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## Facilitating Deportation in Welfare Offices – Outsourcing Migration Control

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**Social services, organizations offering integration courses and language certificates, and competence centers for integration in Switzerland are facing an increase in migration control tasks generally undertaken by migration authorities. This broadening of responsibilities, referred to as ‘outsourcing’ of migration control and management, manifests through policies that force social services to share confidential data with migration authorities. These obligations of data sharing affect migrants’ prospects to stay in the country and clash with several agencies, and their role of offering support and care to their clients.**

“Today one even snitches on children to the migration office – what has become of us? That is simply stupid,” exclaims a cantonal migration official cynically during an interview. The official is referring to the obligation that affects various governmental institutions and organizations entrusted with the implementation of the [Foreign Nationals and Integration Act](#). The act forces officials to report financial dependencies, but also behavior and other information to the migration offices, thus putting a strain on the work ethic of these civil servants. Further along in the interview, the official happily states that, so far, he has not received any information from schools regarding expulsions, suspensions or other behavior revealing a potential ‘integration deficit.’ If such a notification were to occur, this could have severe consequences for the children and their families.

### **Reporting Obligations on the Fast Track**

The expanded reporting obligation towards the migration office affects a number of institutions. Today, not only schools have to report potentially disruptive behavior. Similarly, social services have to report their foreign clients’ dependency on social assistance, and child and adult protection authorities need to inform migration offices about their measures ([see Art. 97, Foreign Nationals and Integration Act, FNIA and Art. 82 b VZAE](#)).

The extended reporting obligations have contributed to both foreign nationals feeling increasingly insecure about their residential status and an increase in control that stigmatizes the use of certain rights, such as welfare services. These two factors, taken together, may lead foreigners to refrain from making use of their rights, e.g., by not claiming social assistance to avoid appearing on the radar of the migration offices. Social services, as well as integration delegates, confirm that they have witnessed individuals’ tendency to deregister from social services or not to bring forth their demands. Even legal advisors, who have been interviewed in the framework of a [research project](#), stated that they would at times recommend finding alternatives to registering for social assistance, so that concerned individuals avoid putting their residence permits at risk.

### **Between Migration Control and Client Responsibility**

As such, the question arises what social workers and other employees make of such reporting obligations and what consequences these have on their work. During a meeting with the cantonal integration delegates, a representative of ‘fide,’ a Swiss program offering certified language courses, confided that migration offices had approached their teachers and asked about their attendees’ behavior. These teachers felt insecure and uncomfortable about sharing negative information on their clients (e.g., their lack of attendance or slow advancement). They were aware that this could have consequences for their students.

The Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) mandated the organization ‘fide’ to put in place instruments to attest linguistic competency. In legal procedures concerning residence, settlement or citizenship, foreign nationals have nowadays to prove their successful integration with official certificates, such as the “fide language passport.” The assessment of linguistic competency is one of the integration requirements that is the most tangible. By mandating language schools to assess their clients’ linguistic competency, the assessment of integration has been assigned to new actors, thus extending migration control to yet another institution.

Similarly, social services are requested to automatically inform cantonal migration offices about foreign nationals that receive social assistance. In some cases, cantonal migration offices have put in place an online system, in which financial dependency is noted down in a database, shared between them and the social services. In a second step, social workers have to provide more detailed information on the clients. With this detailed information, the migration authorities proceed to assess the client’s behavior, motivation and future ability to reintegrate into the labor market and their ability to regain financial independence.

### **Neoliberal Responsibilization of Individuals**

Migrant individuals face a prolonged period of legal uncertainty over their residential status, which may only be substantially reduced with citizenship acquisition. However, the issuance and renewal of a residence permit are at risk in case ‘integration deficits’ come up or in case of welfare dependency. Not only do ‘deficits’ or dependencies lead to an overall assessment of foreign nationals’ behavior, in certain cantons welfare dependency is tracked back for ten years and used as an argument to justify the rejection of citizenship. The pathway towards citizenship is thus rather stony and filled with obstacles. One could argue that the current policy changes have a strong individualizing effect and follow a neoliberal logic shifting the sole responsibility of becoming integrated onto the migrant.

The established legal framework regarding the reporting obligation creates a rather ‘hostile environment’, in which foreign nationals are ogled with suspicion. Their stay is regularly assessed, and information on shortcomings regarding financial dependency or other areas of integration are immediately shared by the involved institutions. This trend may lead to a hollowing out of social rights by migration policies, as the latter nullify foreign residents’ rights to receive social assistance by endangering their right to stay. How this hollowing out will further affect the professional job ethos of public services that do not deal directly with migration enforcement remains to be seen. Having said this, it is clear that the presented developments have contributed to the adverse climate that foreign nationals are facing.

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**Tags** deportation, removal + detention, social work, street-level bureaucracy.