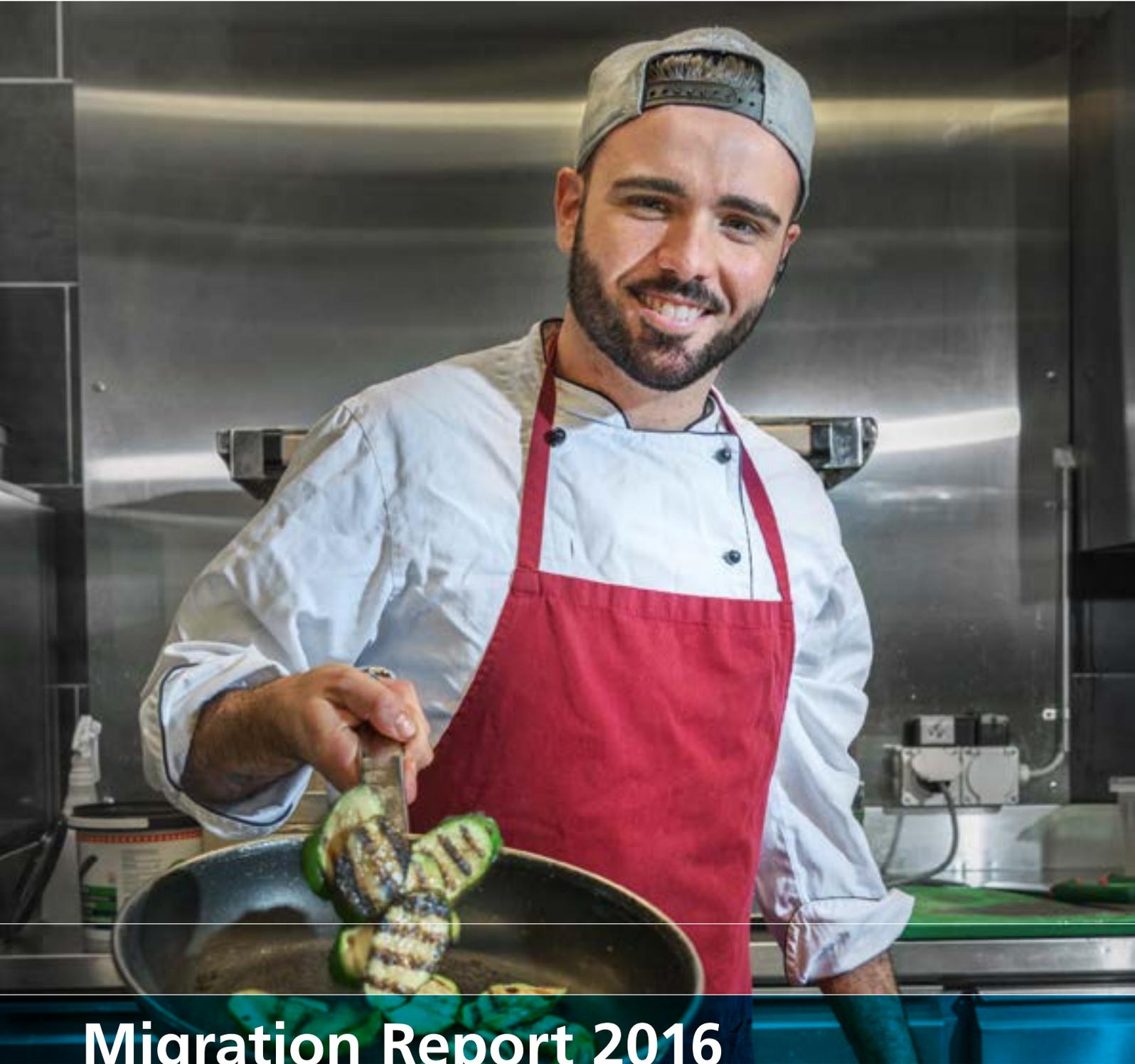




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**State Secretariat for Migration SEM**



# Migration Report 2016

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### Cover page

Massimiliano Antico, cook from Italy

### Page 60

Bahija Mohamad, landscape conservation training programme, from Syria

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## Editorial

Asylum – Integration – Return – Free movement of persons – International cooperation – Naturalisation: Migration policy covers such a wide spectrum that many people find it difficult to gain a clear overview. And yet, many aspects that appear entirely unrelated on the surface are actually quite interconnected when we go deeper, and what may seem contradictory at first glance is actually a different angle of the same picture. Here are a few examples:

*Protection – but only for those in need of protection.* Last year, Switzerland gave refuge to nearly 6000 people fleeing persecution and temporarily admitted around 7000 others, mostly persons escaping from war zones. This protection is afforded for as long as they remain in danger. This is part of a humanitarian tradition that does our country credit. In contrast, those claiming asylum who are in no real need of protection must leave our country quickly. In such cases, Swiss authorities encourage migrants to return to their home countries of their own accord, through counselling and financial assistance.

*Accept refugees – but also provide humanitarian aid on the ground.* Most refugees actually do not flee to Europe but rather seek refuge in a country bordering the conflict zone. For this reason, Switzerland provides comprehensive humanitarian aid on the ground, e.g. helping Syrian nationals in Lebanon and Jordan. In addition, the State Secretariat for Migration provides support for various projects such as those aimed at building the capacities of local authorities. However, despite the support of many countries and international organisations, the willingness of first host countries to accept asylum seekers also has its limits. At the same time, long-term prospects are slim when seen from the eyes of people living in a refugee camp. There is no way to prevent a (small) portion of migrants from continuing on to Europe. Providing humanitarian aid on the ground and granting asylum are therefore two complementary activities that cannot replace one another.

*Freedom of travel – but also control.* The Schengen Agreement enables freedom of travel within the Schengen Area for citizens of participating European countries, including Switzerland. This also applies to visitors from third states. Tourism, trade and other relations are facilitated by this agreement. However, the system also enables the authorities to closely examine applications for a Schengen visa and deny applications if there are doubts that the person will return to his/her home country or if the person poses a security threat.



*Equal opportunities – but also expectations.* Integration is often a long process. It requires efforts on the part of the individual as well as support from society and the state. Increasingly, we find that pre-school support for the children of foreigners is needed, even for children born and growing up here in Switzerland. Such support will enable them to enjoy the same opportunities for health and education as those enjoyed by the children of Swiss citizens. Integration is also something that is expected. Integration has long been a requirement for naturalisation and remains so even when the naturalisation procedure is simplified for third-generation foreigners.

*Control of immigration – more integration.* Implementation of the Popular Initiative “Against Mass Immigration” was intensively discussed last year. In particular, the Swiss Parliament decided that Swiss citizens and foreign residents who are able to work should be encouraged and aided to do so; the Federal Council was given the legal mandate to take corresponding measures. This falls in line with the ever increasing efforts being made to integrate refugees and temporarily admitted foreigners on both an economic and social level. Here we see that immigration and integration policies go hand in hand.

This Migration Report presents facts and figures for the entire spectrum of activities carried out by the State Secretariat for Migration. It should help the reader to gain a clearer understanding of the various issues that affect all of us. At the same time, it enables one to appreciate the many different facets associated with migration. With this in mind, I wish you pleasant reading.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Gattiker', written in a cursive style.

Mario Gattiker, State Secretary, State Secretariat for Migration



*Dara Sadun, a barber from Syria*

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# A Overview



*Mortaza Shahed, cameraman from Afghanistan*

## 1. Key figures 2016

- At the end of 2016, there were 2 029 527 legally resident foreigners in Switzerland (previous year: 1 993 916). The usual resident population therefore grew by 1.8 %. Of these legally resident foreigners, 69 % were EU/EFTA nationals.
- In 2016, the population increased by 60 262. However, the decrease in immigration and increase in emigration observed already in 2015 continued in 2016, effectively reducing the “migration balance” by around 15 % compared to 2015. 100 217 EU/EFTA nationals immigrated to Switzerland. In that same year, 58 042 EU/EFTA nationals left Switzerland.
- In 2016, Switzerland issued 428 463 Schengen visas (previous year: 452 735). Most Schengen visas were approved by Swiss consulates in India (96 211), China (68 967), Thailand (33 893) and Russia (24 131).
- In 2015, 42 974 persons (previous year: 42 703) were granted Swiss citizenship either through the standard (32 155) or facilitated (10 688) naturalisation procedure or through reinstatement of Swiss citizenship (131). Those naturalised came chiefly from Italy, Germany, Portugal, France and Kosovo.
- 27 207 persons (previous year: 39 523) applied for asylum in Switzerland. The main countries of origin were Eritrea, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Iraq.
- In 2016, the State Secretariat for Migration handled 31 299 asylum applications (previous year: 28 118). The number of asylum applications handled in the first instance decreased from 29 805 to 27 711.
- Asylum was granted to 5 985 persons (previous year: 6 377). In addition, 7 369 asylum seekers (previous year: 7 787) were temporarily admitted. 3 750 asylum seekers were transferred to another Dublin state (previous year: 2 461). The overall protection rate fell from 53 % to 49 %.
- Under Switzerland’s Resettlement Programme, Switzerland accepted 662 refugees, mostly Syrian nationals, directly from the first host country where they had sought refuge. Under the EU’s Relocation Programme to distribute asylum seekers among Dublin countries, Switzerland has accepted 368 asylum seekers.
- 2 378 persons obtained residence permits as hardship cases (previous year: 2 284). Most of the residence permits issued (1 866) were for temporary admittance.
- Swiss authorities ensured the removal by air of 8 781 foreign nationals (previous year: 8 608), who had no right (or no longer had the right) to remain in Switzerland.

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662 refugees, mostly Syrian nationals,  
were admitted to Switzerland directly  
from the first Middle Eastern country in  
which they sought refuge.

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*Xamdi Maxamed, packaging plant manager from Somalia*

## 2. Main highlights in 2016

### Temporary change in asylum situation

The closing of the Balkan route from Greece in the direction of Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia as well as the agreement reached between the EU and Turkey led to a significant drop in irregular migration from the Middle East to Europe from March 2016 onwards. However, boat crossings over the central Mediterranean Sea – mostly from Libya to Italy – actually increased. In Switzerland, the number of asylum applications fell 31 % from the exceptional high point observed in the previous year. The decrease in the number of asylum applications from Afghani, Syrian and Iraqi nationals was particularly sharp. However, Eritrean nationals, which is still the largest group, fell by around 44 %.

Cooperation within the framework of the Dublin system has once again returned to normal levels compared to previous years. Compared to the last reporting year, Switzerland was able to send a much larger proportion of asylum seekers to another European country. This is one of the reasons why a record number of asylum applications were settled and the backlog of pending cases could be reduced. This had the impact of lowering the protection rate slightly.

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### Cooperation within the Dublin system has been improving steadily.

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Out of solidarity, Switzerland has joined the EU's programme to relocate asylum seekers within Europe and actively accept refugees who find themselves in particularly dire circumstances in the first host country. In the latter case, the Federal Council announced that a total of 2000 more refugees would be brought to Switzerland in 2017 and 2018.

### Strengthening the asylum system

The extremely large flow of asylum seekers arriving in Europe towards the end of the summer of 2015 prompted the Confederation and the cantons to work together on a set of emergency measures that could be taken in the event a similar situation were to arise in the future. In 2016, work on these emergency measures continued. The SEM expanded its available housing capacity, set aside reserve capacity and established a pool of employees who could be called in the event of unexpected surges in migration and lend support in application processing and accommodation of a large number of incoming asylum seekers.

Over time, restructuring of the asylum system will make it possible for asylum applications to be processed quickly and fairly. After Swiss voters approved legislative amendments by a two-thirds majority on 5 June 2016, the SEM has been working with the cantons, the towns and communes on implementation. By the end of the year, 12 of the 18 sites for federal asylum centres had been decided.

### Control of immigration and free movement of persons

The relatively high level of net immigration to Switzerland once again decreased. Nevertheless, the SEM, the Federal Council, the Swiss Parliament and the general public devoted a great deal of time to this topic. On 16 December 2016, the Swiss Parliament adopted new legislative provisions to implement Article 121a of the Federal Constitution (following adoption of the Popular Initiative "Against Mass Immigration"). The main change was to require employers to notify regional employment centres of vacancies in fields for which there is a higher than average level of unemployment and to consider applications from registered jobseekers. The Swiss-EU Bilateral Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP) remains unaffected. In order to close the gap between Art. 121a and the implementing provisions, the Federal Council submitted a counter-proposal to the Federal Popular Initiative "Get out of this blind alley. Don't reintroduce immigration quotas!" (Rasa Initiative) for consultation. The Rasa Initiative calls for repeal without replacement of Art. 121a.

Admission of citizens from non-EU/EFTA countries remains very limited both on a quantitative and qualitative level. Given the high level of demand for particularly skilled workers, the Federal Council increased quotas on work permits for 2017 from 6500 to 7500.



*Robel Kabsay, local shop manager from Eritrea*



### **Systematic support for integration**

The economic and social integration of migrants is a continuous endeavour that has become increasingly important. More targeted measures are needed in order to integrate the greater influx of migrants who have been granted refugee status or who have been temporarily admitted together with skilled workers and their families who come from many different countries. These measures nevertheless require efforts on the part of the migrants themselves. In 2016, cantonal integration programmes entered their third year. A special intensive pilot programme was also launched, enabling refugees to be accepted to Switzerland directly from a first host country.

On 16 December, the Swiss Parliament adopted the revised Foreign Nationals Act, which includes more extensive provisions on integration. On the one hand, this includes direct support for integration, and on the other the need to take FNA-related decisions into account. For example, it is now expressly stipulated that a permanent residence permit can only be issued if the person is integrated. Moreover, refugees and temporarily admitted persons are provided with somewhat easier access to employment through the replacement of the “authorisation” requirement with a “notification” requirement.

### **Naturalisation**

The process leading towards full integration as Swiss citizens has been partly revised with the complete overhaul of the Swiss Citizenship Act (SCA, SR 141.0). On 17 June 2016, the Federal Council issued the corresponding Ordinance. The new legal provisions shall come into effect on 1 January 2018. On 30 September, the Swiss Parliament approved the legislative provisions on facilitated naturalisation for the third generation of foreigners. The corresponding constitutional amendment was adopted by Swiss voters on 12 February 2017. The implementing provisions adopted by the National Council and the Council of States are subject to an optional referendum.

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Switzerland takes part in the EU's  
Relocation Programme.

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### 3. New developments

The year 2016 was spent handling the exceptional situation that arose in the second half of 2015 when over one million people travelled across Turkey and the Aegean Sea (and to a lesser extent across the central Mediterranean Sea), to Europe. Never before had so many people from non-European countries reached our continent within the span of a single year. Migration from Turkey through Greece and the Balkans practically came to a halt in the first months of 2016. Between the beginning of April and the end of December 2016, around 22 000 migrants reached Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. An equal number arrived over a three-day period in October 2015, when the migration flow had reached a peak. After declining somewhat in the previous reporting year, migration across the central Mediterranean rose by around 18 % in 2016. It reached a new peak at around 181 500 persons. Compared to the previous peak reported in 2014, the increase was just under 7 %.

With the closure of the migration route through the Balkans, Europe nevertheless had to contend with two challenges in April 2016.

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#### Most of the migrants who land in Greece or Italy want to continue their journey to central, western or northern Europe.

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First of all, the need to process the asylum applications of hundreds of thousands of migrants who reached Europe in the autumn of 2015 and the first months of 2016. Germany was particularly affected by this situation. The last of the asylum applications received from migrants who reached Germany in 2015 was processed only in September 2016. All things considered, around 450 000 of the 746 000 asylum applications registered in Germany in 2016 were submitted by persons who had arrived in Europe in 2015. The reported figure of around 1.3 million registered asylum applications in 2016 needs to be seen in this light. This figure does not reflect the actual volume of migration in 2016. Just under 360 000 migrants were reported to have travelled to Europe across the two main migration routes, i.e. the central Mediterranean route and the Turkey-Greece route. Political handling of the situation in the autumn of 2015 will prove to be a much more daunting challenge than having to process all of the asylum applications.

The EU member states all agree that uncontrolled migration to and within Europe, as we saw in the autumn of 2015, must never happen again. However, opinions differ as to what action steps are needed. In 2016, hotspots were established in Greece and Italy for the purpose of registering and fingerprinting all migrants who entered the country illegally. This information will be saved in the Eurodac database. So far, the registration process has been working very well and migrants from countries for which asylum tends to be granted will be relocated to other European countries.

In autumn 2015, the EU decided to relocate 160 000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy over a two year period. However, very little progress has been made in the area of implementation. By the end of 2016, only around 8000 people from Greece and around 3000 from Italy had been relocated to other countries. Despite a fixed quota established by the EU, many European countries have been very reluctant to accept asylum seekers under the Relocation Programme. One of the main concerns is security but scepticism within local populations towards non-European asylum seekers is high and this is another reason for slow implementation of the Relocation Programme.

As a result, the burden placed on Greece and Italy increased considerably in 2016, which is also reflected in the number of asylum applications. Germany, Greece, Italy and to a much lesser extent Spain are the only EU countries that reported a double-digit percentage increase in the number of incoming asylum applications in 2016. Most of the migrants who landed in Greece or Italy in 2016 wish to continue their journey to central, west or northern Europe. Stricter border control in the neighbouring countries of Greece and Italy make these subsequent journeys more difficult. At the same time, arrangements for the return of persons denied asylum have been very sluggish since corresponding return agreements have either not been signed or have not been implemented. As a result, the burden on these two countries steadily increased in 2016. At the same time, the level of dissatisfaction of stranded migrants rose, particularly in Greece. In light of the foregoing, it is likely that the burden on Greece, and especially in Italy, will continue to intensify in 2017. Italy is therefore under pressure because most of the migrants arriving in the south of Italy come from Libya. Because the country has become politically unstable and therefore divided, it is unrealistic to presume that an EU-Libyan agreement can be reached similar to the one with Turkey. It is therefore very unlikely that the migration situation across the central Mediterranean Sea will improve in 2017. In the

meantime, the EU has turned its attention to routes leading to Libya, e.g. in Niger. It will take quite a bit of time before these efforts will have a lasting effect.

According to the UNHCR, by the end of 2015, 65.3 million people had fled their homes. Most were internally displaced persons (IDPs) within their home country. Of the 21.3 million

people who were forced to leave their homes, the vast majority remained in their home region. The UNHCR estimates that in 2015 most refugees fled to Turkey (2.5 million), Pakistan (1.6 million), Lebanon (1.1 million), Iran (980 000) and Ethiopia (740 000). These figures refer only to UNHCR-registered persons.



*Migration across the central Mediterranean reached a new peak in 2016.*

# B Migration figures for 2016



*Starky Miguel Rodriguez Martinez, musician from the Dominican Republic*

## 1. Foreign resident population

At the end of December 2016, there were 2 029 527 (2015: 1 993 916)<sup>1</sup> legally resident foreigners in Switzerland. A total of 1 390 405 (2015: 1 363 736) people (about 69 % of the usual foreign resident population in Switzerland) are nationals of EU-28/EFTA member states; 639 122 (2015: 630 180) or 31 % are nationals of other states. The number of EU-28/EFTA nationals increased by 2.0 % compared to the 2015. The number of third-state nationals increased by 1.4 %. The largest community of foreign nationals comes from Italy at 318 653 persons (15.7 % of the total foreign resident population), followed by Germany at 304 706 persons (15.0 %) and Portugal at 269 521 persons (13.3 %). The largest increase compared to the previous year was registered by Italian (+4 928), French (+4 244) and German nationals (+3 158).

<sup>1</sup> The State Secretariat for Migration's statistics on foreign nationals are based on data taken from the Central Migration Information System (ZEMIS), but nevertheless exclude the following categories of foreign nationals: international civil servants and their family members, short-term residents (< 12 months), asylum seekers and temporarily admitted persons.

<sup>2</sup> The current member states of the European Union are known as EU-28 member states. They are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Croatia joined the EU on 1 July 2013. The Free Movement of Persons Agreement (AFMP) signed by Switzerland and the EU needed to be adapted as had been the case with previous cases of EU enlargement. For this reason, Switzerland and the EU negotiated the terms of an Additional Protocol III. Until this Protocol comes into effect, issuance of permits to Croatian nationals wishing to work on the Swiss labour market will continue to be subject to the provisions of the Foreign Nationals Act (FNA, SR 142.20) and separate quotas will remain in place. Currently, the quota for type B residence permits stands at 50 and the quota for type L short-stay permits stands at 450. The current member states of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) are Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

<sup>3</sup> EU-17/EFTA: citizens of Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Portugal, Sweden, Spain, United Kingdom and Cyprus have enjoyed unrestricted freedom of movement since 1 June 2007.

<sup>4</sup> These values are based on the usual foreign resident population.

<sup>5</sup> EU-8: citizens of Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004, excl. Malta and Cyprus: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia.

<sup>6</sup> Switzerland still has the right to invoke the safeguard clause set forth in Protocol II for citizens of EU-2 member states until 31 May 2019.

<sup>7</sup> EU-17, EU-8 and EFTA member states.

## 2. Immigration and employment

Switzerland draws a distinction between two types of foreign workers when awarding residence and work permits: EU-27/EFTA nationals and third-state nationals. The first group enjoys all of the benefits of the Swiss-EU bilateral agreement on the free movement of persons and is given priority access to the Swiss labour market over the second group.

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Full free movement of persons was extended to Bulgarian and Romanian nationals on 1 June 2016.

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### Free movement of persons with the EU

In 2016, a total of 100 217 EU-28/EFTA<sup>2</sup> nationals immigrated to Switzerland – around two-thirds of whom came for the purpose of taking up employment (usual foreign resident population).

Newly arrived EU-17/EFTA<sup>3</sup> nationals mainly work in the tertiary sector (80 %).<sup>4</sup> Roughly 18 % work in the secondary sector (industry and crafts) and 2 % work in the primary sector. The employment situation for EU-8 nationals<sup>5</sup> is similar: around 74 % work in the tertiary sector and 18 % work in the secondary sector (industry and crafts). Compared to EU-17/EFTA nationals, however, considerably more EU-85 nationals (8 %) work in the primary sector. The vast majority (74 %) of Bulgarian and Romanian nationals (EU-2 nationals) work in the tertiary sector; around 17 % work in the secondary sector (industry and trade); and 9 % in the primary sector.

Full freedom of movement was extended to Bulgarian and Romanian nationals on 1 June 2016.<sup>6</sup> After a seven-year transitional period applying specifically to Switzerland, Bulgarian and Romanian nationals now enjoy exactly the same rights as citizens of EU-25 and EFTA member states.<sup>7</sup>



*Charlotte Lebrun, supply planning specialist from France*

### Work permit quotas (third-state nationals and service providers from EU/EFTA member states)

Each year the Federal Council establishes quotas for workers from non-EU/EFTA member states (third-state nationals) as well as for service providers from EU/EFTA member states who wish to work for longer than 120 days. 4000 short-stay permits (L) and 2500 normal residence permits (B) were set aside for third-state nationals for 2016. The Federal Council established a separate quota of 2000 short-stay permits (L) and 250 normal residence permits (B) for service providers from EU/EFTA member states.

The quotas for service providers were fully used up in 2016. Permits for service providers were issued mainly in the tertiary sector (financial services, corporate consulting, IT) and the secondary sector (machine industry, electrical engineering, construction).

The quota set by the Federal Council on the number of type B residence/work permits granted to third-state nationals (2500) was reached in November 2016. The quota for the number of type L permits was fully used up at the end of December.<sup>8</sup> Compared to 2015, around 90 fewer type B permits and around 180 more type L permits were issued.<sup>9</sup>

In 2016, most of the permits were issued in the IT field (1990 permits), followed by the chemical and pharmaceuticals industry (640), corporate consulting (570), the food and beverage industry (510), research (390), the machine industry (350), as well as financial and insurance services. In 2016, 85 % of all third-country nationals who received a work permit were holders of a higher education qualification. Third-state nationals mainly came from the following countries: India (1780), USA (1120), the People's Republic of China (430) and Russia (370).

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## The available quotas for service providers were fully used up.

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On 12 October 2016, the Federal Council decided to slightly increase the quotas for short-stay and residence permits for third-state nationals for 2017. A total of 7500 permits were made available for specialists from third states. The thousand additional permits (i.e. 500 type B and 500 type L permits) were allocated to the Confederation's reserve of permits. With this decision, the Federal Council sought to reconcile the need of Swiss employers for specialists from third states as well as the will of Swiss voters expressed on 9 February 2014 (Art. 121a of Swiss Federal Constitution). The quotas for service providers from EU/EFTA member states also remained the same (2000 short-term stay permits and 250 residence permits).

### Bilateral traineeship agreements

Over the past decade, Switzerland has signed bilateral traineeship agreements with various countries. These agreements give young professionals aged between 18 and 35 the opportunity to work in their occupation for up to 18 months in another country and pursue subsequent training. This option is available for all occupations.

In 2016, a total of approximately 300 Swiss nationals took advantage of this opportunity to spend some time abroad. Most of the young Swiss nationals travelled to Canada, followed by the USA. In that same year, a total of 173 permits was issued to foreign nationals for traineeships in Switzerland. Most of the permits were issued to young professionals from Canada (56), the USA (31) and Tunisia (15). Traineeships in Switzerland took place in various branches, mainly in health-care, architecture and the hotel industry.

<sup>8</sup> The Confederation drew from the previous year's reserve to cover any needs for type B and type L permits that exceeded the 2500 (B) and 4000 (L) thresholds.

<sup>9</sup> By the end of 2016, a total of 2656 type B permits and 4079 type L permits had been granted under the quota system were.

### 3. Schengen visas

Schengen visas are valid for short-term stays within the Schengen Area (i.e. no longer than 90 days within a 180-day period) and are usually required by tourists and business travellers. In 2016, Switzerland issued 428 463 Schengen visas and rejected 34 687 visa applications. A visa application is turned down when the authority examining the application concludes that one or more entry requirements have not been met. For example, if an authority doubts that the visa applicant truly intends to leave Switzerland upon expiry of the visa or if the visa applicant lacks adequate financial resources.

Most of the Schengen visas were issued by Swiss consulates in India (96 211 visas), China (68 967 visas), Thailand (33 893 visas) and Russia (24 134 visas). Like other Schengen countries, Switzerland may require fellow Schengen countries to obtain Swiss consent in specific cases before a visa is issued. In 2016, the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) handled preliminary consultation requests from other Schengen countries in relation to 471 037 persons. At the same time, the Swiss authorities submitted around 75 679 consultation requests to Schengen member countries.

The Central Visa Information System (C-VIS) has been in operation since October 2011. All Schengen member countries store numerical and biometric data (10 fingerprints and facial image) of visa applicants in this system. Border guards compare the fingerprints saved to the C-VIS directly with the fingerprints of travellers holding a Schengen visa. This control has been systematically carried out at Swiss airports since 11 October 2014.

Additionally, Switzerland has been comparing the fingerprints of asylum seekers with the C-VIS since December 2012. In 2016, Swiss authorities determined in this manner that 1 663 of those who applied for asylum in Switzerland had done so only after already obtaining a Schengen visa from another country. An additional 403 others had submitted an asylum application in Switzerland after their visa application had been denied. Under the Dublin Agreement, the Schengen country that issued the visa is responsible for handling any asylum applications submitted by the visa holder.

Since 15 March 2016, citizens of Peru have enjoyed visa-free travel to Switzerland on a biometric passport. Since 2016, citizens of the following countries have also enjoyed visa-free travel to Switzerland: Kiribati, Tuvalu, Micronesia, the Marshall and Salomon Islands. With this measure, the Federal Council has aligned itself with decisions of the European Parliament and of the Council. If the EU introduces or waives general visa requirements for a given country, then this change applies to the entire Schengen Area, which includes Switzerland. Citizens of the following countries are no longer subject to visa requirements thanks to changes introduced in recent years: Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania and Moldova, the United Arab Emirates, Colombia, East Timor, Dominica, Vanuatu, Samoa (West), St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Tonga as well as Palau.



*In 2016, 428 463 Schengen visas were issued.*

## 4. Naturalisations

In 2016, the SEM received a total of 33 289 naturalisation applications – roughly the same as in the previous year (33 437 applications).

In 2016, 42 974 persons were granted Swiss citizenship, 271 more compared to 2015 (42 703 persons). 32 155 persons acquired Swiss citizenship through the ordinary naturalisation procedure, +3 % compared to 2015 (31 170 persons). The number of simplified naturalisations decreased by 6 % and the number of persons who obtained reinstatement of lost Swiss citizenship decreased by 19 %: 10 688 persons for simplified naturalisation (2015: 11 371 persons) and 131 persons for reinstatement of Swiss citizenship (2015: 162 persons).

### Naturalisations from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016 by nationality<sup>10</sup>

Nationality	Total naturalisations	of which persons resident in Switzerland	of which persons resident abroad	Naturalisations		
				Ordinary naturalisations	Simplified naturalisations	Reinstatement of citizenship
Italy	5 380	5 108	272	3 931	1 441	8
Germany	4 786	4 610	176	3 252	1 522	12
Portugal	3 927	3 922	5	3 724	203	0
France	3 831	3 104	727	2 466	1 328	37
Kosovo	3 252	3 250	2	2 859	393	0
Turkey	1 734	1 725	9	1 475	259	0
Spain	1 577	1 547	30	1 267	310	0
Serbia	1 565	1 564	1	1 381	184	0
Macedonia	1 553	1 553	0	1 386	167	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	957	957	0	824	133	0
Sri Lanka	759	759	0	724	35	0
Croatia	737	736	1	643	94	0
UK	687	664	23	516	171	0
Russia	605	597	8	398	207	0
Brazil	547	517	30	181	364	2
USA	522	431	91	287	217	18
Iraq	393	393	0	369	24	0
Belgium	387	367	20	302	84	1
Morocco	347	343	4	217	130	0
Netherlands	326	315	11	209	116	1
Other	9 102	8 665	437	5 744	3 306	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>42 974</b>	<b>41 127</b>	<b>1 847</b>	<b>32 155</b>	<b>10 688</b>	<b>131</b>

<sup>10</sup> Unlike the official statistical tables on acquisition of Swiss citizenship, these figures include naturalisation of persons abroad, but not those who have acquired Swiss citizenship through assessment or adoption.

As in 2015, newly naturalised Swiss citizens mainly come from Italy (5380 compared to 5740 in the previous year, –6 %) and Germany (4786 compared to 5363 in the previous year, –11 %). As in 2015, Portugal comes in third (3927 compared to 3624 in the previous year, +8 %), followed by France (3831 compared to 3532 in the previous year), Kosovo (3252 compared to 3167 in the previous year, +3 %), Turkey

(1734 compared to 1813 in the previous year, –4 %), Serbia (1565 compared to 1670 in the previous year, –6 %), Spain (1577 compared to 1541 in the previous year, +2 %), Macedonia (1553 compared to 1303 in the previous year, +19 %), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (957 compared to 1105 in the previous year, –13 %).



## 5. International cooperation

In its international cooperation activities, Switzerland seeks out and maintains close partnerships with countries of origin, transit and destination. It also plays an active role in the further development of international governance as a means of addressing major migration challenges and tasks.

In 2016, the SEM gave top priority to providing support to the first-host countries in relation to the ongoing conflict in Syria.

As part of the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for the Middle East for 2015–2018, the SEM helped the Jordanian authorities to register Syrian refugees as a prerequisite for providing them with access to state aid. In Lebanon, the SEM funded a project to establish an integrated border management system for the General Directorate of General Security, which included development of an overall strategy to deal with particularly vulnerable persons at border checkpoints. In addition, Switzerland worked with Turkey to establish and expand strategic action points for the Directorate General for Migration Management, which is part of the Turkish migration agency set up in 2014. The special importance of the Middle East for Switzerland was also demonstrated by the first-time appointment by the Federal Council of an official representative for migration issues in the Middle East.

The Horn of Africa is still a priority region for the SEM's international activities. The "Protection in the Region" programme is intended to help first-host countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan or Kenya in their efforts to provide effective protection, improve the living conditions of asylum seekers, and find lasting solutions for them. The SEM therefore continued to fund a project in Ethiopia which will help Eritrean refugees build livelihoods for themselves outside of refugee camps.

In 2016, priority was also given to further development of migration governance in North and West Africa. Here, Switzerland took steps to reinforce local structures to protect migrants. At the end of 2016, this included the launch of a project to improve the capacities of the Libyan coastguard.

In the area of migration partnerships with countries of the West Balkans, Nigeria and Tunisia, Switzerland implemented its plans to strengthen national institutions and engage in constructive migration dialogue. In Tunisia, Switzerland helped the authorities to set up an integrated border control system and provide training in the use of fingerprint identification systems. In Nigeria, a project was carried out to improve Nigerian border control capacities. In addition, initial steps were taken to establish a migration partnership with Sri Lanka. In October 2016, Federal Councillor Sommaruga travelled to Sri Lanka to sign a migration agreement with the Sri Lankan authorities.

In addition to bilateral cooperation, collective responses of the international community to migration issues gained in importance. There is increasing awareness that major challenges giving rise to refugee and migration flows cannot be successfully resolved by any one country alone but rather only through international migration governance. In September 2016, Federal Councillor Sommaruga represented Switzerland at the Summit for Refugees and Migrants, held during the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Two Global Compacts were adopted at this summit. Switzerland and Mexico will decide together on the process leading up to the "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration".

Long-term resettlement may also be another collective response. On 9 December 2016, the Federal Council decided to accept a further 2000 vulnerable persons who have already been recognised as refugees by UNHCR.

In parliamentary debates on international cooperation, there has been consensus that efforts will need to be made to establish links between migration policy and development cooperation. A further strategic objective for 2017 will be to establish new migration partnerships and agreements.

## 6. Asylum

### European trends

After exceeding tolerated thresholds, asylum figures in 2016 were influenced by migration flows from Turkey through Greece and the Balkans to Austria, Germany, Sweden and, in some cases, to other destination countries. This was thanks to closure of the Balkan route in March 2016 as well as entry into force at the end of March of the agreement between the EU and Turkey. In contrast, migration over the central Mediterranean intensified in 2016. A total of around 1.3 million asylum applications were received in Europe in 2016. This was roughly as many as in 2015 (1.36 million). However, this figure does not necessarily mean that migration levels in 2016 were as high as those in 2015. In 2015, the migration flow was extraordinarily high, which prevented all asylum applications from being recorded in the year of arrival of asylum seekers. This was particularly the case for Germany. Around 450 000 of the asylum applications recorded in 2016 actually came from asylum seekers who had reached Germany in 2015.

### Asylum applications in Switzerland

In 2016, Switzerland received 27 207 asylum applications. Compared to 2015, this amounts to a decrease of 31.2 % (– 12 316 applications). At the start of the year, the number of asylum seekers remained high because the Balkan route was still open. January (3618 applications) and February (2705 applications) were the months with the highest volume of asylum applications in 2016. April was the month with the lowest volume of the year (1748 applications). The volume of incoming asylum applications picked up again in May as a result of seasonal peaks in migration over the central Mediterranean route. Despite the significant increase in the number of landings of migrants along the southern coast of Italy, the volume of asylum applications in Switzerland rose only moderately in the summer months of 2016. Starting in the summer of 2016, the Swiss Border Guard intensified border controls along Switzerland's southern border in Ticino. At the same time, the Italian security agencies bolstered their presence along the border. This enabled the Swiss Border Guard to detain in a timely fashion migrants who had no intention of requesting asylum in Switzerland and to transfer them back to Italy.

#### Main European destination countries for asylum seekers in 2016<sup>11</sup>

Country	Asylum applications 2016	Asylum applications 2015	Absolute Change	Relative Change
Germany	746 000	442 000	+ 304 000	+68,8 %
Italy	124 000	86 000	+ 38 000	+44,2 %
France	85 000	80 000	+ 5 000	+6,3 %
Greece	56 000	13 000	+43 000	+330,8 %
Austria	43 000	88 000	–45 000	–51,1 %
UK	38 000	38 500	–500	–1,3 %
Hungary	29 500	179 000	–149 500	–83,5 %
Sweden	29 000	163 000	–134 000	–82,2 %
Netherlands	28 500	59 000	–30 500	–51,7 %
Switzerland	27 207	39 523	–12 316	–31,2 %

#### Main countries of origin of asylum seekers in 2016<sup>11</sup>

Country	Asylum applications in 2016	Difference compared to 2015	Applications in Switzerland in 2016	Proportion of total asylum applications in Switzerland
Syria	325 000	–65 000	2 144	0,7 %
Afghanistan	175 000	–20 000	3 229	1,8 %
Iraq	125 000	–5 000	1 312	1,0 %
Pakistan	50 000	+ 2 500	167	0,3 %
Nigeria	49 000	+ 17 000	1 106	2,3 %
Iran	42 000	+ 13 500	561	1,3 %
Eritrea	39 000	–11 000	5 178	13,3 %
Russia	35 000	+ 5 500	185	0,5 %
Albania	32 000	–36 000	157	0,5 %
Somalia	21 500	–500	1 581	7,4 %

<sup>11</sup> The figures are partly based on provisional data taken from Web sites of the various migration authorities, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Intergovernmental Consultations (IGC) and Eurostat.

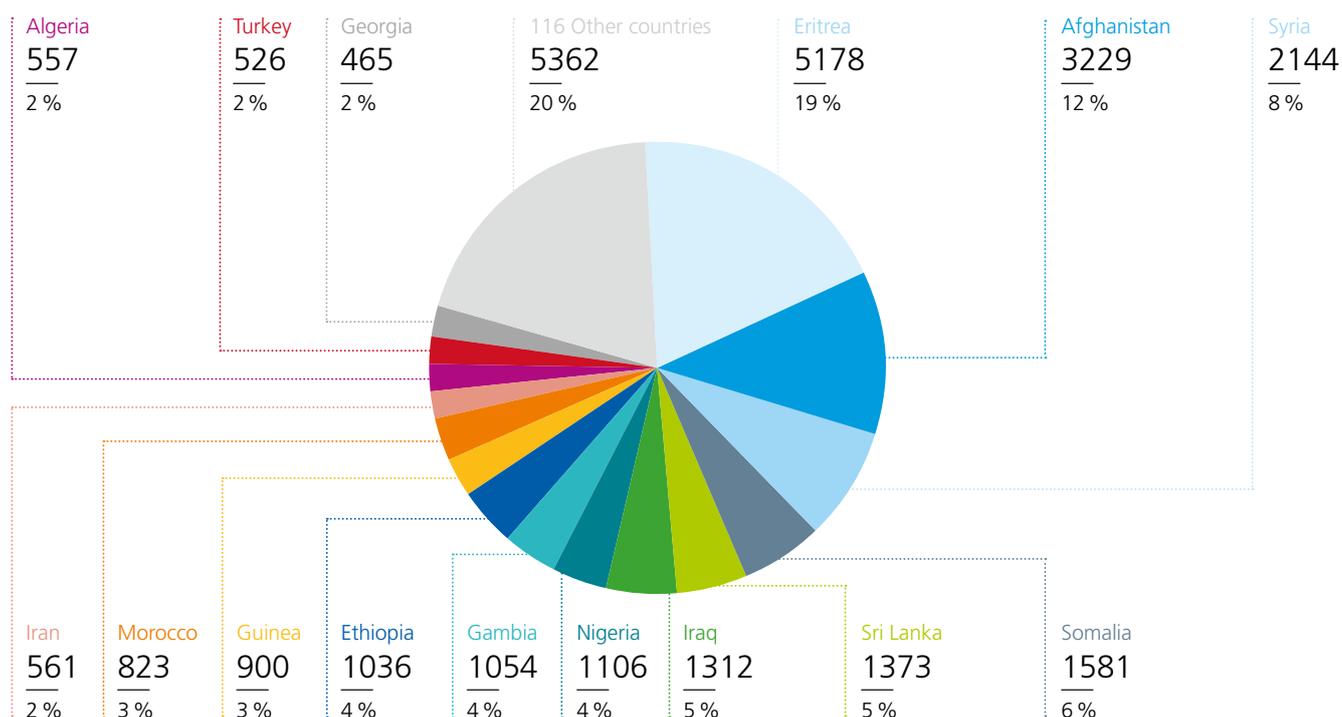
Switzerland's share of all asylum applications filed in Europe fell by around 2 % in 2016. Nevertheless, this low figure does not adequately reflect the reality of the situation of Switzerland's share of the asylum migration to Europe. The statistical decrease is largely due to the fact that asylum seekers in Germany were recorded after the fact. A more realistic proportion for 2016 would be around 3 %, which is more or less comparable to 2015. In 2016, the Swiss average of 3.4 asylum applications per 1000 inhabitants (2015: 4.9) far exceeds the European average of 2.5 asylum applications per 1000 inhabitants (2015: 2.6). Germany accounted for most of the asylum applications per 1000 inhabitants in 2016 (9.2), followed by Greece (5.2), Austria (5.0), Malta (4.5) and Luxemburg (3.6).

Eritrea was once again the top country of origin in 2016, with 5178 applications, around 48 % fewer applications compared to 2015 as a result of the sharp drop (–49 %) in the number of Eritrean nationals reaching the southern coast of Italy. The setting up of hotspots and the possibility of being placed in

the EU's relocation programme increased the number of Eritrean nationals who applied for asylum in Italy (7700 applications). However, Germany was by far the main country of destination for Eritrean nationals in 2016 (17 700 applications).

In March 2016, the Balkan route was largely shut off. As a result, the number of asylum applications from persons reaching Europe along this route quickly dropped. This development is also reflected in the significant decline in the number of asylum applications filed in Switzerland by asylum seekers from Afghans (–58 %), Syrians (–55 %) and Iraqis (–45 %). At the start of the year, the number of asylum seekers from these three countries was still very high. In 2016, migration across the central Mediterranean was the second most decisive factor in the development of asylum applications in Switzerland. Likewise, the increase in the number of asylum applications from nationals of Nigeria, Gambia, and Guinea is directly correlated with the increase in the number of landings of these nationals along the southern coast of Italy.

#### Country of origin of persons seeking asylum in Switzerland in 2016



### Handling of asylum applications

In 2016, the SEM handled 31 299 asylum applications in the first instance. This amounts to an 11.3 % increase over 2015 and the highest number of applications handled since the year 2000 (40 036).

This positive outcome was mainly due to the larger number of asylum applications settled more quickly because another Dublin country turned out to be responsible for the asylum application submitted in Switzerland. The increase in Dublin cases was another reason why the recognition and protection rates for 2016 were somewhat lower than those for 2015.

The number of withdrawn applications also rose substantially in 2016. This can be explained by the fact that in the summer months many asylum seekers interrupted their asylum procedure at an early stage by leaving reception and processing centres without authorisation.

In 2016, the SEM granted temporary admission to 7369 persons (2015: 7787, –5.4 %), of whom 6850 (2015: 7109, –3.6 %) were admitted following an asylum decision rendered in the first instance. 3639 cases of temporary admission reached expiration (2015: 3466, +5.0 %).

The number of applications pending in the first instance fell by 2094, from 29 805 at the end of 2015 to 27 711 at the end of 2016, which amounts to a 7 % decrease. Since the peak observed at the end of February 2016, when 31 196 applications were pending, the SEM managed to bring the figure down by 3485.

### Duration of asylum applications handled in the first instance

The mathematically calculated duration of asylum applications handled in the first instance in 2016 stood at 249 days. This figure varies sharply, depending on the volume of incoming asylum applications and SEM's handling strategy. The total duration of asylum applications handled in the first instance in 2015 was 278 days, in 2014 it was 401 days. In 2013, the total stood at 258 days and in 2012 at 163 days.



*In 2016, Switzerland received 27 207 asylum applications. Compared to 2015, this amounts to a decrease of 31.2 %.*

However, the average duration of asylum applications handled in the first instance is not a very informative indicator for the effective amount of time needed to process an asylum application, since a given handling strategy based on two priority categories and the large proportion of Dublin cases are not typical Gaussian distributions. The handling strategy should be broken down into three categories of asylum applications: Dublin cases, which accounted for 35 % of the asylum applications received in 2016, with an average duration of around two months (72 days); Priority 1 asylum applications, which accounted for 6 % of the incoming asylum applications, with an average duration of around six months (182 days); and Priority 2 asylum applications, which accounted for 59 % of the cases, with an average duration of about a year (361 days).

### Dublin procedure

The Dublin Association Agreement came into force in Switzerland on 12 December 2008. Experiences have been largely positive as another Dublin country has turned out to be responsible in around 40 % of all asylum applications submitted to Switzerland.

In 2016, 29.2 % of all asylum applications handled fell under the provisions of the Dublin Association Agreement (2015: 28.9 %). Switzerland transferred considerably more asylum seekers back to the corresponding Dublin country (4096) than vice versa (373).

Cooperation with partner countries has been smooth. Italy, in particular, managed to abide by its obligations by registering significantly more incoming migrants in 2016. Compared to 2015, Switzerland was able to declare more asylum applications as unfounded and transfer many more persons to the corresponding Dublin country. The high migration pressure on the coast of Italy and uncertainty along the Balkan route remain a serious challenge.

### Cases handled in the first instance 2016

Cases handled	2016	Change from 2015–2016	Change from 2015–2016 in %
Asylum granted	5985	–392	–6.1 %
Recognition rate <sup>12</sup>	22.7 %	–2,4 Percentage points	–9.6 %
Protection rate <sup>13</sup>	48.7 %	–4,4 Percentage points	–8.3 %
Applications dismissed	9 393	+ 972	+ 11.5 %
Of which related to Dublin (incl. other transfer procedures) <sup>14</sup>	9 136	+ 1 013	+ 12.5 %
Asylum denied	10 983	+ 381	+ 3.6 %
Application cancelled	4 938	+ 2 220	+ 81.7 %
<b>Total cases handled</b>	<b>31 299</b>	<b>+ 3 181</b>	<b>+ 11.3 %</b>
Applications pending in first instance	27 711	–2 094	–7.0 %

<sup>12</sup> Proportion of cases where asylum was granted in relation to all cases handled (excl. cancelled asylum applications)

<sup>13</sup> Proportion of all cases handled (excl. cancelled asylum applications) where asylum or temporary admission was granted in the first instance.

<sup>14</sup> Since implementation of the Dublin III Ordinance on 1 January 2014, certain categories of foreign nationals no longer fall within the scope of application of the Dublin III Ordinance; for these foreign nationals, requests for transfer must be made in accordance with readmission guidelines or a bilateral readmission agreement.

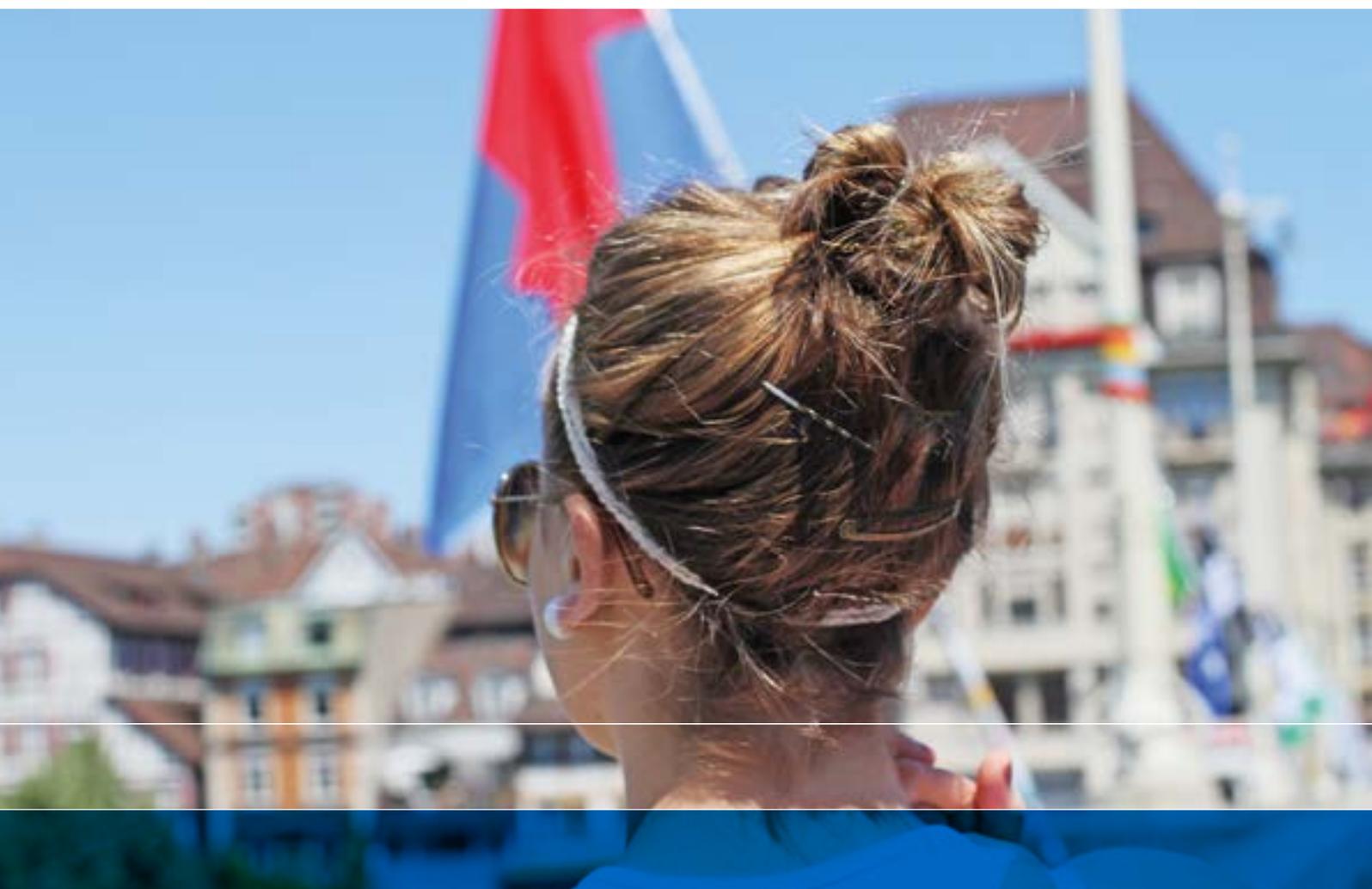
## 7. Hardship cases

The Asylum Act (AsylA) and the Foreign Nationals Act (FNA) contain rules on how to handle hardship cases. Under the following conditions, the cantons may issue a type B residence permit subject to approval by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM).

Under AsylA, asylum seekers must have lived in Switzerland for at least five years (their place of residence has to have been known by the Swiss authorities at all times) and have experienced great personal hardship following intensive efforts to integrate into Switzerland. In 2016, a total of 121 persons received a residence permit by virtue of this provision.

FNA stipulates that applications for a residence permit made by temporarily admitted foreign nationals who have resided in Switzerland for more than five years be closely examined to determine whether the person falls into the hardship category. In 2016, 1866 temporarily admitted persons were granted a residence permit on this basis.

In addition, FNA enables a residence permit to be granted in the event of serious personal hardship. In 2015, 391 illegal immigrants living in Switzerland were granted residence permits. There is also a special rule whereby a residence permit can be given to a person who may lose his/her residence status as a result of divorce under particular circumstances (e.g. domestic violence, forced marriage).



*In 2016, 391 illegal immigrants living in Switzerland were granted residence permits.*

## 8. Returns

### Return assistance

Twenty years after their inception, return assistance programmes are no longer being offered by the Swiss Confederation: the last two country programmes for Guinea and Nigeria ended in 2016. However, individual return assistance remains a very extensive and time-proven option for asylum seekers from most countries. Asylum seekers are informed of the various possibilities throughout the entire duration of the asylum process.

The Swiss Confederation introduced the first return assistance programme for Bosnia and Herzegovina back in 1997. Since then, it has implemented 24 country programmes, which the SEM has run in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). In the West Balkans alone, the Swiss Confederation has maintained seven programmes over the past twenty years, seven in Africa, five in Asia, two in the Caucasus and Maghreb, and one in Turkey.

Most of the returnees took part in the return assistance programme for Kosovo (around 40 000). The second largest group came from Bosnia and Herzegovina (10 000). The other programmes remained far below these figures (incl. Iraq with around 1 200 and Nigeria with 900 returnees).

Repeatedly, we have seen that the added value of a programme should not be limited to providing individual support to asylum seekers. A country programme must also include comprehensive structural support as well as in-depth migration policy cooperation at the intergovernmental level. If a situation similar to the post-war situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (e.g. when the first country programme was launched) were to arise once again, then resumption of a country programme will once again be a viable option for the SEM.

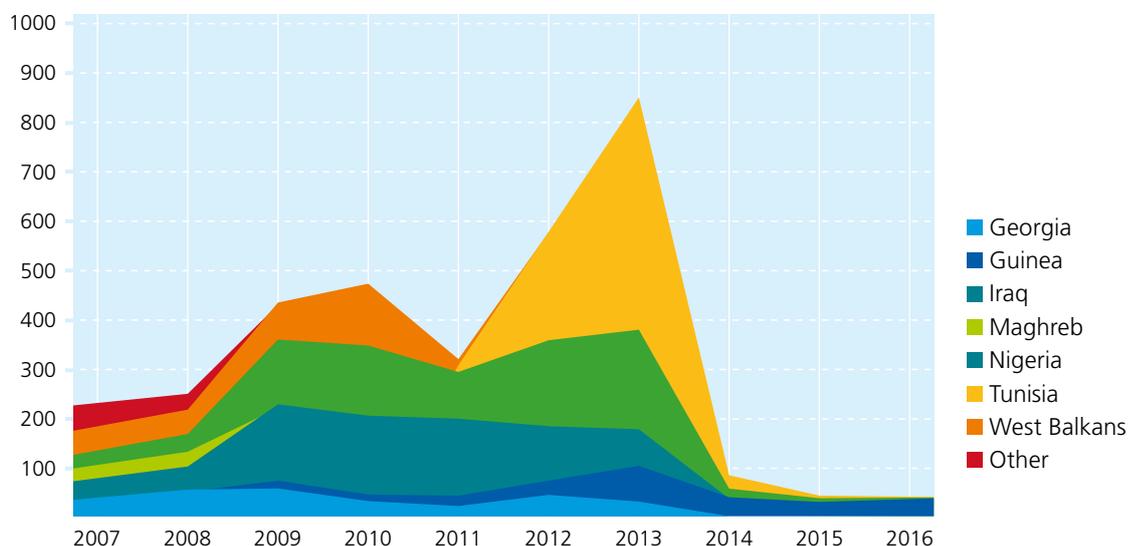
In the meantime, country-specific individual return assistance has been maintained: in order to provide guidance and support to returnees and implement return assistance projects, the SEM provides funding to local IOM offices in four countries: Afghanistan, Gambia, Iraq and Sri Lanka.

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Since return assistance was introduced in 1997, around 90 000 people have voluntarily returned to their country of origin.

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### Country programmes from 2006 to 2016





*Sambujang Cessay, group manager for Team Clean work training programme, from Guinea-Bissau*

### Coercive measures

Asylum seekers whose applications have been legally rejected must leave Switzerland at the end of the asylum procedure. Other foreign nationals may also be deported if they have lived in Switzerland illegally. Coercive measures (namely administrative detention and removal enforcement) may be taken if the foreign national refuses to leave Switzerland after receiving official notice to do so.

The average duration of administrative detention remained practically the same at 25 days (2015: 23 days). In 2016, a total of 5732 detention orders was issued (2015: 5935 detention orders). Most of the individuals placed in administrative detention in 2016 – as in the previous year – came from Nigeria and Albania. The second category was Afghan and Gambian nationals whose administrative detention was mostly ordered under the terms of the Dublin procedure (Art. 76a FNA).

### Removal by air

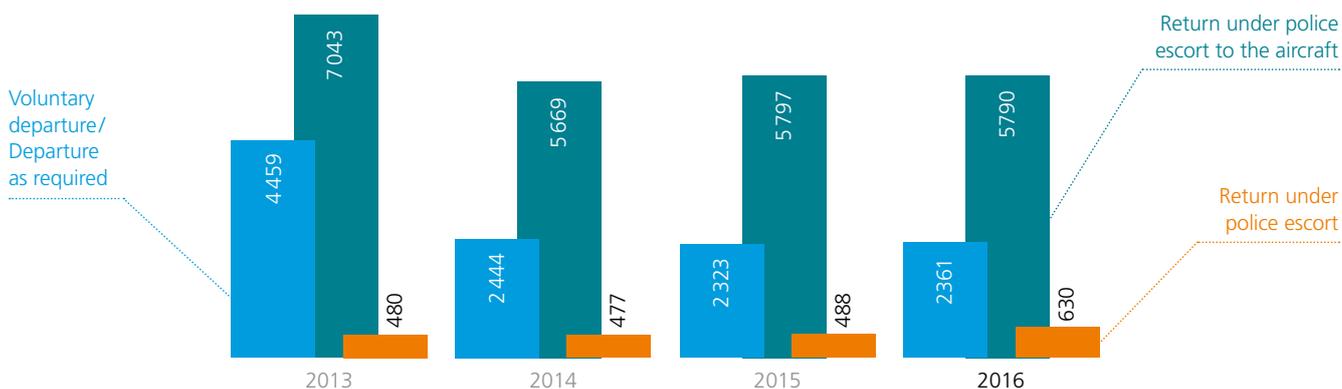
In 2016, the Swiss authorities ensured the removal by air of 8781 persons falling within the scope of the Asylum Act and the Foreign Nationals Act. Despite the massive decline in the number of asylum applications, this figure is comparable to the previous year's figure (2015: 8603 departures). This was mainly because the number of removals associated with the Dublin procedure was significantly higher than in 2015.

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In 2016, Switzerland was also  
able to take part in even more joint  
EU deportation flights.

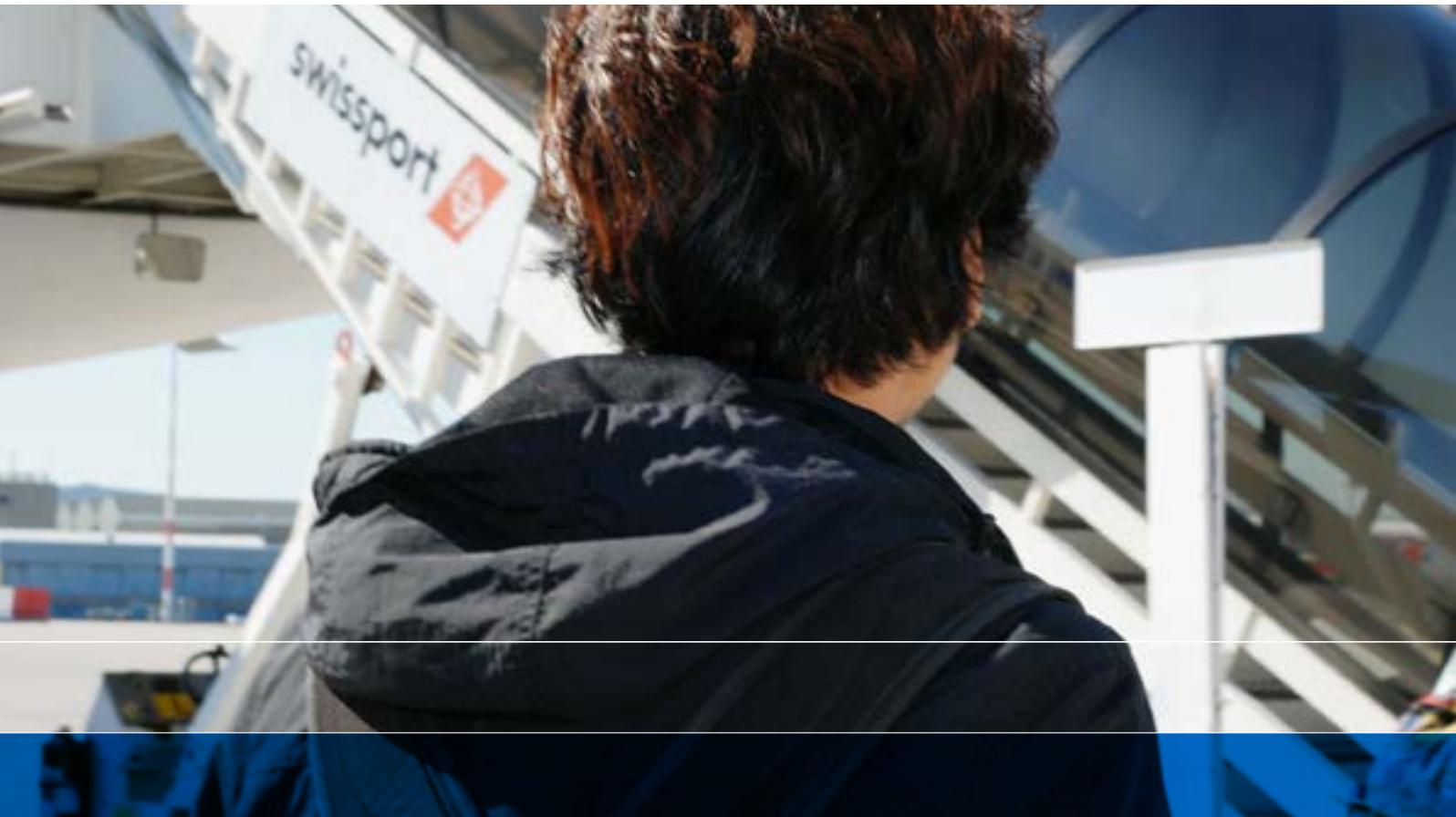
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### Departures by air (2013–2016)



As in the previous year, nearly 27 % of those ordered to leave Switzerland left voluntarily. However, many persons failed to comply with official removal or expulsion orders. Most of these persons were returned under enforcement level 1 (police escort only to the departure gate to ensure that the person boarded the aircraft). Only 630 persons (7 % of the departures) were accompanied by specially trained security officials to their destination country on standard flights and 345 persons in this group were returned to their countries of origin on 64 special deportation flights (2015: 45 special deportation flights). The sharp increase in the number of special deportation flights is due to the fact that more joint EU deportation flights could be arranged and coordinated by the EU's border control agency Frontex. Switzerland played the lead role in five of the 21 joint EU deportation flights that it took part in (2015: 16 joint EU deportation flights).

In the previous year, the new training regulation on police escorted returns came into effect. This regulation was jointly drafted by the Swiss Police Institute (SPI). It sets out the initial and continuing training required in order to perform various tasks. Mandatory recertification courses have also been set up to ensure that all officers involved in escorted returns are able to refresh their knowledge and skills on a continuous basis.



*In 2016, the Swiss authorities ensured the removal by air of 8781 persons falling within the scope of the Asylum Act and the Foreign Nationals Act.*

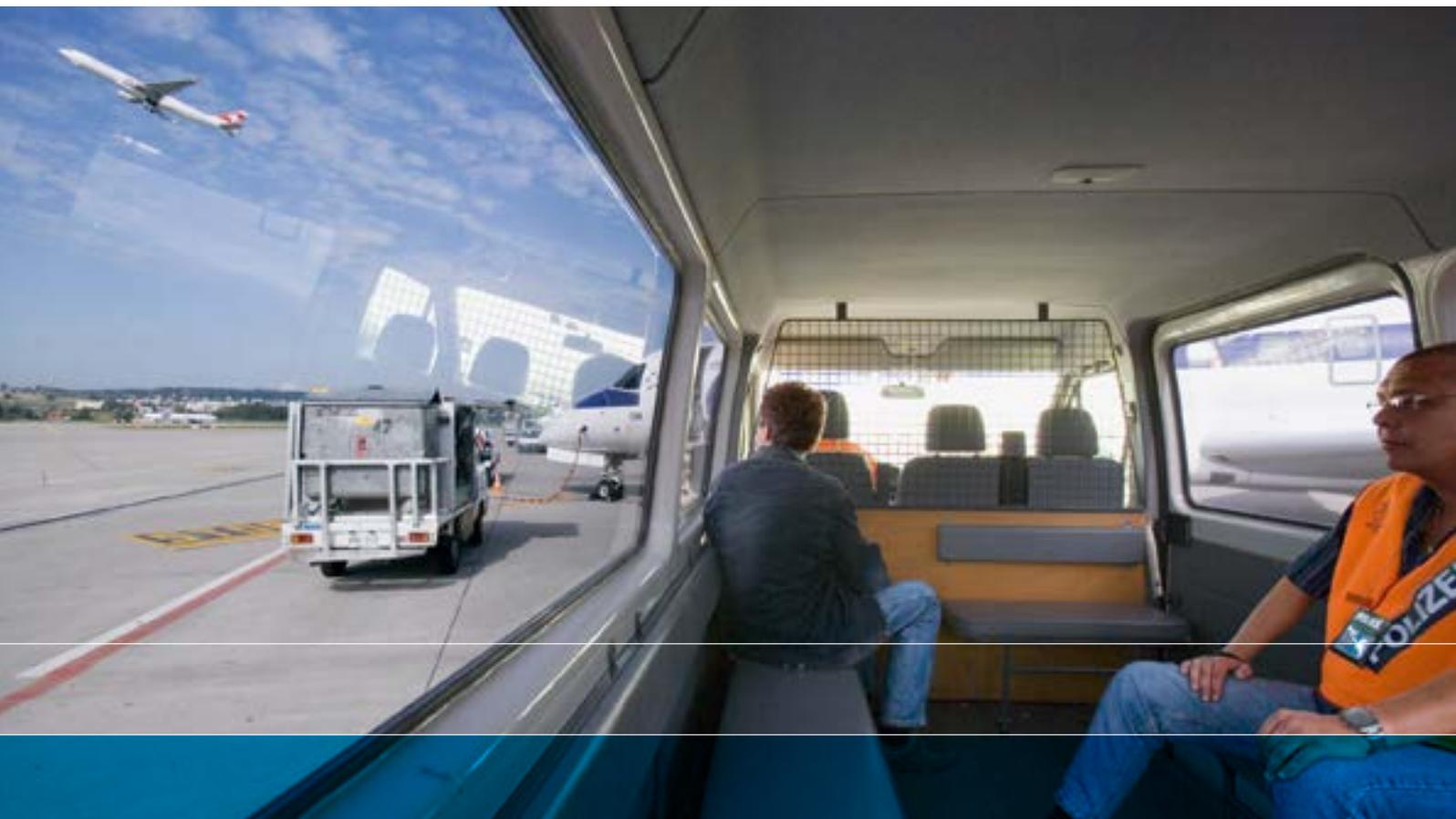
## 9. Procedures to remove people and keep people away

The Foreign Nationals Act (SR 142.20) provides for a range of measures designed to enable the authorities to remove foreign nationals who undermine Switzerland's security and public order or constitute a serious threat to Switzerland's internal or external security. These measures include, in particular, removal orders (*Wegweisung*), expulsion orders (*Ausweisung*) and entry bans (*Einreiseverbot*). Entry bans and expulsions are aimed at preventing the uncontrolled entry to Switzerland of undesirable foreign nationals. Both measures are preventive rather than penal in nature. As long as they remain in force, the foreign national may not enter our country without obtaining the explicit authorisation (suspension of entry bans) of the competent authority. In the case of EU nationals, an entry ban may only be ordered if the person in question represents a real, current and sufficiently serious threat to security and public order. In 2016, 13 566 entry bans were issued in Switzerland (2015: 11 979).

Since the Swiss-EU bilateral agreement on Schengen/Dublin cooperation came into effect, all bans on entry ordered by our country are recorded into the Schengen Information System (SIS). This enables undesirable foreign nationals to be barred from entry to the Schengen Area.

On 1 October 2016, an amendment<sup>15</sup> was made to the Swiss Criminal Code (SCC) and the Military Criminal Code of 13 June 1927 (MCC, SR 321.0). These amendments were made to implement Article 121a of the Swiss Federal Constitution, thereby enabling deportation of foreigners who commit crimes in Switzerland. Under these new provisions, judges in criminal cases may now at their sole discretion issue removal orders and entry bans as part of mandatory or voluntary expulsion orders. In such cases, expulsion order provisions apply instead of the provisions of the Foreign Nationals Act.

<sup>15</sup> Legislative text: [www.admin.ch/opclde/official-compilation/2016/2329.pdf](http://www.admin.ch/opclde/official-compilation/2016/2329.pdf)



In 2016, 13 566 entry bans were issued (2015: 11 979).

# C Integration



Séverine Montaland, teacher from France

## 1. Action needed to encourage integration

The first years of life are extremely important in the development and health of a child, whether it be socially, emotionally or intellectually. In early childhood, important building blocks are laid for future success in education and life. For this reason, specific measures taken by the Confederation in support of integration have been heavily focused on early childhood, through cantonal integration programmes (CIPs), SEM programmes and projects of national importance, and especially the Tripartite Agglomeration Conference (TAC) "Growing up – getting a healthy start in life".

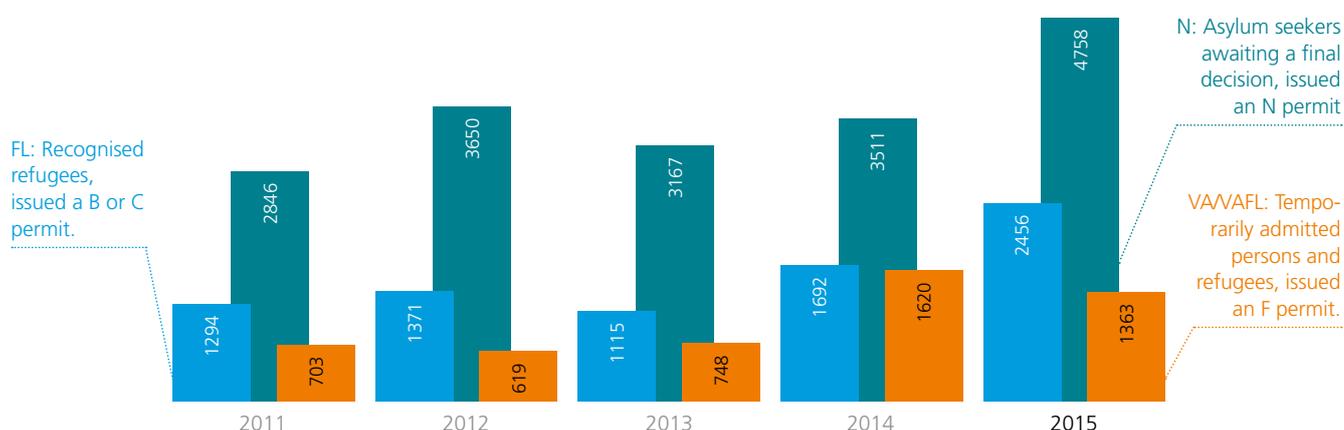
This commitment has benefited the whole of society: children who have received support in their early childhood years are more successful in school and later on in VET programmes and working life.

Pre-school support and integration help to create more equal opportunities.

Pre-school support is a collective endeavour that spills over into the educational, social and health spheres. There is particular need for action to encourage integration. This is because a relatively large proportion of Switzerland's youngest inhabitants come from the migrant population, as we see in the key figures published by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO):

- In 2015, there were 86 559 live births in Switzerland, 25 215 of these infants were born from non-Swiss families.
- The number of births from foreign mothers increased by 19 % between the year 2000 and 2015.
- Around one-fourth of young people under the age of 15 within the usual resident population are foreigners who were either born abroad or in Switzerland.
- Foreign children are mainly of Portuguese, German or Italian extraction. Young foreign nationals (up to the age of 14) from Kosovo, France and Serbia can be found in proportions under 10 %.
- Most of the children up to the age of 6 were born in families where at least one of the parents is from a migration background.
- Among asylum seekers, the number of children up to the age of five has increased over the past five years. This includes both children of recognised refugees and temporarily admitted foreigners. Most of these children come from Eritrea, Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia.

Increase in the number of under-five-year-old children of asylum seekers (2011–2015)



The need for action to encourage integration is particularly important because children with a migration background often do not have the same starting conditions as children of Swiss parents:

- Statistical analyses show that there are more frequent health-related issues surrounding pregnancies and birth when mothers and infants are from a migration background than when they are Swiss: more underweight infants, higher infant and maternal mortality rates, etc. Even abortion rates are higher than average among foreign nationals. Nevertheless, it is important to draw distinctions when making such comparisons because the migration population is very heterogeneous and not all migrant groups experience these problems to the same extent (see Federal Council report on Fulfilment of the Maury Pasquier Postulate no. 12.3966).

- Infant mortality for the entire usual resident population stood at 3.8 per mille in 2014. The place of birth and nationality of the mother had an influence on this indicator: the infant mortality rate for women born in Switzerland stands at 3.4 per mille compared to 4.1 per mille for mothers born abroad. Non-Swiss mothers tend to experience a higher level of infant mortality than Swiss mothers: 4.1 per mille compared to 3.5 per mille.
- Fewer than 50 % of the children with a migration background under the age of three communicate in a national language of Switzerland. Migrant children who do not use a national language in the household or in their social environment are two to four times more likely to experience poverty and hardship than local children.

In light of these figures, early childhood has become an important concern in all policy areas that have an impact on child development, such as education, social care, health and integration.

Encouraging integration means recognising both the potential and risks early on and taking suitable measures to eliminate obstacles. The aim is to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, are provided with equal chances to gain access to high-quality early childhood education, supervision and rearing.

Back in 2009, the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and the Federal Commission on Migration (FCM) jointly launched a programme to encourage integration in the early childhood years. The aim is to make it easier for parents and children from a migration background to benefit from public services, to provide training to those working in the field of intercultural interpreting and communication, and to carry out corresponding conceptual work, particularly at the communal level. Between 2009 and 2011, a total of CHF 5 million was spent on 86 innovative projects. It was thanks to these projects that preschool support became one of the eight areas of action in cantonal integration programmes (CIPs) starting from 2014 onwards.



*Around one-fourth of young people under the age of 15 within the usual resident population are foreigners.*

## 2. Cantonal integration programmes and preschool support

The launch of the CIPs in 2014 was a milestone for Switzerland's integration support strategy as the whole of the country now pursued the same set of goals agreed upon by the Confederation and the cantons. The first phase of cantonal integration programmes will last for a period of four years. This will enable local integration work at cantonal and communal levels to be sustainably developed over a longer period of time.

One of the strengths of CIPs is the fact that while common goals have been set for the whole of Switzerland, implementation takes local conditions into account. This allows the cantons and communes to set their own priorities.

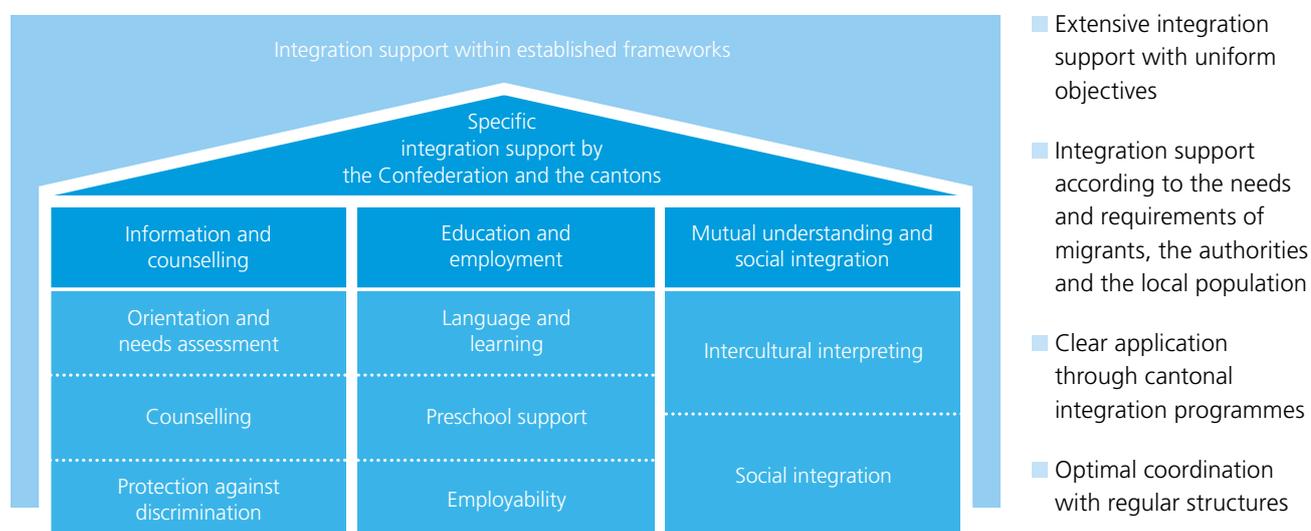
The Confederation and the cantons spent over CHF 148 million in 2015 on specific integration support programmes. Most of this funding was used for language learning and improving employability as well as to provide orientation and counselling.

A total of CHF 7.4 million (around 5% of the total combined budget of CIPs) was spent in 2015 on preschool support to further the strategic objective of providing migrant families with equal access to preschool support catered to their specific family situation. The cantons focussed on five different aspects:

### Networking

When it comes to implementing the programme goals, it is vital that a stakeholder network is in place and coordination takes place both horizontally and vertically. This is owing to the fact that neither the SEM nor the cantonal or communal integration offices have overall responsibility for preschool support. Integration delegates are strongly encouraged to develop a network of contacts within the cantonal offices and with the communes. They must also be familiar with and coordinate the activities of the preschool support stakeholders and the services available. Since it is the communes that oversee preschool support measures in many cantons, cooperation often helps to convince the communes of the value of preschool support. In most cases, training courses provide a platform for preschool support professionals to help them build a network of contacts.

### Integration support





*Tsering Dolma Chedrong, participant in Team Clean work training programme, from Tibet*

### Empowering parents

Parental behaviour and attitudes are strong determinants of childhood development. Parent outreach schemes focus on providing parents with the support they need to honour their child-rearing responsibilities. Home-visit programmes – e.g. the “Schritt:weise” project (see infobox) – are particularly useful in this regard. Parent counselling also plays a key role in family outreach efforts. Available nationwide, this service is sometimes provided within the framework of CIPs.

### Learning a first and second language simultaneously

Migrant children from socio-economically and/or educationally disadvantaged families are often ill-prepared for nursery school. Their proficiency in one of the four official Swiss languages tends to be worse than that of children who learnt one of these languages as their mother tongue. The provision of early years' language-learning support in a family, day care or playgroup setting is therefore a key objective of integration policy. Many cantons support such services, whether they are language-learning schemes in a playgroup or day care setting, such as ‘SpielgruppenPlus’ (implemented in various cantons), or projects that involve parents in the language-learning process.

#### “Schritt:weise” project

This preventive support programme is intended to help socially disadvantaged and poorly educated families with children between the ages of one and five. The main purpose of weekly house visits is to provide age-appropriate support to children and to improve parenting skills. These measures are particularly effective if they are not limited to mere house visits but rather include various services and clear objectives (e.g. parenting training, support and guidance, health promotion and regular verification of child development).

[www.a-primo.ch/de/angebote/programm-schritt-weise/uebersicht](http://www.a-primo.ch/de/angebote/programm-schritt-weise/uebersicht)

### Guaranteeing quality at all levels

Almost all cantons promote basic and advanced training courses aimed specifically at childcare professionals working in day care facilities and playgroups. This training tends to focus on interculturalism, cooperation with parents, health and early years' language-learning support. Advanced training programmes are offered, such as the intercantonal “Valoriser la diversité dès l'enfance” (Valuing diversity from infancy) course in the French-speaking region of Switzerland. From the standpoint of CIPs, existing preschool support services should be adapted to the needs of the local migrant population and, where necessary, supplemented with targeted integration measures. Delivering good-quality services advances the development of every family, and every child. The biggest winners are children from socially disadvantaged families. Research clearly shows that receiving quality preschool support can have a very positive influence on a child's personal growth.

### Removing stumbling blocks

Feedback from the cantons shows that the appreciation for preschool support services is high. This is motivation enough to continue down this route and remove the many remaining obstacles along the way. Some cantons cited problems which were caused by their financial situation or difficulties with parent outreach. From an institutional perspective, funding is also a problem owing to the lack of legal provisions on the matter. This is why it is so important to establish a network of different governmental and non-governmental actors and to better coordinate their activities. Service provision still tends to vary considerably across communes, with many lacking the time to review or adapt their offerings.

A complete report on all eight areas of action of CIPs is provided in the first interim report, which was published in 2016: [www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/publiservice/berichte/integration.html](http://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/publiservice/berichte/integration.html)

### 3. Programmes and projects of national importance

Programmes und projects of national importance that are directly funded by the SEM serve as a complement to CIPs and help to further develop, ensure the quality of and find innovative solutions for integration support activities.

In the area of preschool support too, the SEM has been heavily involved in the TAC Integration Dialogue “Growing up – getting a healthy start in life”. Preschool support received special attention in the pilot project Resettlement (active acceptance of groups of refugees).

#### TAC Integration Dialogue “Growing up – getting a healthy start in life”

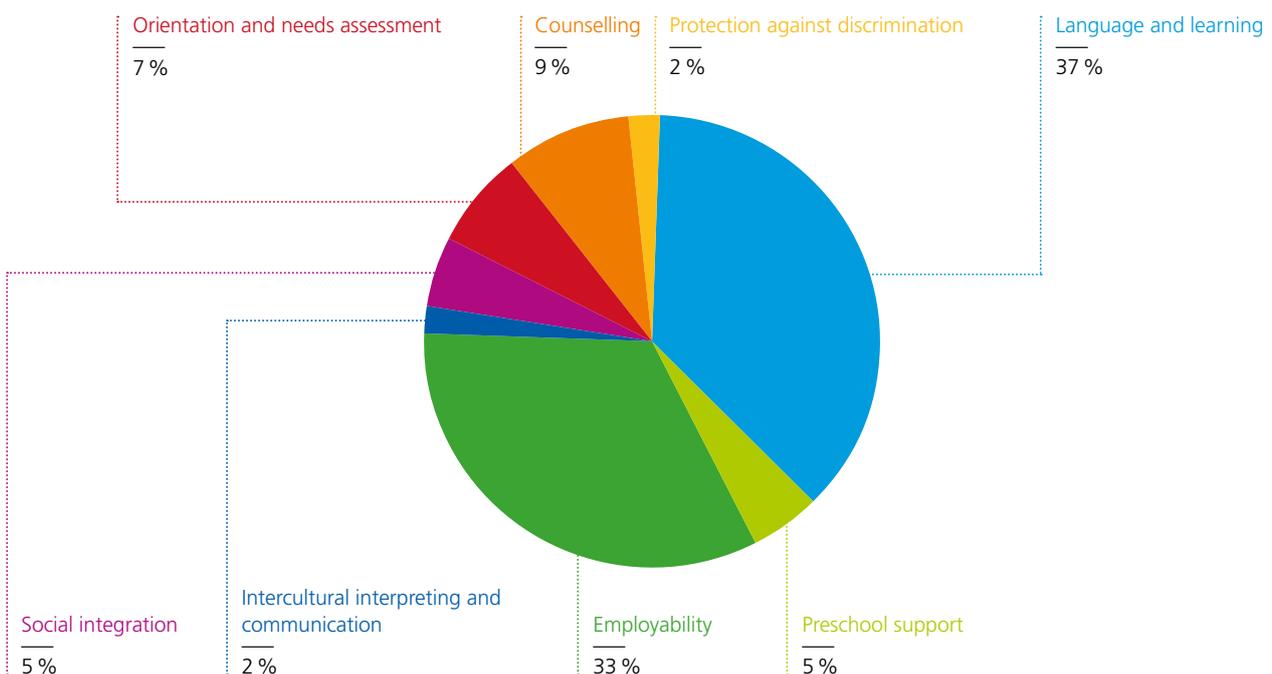
In 2013, the Confederation, the cantons, towns and communes launched the TAC Integration Dialogue “Growing up – getting a healthy start in life”. The aim of the project is to optimise the general conditions needed for healthy physical, emotional and social development of all children, from a very young age onwards. The dialogue partners include the

main TAC sponsors (i.e. the Confederation, the cantons, towns and communes) – specifically the agencies responsible for health, social welfare and child care – as well as non-state actors in the field of basic healthcare, family support and integration support services.

With this Dialogue, the TAC wishes to help all families – regardless of their social or national origin – to become aware of and gain access to basic healthcare, family support and integration support services in their region. In addition, the various actors will undergo training on how to work more effectively with diversity and establish more effective networking ties.

Within the context of the Dialogue “Growing up – getting a healthy start in life”, the TAC officially adopted thirteen concrete recommendations for state actors and took note of the recommendations for non-state actors. Non-state partners in this Dialogue intend to implement these recommendations in accordance with their respective capacities.

#### Effective costs in 2015: by area of action



The SEM and the network “Kinderbetreuung Schweiz” will hold a symposium in May 2017 to take stock of the TAC Integration Dialogue “Growing up – getting a healthy start in life” (2013–2017).

The Dialogue “Growing up – getting a healthy start in life” is intended to benefit all disadvantaged families. In terms of concrete implementation, the SEM has therefore focussed its attention on migrant families as the main target groups. As a case in point, the SEM has helped to improve the communication skills of parents and expanded learning content in the language system “fide – French, Italian, German in Switzerland – Learning, Teaching and Assessment” to include topics such as pregnancy, childbirth and early childhood.

### TAC – Integration Dialogue

Integration requires concerted action. Following the second national integration conference in 2011, the Confederation, the cantons, towns and communes launched the Integration Dialogue through their political platform, the Tripartite Agglomeration Conference (TAC). This complex Dialogue is intended to enable more extensive cooperation with private actors as a means of mainstreaming integration into various aspects of life, which are covered in the various Dialogues “Employment”, “Growing up – getting a healthy start in life” and “Living together”.

The Dialogue “Employment” (2012–2016) was completed with positive results on 3 November 2016. The Dialogue “Growing up – getting a healthy start in life” started in 2013 and will continue through 2017. The Dialogue “Living together” was launched on 8 September 2016.

In 2017, the name of the Tripartite Agglomeration Conference (TAC) will be changed to the Tripartite Conference (TC).

The 3rd National Integration Conference will be held in June 2017.

More information can be found on the organisation’s website: [www.dialog-integration.ch](http://www.dialog-integration.ch)

For language courses for pregnant women, pilot projects were launched to enable schools with many years of language teaching experience to test the learning materials. In 2015/2016, the concept was transferred to the regions with the support of 14 projects. Fide language courses focus on learning day-to-day language use. For example, pregnant women will learn language skills needed to handle pregnancy and childbirth situations. This allows them to communicate more effectively with medical personnel, which greatly facilitates their work.

In addition, the SEM was involved in implementation of TAC recommendations. Drawing from federal funding for integration, the SEM supported the activities of various partners. The Femmes-Tische programme led to development of a moderation platform to discuss such topics as reproductive health and preventive medical check-ups for small children. Various associations developed or revised guidelines and materials for work with migrants. Several studies were conducted on language barriers, information content and the effectiveness of services.

### Resettlement pilot project

The Resettlement pilot project enabled 503 refugees to be assigned to eight cantons between the end of 2013 and the end of 2015. These refugees were then provided with special integration support over a two-year period. Support to children was particularly important since refugees in the pilot programme included 170 children between the ages of 5 to 15 as well as 69 children of preschool age (up to age 4). The partner cantons Basel-Landschaft, Geneva, Lucerne, Schaffhausen, Solothurn, St. Gallen, Uri and Valais were responsible for providing suitable schooling for the older children and preschool support to the youngest ones.

The experience gained from the pilot programme will be used to bring longer-term enhancements to integration measures for all recognised refugees.



## Main highlights in 2016



*Yahya Dalib Ahmed, intercultural interpreter from Somalia*

## 1. Migration flows to and within Europe

### Situation on the southern border/transit migration

Starting in May 2016, asylum migration in Switzerland took place mainly over the southern border. This is the same pattern observed over the past few years, with the exception of August 2015 to January 2016, when most asylum seekers reached Switzerland's eastern and northern border after transiting along the Balkan route via Austria and Germany.

With improvement of weather conditions in the early summer of 2016, boats once again began crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. This combined with more stringent border controls by the French and Austrian authorities on the Italian border significantly increased migration pressure along Switzerland's southern border. Starting from the end of May, the Swiss Border Guard (BG) picked up considerably more migrants illegally crossing the border in Ticino than in the same period the previous year. In the months of June to October alone, the BG detained around 24 200 illegal migrants in Region IV (2015: around 7000).

In response to the changing situation, the BG dispatched more of its personnel to the southern border; in particular, ID checks intensified at the railway station in Chiasso because around 85 % of all irregular migrants on the southern border were coming by train from Como to Chiasso. Migrants who admitted during these checks that they had no intention of applying for asylum in Switzerland were immediately handed over to the Italian border officials by virtue of the bilateral readmission agreement. As a result of this development, in the summer months, the train station in Como became a backwater as several hundreds of people, some in precarious conditions, camped out in the hope of making an attempt to cross the Swiss border at a later time.

The proportion of migrants wishing to use Switzerland as a transit country without applying for asylum greatly increased in the past year. In the second half of the year, only around one-fourth of the migrants detained at the southern border informed the BG of their intention to apply for asylum in Switzerland. Of those persons who submitted an asylum application, an unusually large number interrupted the process shortly afterwards by leaving unannounced. In the months of June to August 2016, up to 40 % of asylum seekers vanished before fully submitting their asylum application and attending their first interview at the reception and processing centre. An additional 10 % to 20 % of applicants interrupted the asylum procedure after it was filed by leaving the reception and processing centre prematurely and unannounced a few days afterwards. SEM chartered bus transport services to prevent asylum seekers from disappearing during the transfer from Chiasso to another reception and processing centre. However, since these are not detention centres, it was not possible to prevent unauthorised departures of asylum seekers. Based on all of the information obtained thus far, we can assume that the vast majority of those who departed unannounced are no longer in Switzerland but rather continued their journey northwards into Europe.

### Migration cooperation in Europe

Switzerland is in the heart of Europe, enclosed by the European Union (EU), and thus directly affected by the EU's migration and asylum policies. By signing the Schengen/Dublin Association Agreement, Switzerland takes part in political and legal discussions concerning these topics. It is able to express its position and adopts corresponding *acquis* arising from this agreement.

The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) analyses the effects of Schengen/Dublin policies on Switzerland and actively contributes to discussions in EU working groups and committees. In addition, it coordinates with other federal agencies to establish a coherent Swiss position, which is then decided on either by the Federal Council or the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP). Depending on the body, this position is represented by a head of department, the head of SEM, the head of the Swiss Mission to the European Union or another SEM delegate in Brussels.

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The crossing to Italy and stricter border control in France and Austria intensified migration pressure on Switzerland's southern border.

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In 2015, Europe experienced levels of migration not seen since the end of World War II. In particular, the uncontrolled continuation of migration flows along the Balkan route was a problem for many EU states. The situation returned somewhat to normal in the spring of 2016 after border controls between individual Schengen countries were reinstated and following the joint declaration of the EU and Turkey.

In May 2015, the European Agenda on Migration was adopted, which set out the various migration policy challenges that the EU wishes to comprehensively address. As in the previous year, the relocation programme adopted in autumn 2015 was also not implemented quickly enough in 2016. Of the total of 106 000 persons, fewer than 10 000 asylum seekers were transferred from Greece and Italy to other Dublin states by the end of 2016.

On 4 May 2016, the European Commission published a revised draft of the Dublin III Regulation, which presents proposals designed to achieve three main objectives: asylum applications need to be processed more quickly and efficiently; secondary migration should be prevented; and Dublin countries under particularly heavy migration pressure should receive solidarity support by means of a corrective mechanism. At the same time, the Eurodac Regulation was revised and its scope of application broadened. On 13 July 2016, the second legislative package on revision of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) was published, containing proposed guidelines on procedures for processing asylum applications, admitting asylum seekers and granting refugee status. This second legislative package is of lesser interest to Switzerland since these guidelines are not binding on our country.

Over the course of the year, several European-wide projects to improve border protection were discussed and some approved. As a result, the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) became operational on 6 October 2016. This agency has a rapid response pool of some 1500 experts who can be dispatched at a moment's notice. The external borders of the Schengen Area should therefore be better monitored, which in turn should have a positive impact on efforts to crack down on illegal migration across borders as well as criminal activities. The new agency has also been given a broader remit to return migrants. Switzerland will play an active role in this respect.

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## In 2016, the EU took action to improve border protection.

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As a new development, when a person benefitting from EU provisions on the free movement of persons is checked at the border, borderguards will systematically verify that the person is not listed in relevant police and migration databases. Approval of the corresponding project is expected to be given in the first half of 2017.

Following release of a new draft ordinance in April 2016, discussions on introduction of an entry/exit system (EES) continued. The EES is intended to enable capture of biometric data upon entry and departure of third state nationals at external borders of the Schengen Area for short stays of up to 90 days per 180-day period or who arrive on a tourist visa, regardless of visa requirements.

In November 2016, the European Commission presented its proposal for an EU Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). This system would enable the online recording of relevant information from visa-exempt third-state nationals regarding their travel plans as well as alphanumerical personal data. ETIAS is modelled after the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), which was introduced by the United States to facilitate visa-free travel for third-state nationals.

All of these measures are intended to provide better protection of the external borders of the Schengen Area and improve domestic security.

The SEM has also worked on a bilateral level in individual EU member states. In 2016, funding was provided to a Greek NGO for translation services within the context of Greek asylum procedures as well as to UNHCR for its activities in Greece. In addition, cooperation with Poland was intensified, mostly with regards to encouraging knowledge transfer in the area of asylum, housing practices and integration. Close ties with Poland in the area of migration should also lead to more intensive cooperation with the other members of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia).

### Switzerland's contribution

Since 2013, approval has been given to various programmes designed to relieve current burdens on first-host countries by admitting around 9700 asylum seekers to Switzerland:

- In 2013, the FDJP approved an easing of visa requirements for around 4700 Syrian nationals.
- Up to 1500 asylum seekers will be transferred from Italy and Greece to Switzerland as part of the EU's Relocation Programme (Federal Council decision dated 18 September 2015).
- 3000 particularly vulnerable refugees should receive protection and sustainable future prospects in Switzerland under the Resettlement Programme (Federal Council decisions dated 6 March 2015 and 9 December 2016).
- Another 500 close relatives of Syrian nationals who have been temporarily admitted to Switzerland should receive a humanitarian visa.

### Resettlement

The first asylum seekers arrived in August 2015, after which the resettlement programme was extended in 2016. 662 persons in total were resettled in Switzerland in the reporting year, which brings the total number of resettled asylum seekers to 968 since the programme was launched. As a result, the resettlement quota established in the Federal Council decision of 6 March 2015 was nearly used up by the end of 2016.

On 9 December 2016, the Federal Council decided to renew its commitment to help the victims of the Syrian conflict. Over the next two years, Switzerland therefore intends to work closely with UNHCR and the cantons to accept an additional 2000 particularly vulnerable persons under the resettlement programme.

### Relocation

Switzerland has voluntarily chosen to take part in the EU Relocation Programme out of solidarity with those who have become displaced by war as well as in support of both Italy and Greece, which face enormous challenges with the continuous flow of refugees. Asylum seekers eligible for the programme include citizens of all countries for which the EU protection rate is at least 75 %. To date, asylum seekers have mainly come from Syria and Eritrea.

So far, Switzerland has accepted 368 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece under the EU Relocation Programme. These individuals will go through the standard asylum procedure in Switzerland.

In order to lend support to emergency relocation efforts in Italy and Greece, the SEM has sent experts to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) for periods of several months. In 2016, 17 Swiss experts worked a total of 1240 days at this office, of which 1028 days were spent in Italy and 212 in Greece.

### Humanitarian visas

Moreover, in addition to the 150 visas issued in 2015 for close relatives of Syrian family members already temporarily admitted to Switzerland, 222 visa applications for spouses and under-age children were approved in 2016.



*A total of 662 persons were resettled in Switzerland in the reporting year.*

## 2. Examples of cooperation with countries of origin and transit

### “Swiss – West Balkan Migration Partnership Strategy for 2016–2019”

For many years, Switzerland has intensively maintained ties with West Balkans countries, which has become one of the main regions from which migration to Switzerland originates. In order to further intensify cooperation, Switzerland has signed migration partnerships with Bosnia and Herzegovina (April 2009), Serbia (July 2009) and Kosovo (February 2010). As a strategic framework for these partnership agreements and as a continuation of the first interdepartemental strategy for 2012–2015, a new strategy paper came into effect on 1 January 2016 entitled “Migration partnerships between Switzerland and the West Balkans for 2016–2019”. The aim of this strategy is to improve the capacities of partner countries so that they can more adequately address migration challenges. The main priority areas of action include the following:

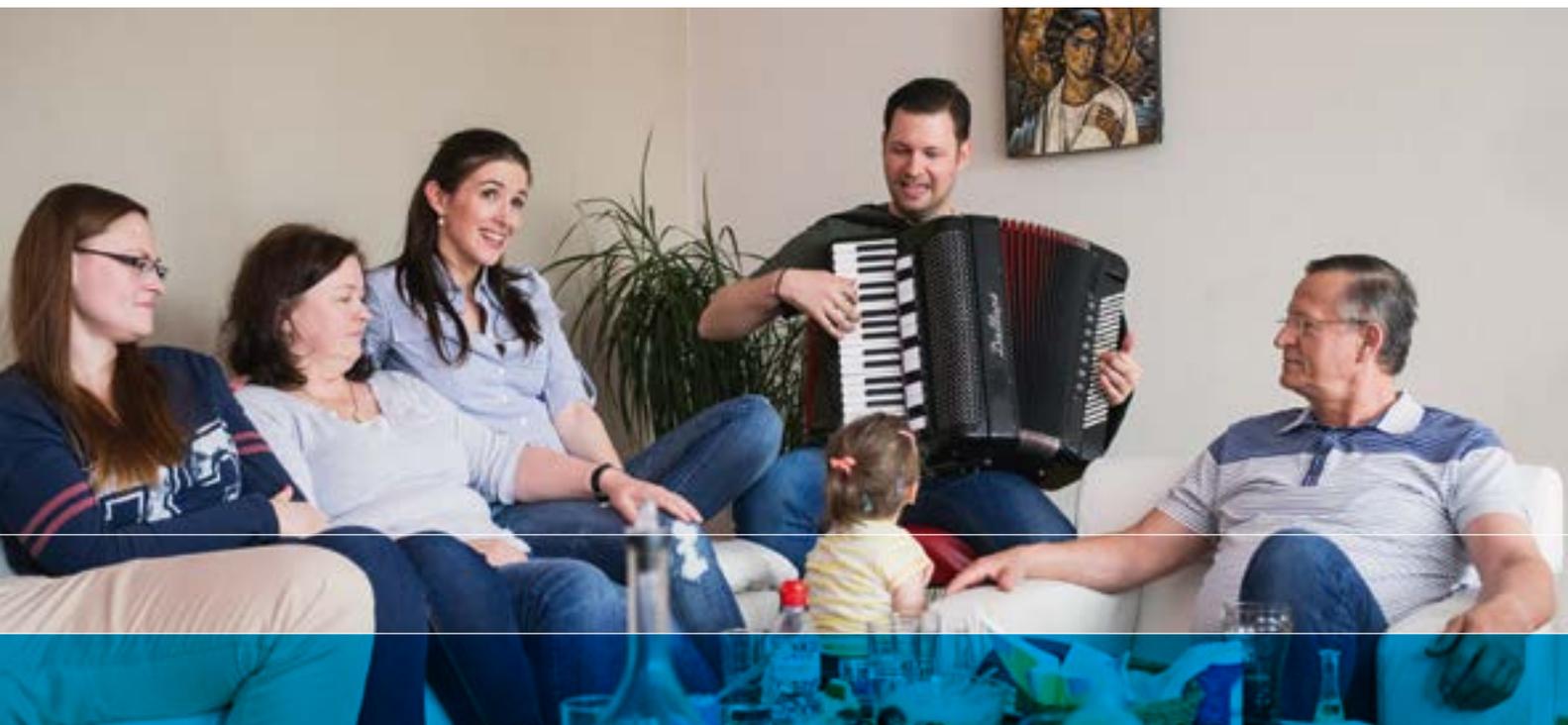
- Asylum and protection of migrants, namely by helping to build functional, coherent systems that meet international standards;
- Return and reintegration, i.e. the return of migrants from Switzerland to partner countries or the return of migrants who have sought refugee in these countries to their countries of origin;

- Migration and development, namely by tapping the potential of Diaspora for development in countries of origin;
- Prevention of irregular migration and cracking down on human trafficking and people smuggling.

Special emphasis will be placed on “capacity building” and regional cooperation, including greater use of regional platforms and networks.

In order to develop and implement joint projects that meet the needs of the migration authorities in partner countries, Switzerland maintains regular dialogue with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo.

Given the cross-border nature of migration policy challenges in the West Balkans, Swiss support can be extended to other countries in the region such as Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, either through bilateral channels or within the framework of a regional project. Switzerland’s migration policies have enabled our country to provide very active assistance to countries in the region during the crisis along the Balkan route. Although the situation has fundamentally changed for the better since the Balkan route was closed off in March 2016, the



*A new strategy “Migration partnerships between Switzerland and the West Balkans for 2016–2019” came into effect on 1 January 2016.*

difficulties faced by the countries in the region remain formidable. In Serbia in early 2017, for example, there were still 7500 asylum seekers who for the most part had no intention of applying for asylum there and were determined to continue their journey to Western Europe. This situation places a considerable burden on the authorities and local government and creates risks for the migrants themselves.

Given the present challenges, Switzerland intends to leverage its migration partnerships and strategy for 2016–2019 to continue in its efforts to improve the capacities of local authorities and provide support to migrants in the region. A total four-year budget of CHF 10 million has been set aside for this purpose, CHF 6 million of which will be co-managed by SEM. Implementation of the strategy for 2016–2019 will take place in close cooperation with SEM, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the Principality of Liechtenstein, which has also signed migration partnership agreements with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

#### Swiss aid activities in North Africa

Once the outcome of the Arab Spring had become clear, Switzerland devised and implemented a cooperation programme for North African countries for the period 2011–2016. A certain degree of urgency was called for to respond to numerous political, economic and social challenges and help countries in the region to gradually transition towards democracy. The various federal agencies involved (i.e. SDC, SECO, FDFA's Human Security Division, SEM) chose to coordinate their activities ("whole of government approach") to improve the effectiveness and coherence of action taken. This led to the opening of joint offices at Swiss embassies. The cooperation programme focussed on three key areas of action: 1. democratic change and human rights; 2. economic growth and employment; 3. migration and protection.

In the six years that have passed since the programme was launched, a total of CHF 268 million has been spent. Over half of this amount was allocated to employment and VET-related projects in an effort to reduce youth unemployment and prevent irregular migration to Europe. Nearly one-third of programme funding was allocated to migration projects. The SEM spent CHF 9 million to strengthen institutional structures in North Africa so that migration flows could be managed more effectively. SEM's involvement in the Swiss cooperation

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### For many years, Switzerland has actively maintained intensive ties with West Balkan countries.

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programme often takes place within the framework of bilateral migration dialogue with the authorities of North African countries, where issues of asylum and readmission are also discussed.

For example, as part of the migration partnership agreement with Tunisia, funding was provided to numerous projects aimed at building capacities of institutions in several areas of migration: integrated border management, development of a legal and institutional framework for asylum and the handling of fingerprint data. Over 1500 rejected asylum seekers received assistance in Switzerland to facilitate their return to Tunisia. The institutional capacity of the Tunisian Red Crescent was developed further so that it could more effectively take care of migrants and refugees rescued from boats. In migration dialogues, the difficulties associated with readmission were also discussed, for example in the case of Morocco and Algeria, where Swiss cooperation programmes are more heavily focussed on migration issues.

Given the strong migration pressure and irregular transit of migrants in the direction of Europe, the region of North Africa is of strategic interest to Switzerland from a migration policy standpoint. In 2016, around 180 000 people took the central route across the Mediterranean Sea and over 4200 people lost their lives in the process. The SEM provides support to several aid projects for unsuccessful migrants as well as to sea rescue operations in Libya. In this manner, SEM helps to address local challenges on the ground. Switzerland's new strategy for cooperation with North Africa for 2017–2020 will enable it to continue its efforts in the region.



*Sladjana Markovic, Laboratory worker from Serbia*

### 3. Asylum challenges and measures

#### Progress towards revision of the Asylum Act

On 3 September 2014, the Federal Council adopted its dispatch on the restructuring of the asylum system. This reform should enable asylum applications to be processed more quickly. With the final vote on 25 September 2015, the Swiss Parliament approved the amendments to the Asylum Act. A referendum was called to challenge the draft revision, which was then put to the vote on 5 June 2016, and was approved by a majority of 66.8 %.

Revision of the Asylum Act is intended to ensure that most asylum applications are legally and quickly processed at federal asylum centres. Asylum seekers whose applications fall under the “accelerated processing” or “Dublin procedure” categories will be housed at federal asylum centres for the entire duration of processing and until enforcement of removal orders. These two accelerated procedures should be legally completed within a period not exceeding 100 days or 140 days respectively, including enforcement of any removal orders. If further clarifications are needed, then the given asylum application will receive more extensive handling. In such cases, asylum seekers will be assigned to a canton, as has been the case thus far. More extensive handling of asylum applications must be legally settled within a year, including enforcement of any removal orders. In order to ensure that quick processing is carried out legally, asylum seekers will also be entitled to free counselling and pro bono legal representation as accompanying measures.

Asylum is a joint undertaking of the Confederation, the cantons, towns and communes. In the future, specific asylum-related tasks will continue to be handled by the cantons, towns and communes, e.g. promotion of the social and economic integration of those permitted to remain in Switzerland. The shared responsibility was taken into account from the start of work to revise the Asylum Act: key features of the future asylum system were decided in close consultation with the three levels of government. This close cooperation will continue in the future. As a case in point, projects to implement the new Asylum Act will be coordinated by a joint working group responsible for restructuring of the asylum sector (AGNA). This working group will be led by Cantonal Councillor Hans-Jürg Käser and State Secretary Mario Gattiker.

#### Future locations of federal asylum centres

With the new system, most asylum applications will be processed in federal asylum centres and fewer asylum seekers will be assigned to the cantons. As a result, the Confederation needs to increase its housing capacity. At the second national asylum conference on 28 March 2014, it was decided that the Confederation would manage housing units for a total of 5000 asylum seekers spread out over six designated asylum zones. Two to four federal asylum centres will be managed in each asylum zone. In addition, there will be two national detention centres for recalcitrant asylum seekers.

Considerable progress has been made as far as location planning for the future federal centres is concerned: by the end of 2016, the Confederation and the host cantons and communes reached an agreement on twelve of the eighteen planned federal asylum centres.

#### Amendment of ordinances

Some of the requirements of the revised Asylum Act can be directly implemented without the need for amendment of ordinances. At the end of August 2016, the Federal Council decided that this first set of measures would go into effect on 1 October 2016. Among other things, it includes measures to improve enforcement of removal orders and rules on attendance of school for asylum seekers whose age requires them to be in school. Implementation of other aspects of the legislative revision will require amendments to ordinances. In October 2016, the Federal Council submitted a second set of new provisions for consultation. Specifically, explanations are provided on planning approval procedures relating to asylum. The FDJP is currently drafting amendments to ordinances for all other new or revised legal provisions. Among other things, this includes the process sequence and legal protection. The cantons, towns and communes will be involved in this work.

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The first set of measures came into effect on 1 October 2016. They cover such things as enforcement of removal orders and education.

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### Asylum Action Plan

The SEM processes asylum applications quickly and in a legally correct manner. According to Art. 37b AsylA, the SEM lists the categories of asylum applications that are to be given priority, indicating such things as legal deadlines for processing, the situation in countries of origin, clearly justified/unjustified applications and the behaviour of asylum seekers. The Asylum Action Plan is intended to ensure effective processing of asylum applications by giving priority to specific categories of applications. Other objectives of the Asylum Action Plan include:

- Reducing the number of clearly unjustified asylum applications
- Easing housing burdens
- Minimising the overall costs of the asylum sector

In 2012, the State Secretariat for Migration adopted a new procedure for the processing of visa applications from visa-exempt European countries (“48-hour procedure”) and in the spring of 2013, extended this procedure to nationals from Kosovo and Georgia.

In December 2012, the SEM also gradually introduced a “fast-track procedure. The main difference between the 48-hour procedure” and the fast-track procedure is that the latter is applied to nationals from countries where it is more difficult to enforce removal orders and obtain the necessary documents for departure. Currently, the fast-track procedure applies to nationals from six countries where chances of success in asylum applications are slim: Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, Algeria, Gambia, and Senegal.

Introduction of the 48-hour procedure and the fast-track procedure has led to a significant reduction in the number of asylum applications from nationals of the corresponding countries of origin and the figure remains stable at a low level. Accelerated processing of asylum applications has lowered Switzerland’s appeal as a destination country for citizens of countries whose asylum applications are poorly justified and who are in no need of protection.

### Unaccompanied minors seeking asylum

#### Situation

The number of asylum applications submitted by unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMAs) increased dramatically from 2013 to 2015 (2013: 332; 2014: 790; 2015: 2739) before falling back to 1997 asylum applications in 2016. While the proportion of UMAs in the total number of asylum applications had remained at 1–3% in the previous ten years, it reached 7% in 2015 and 2016. This phenomenon can be seen in quite a few European countries. Roughly half of all UMAs were unable to credibly prove their age. For this reason, determining the credibility of the asylum seeker’s status as a minor is crucial. UMA status, whether confirmed or claimed, determines how an asylum application is processed, the type of support given, where the person will be housed as well as what funding and guidance will be given. Processing priority is given to asylum applications from UMAs.

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The fast-track procedure currently  
applies to: Morocco, Nigeria,  
Tunisia, Algeria, Gambia, and Senegal.

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#### Asylum procedure

Based on solid jurisprudence from 2004 onwards, if a person fails to produce a valid identification document, then all indications of age will be taken into account in an overall assessment to determine whether he/she is indeed a minor; the Asylum Act places the burden of proof on the asylum applicant. Despite numerous criticisms from the media and political circles (often against the use of hand x-rays as one of the many different factors to be considered), this method of assessment is the only one available. Scientific analysis of “three pillars”, which is used in the test asylum centre in Zurich, is one alternative but remains very controversial and jurisprudence has yet to give credence to a better method than bone x-rays. With regards to the asylum procedure itself, the SEM has taken steps to ensure that asylum applications from UMAs are more systematically given priority (triage) and has improved asylum seeker hearings.

#### Housing, guidance, education and healthcare

The canton to which asylum seekers are assigned is solely responsible for appointing a legal representative as well as for providing accommodation, counselling, school and any medical care required. More importantly, given the increase in the number of asylum applications from unaccompanied minors, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Social Affairs (SODK) adopted a series of recommendations for the cantons in May 2016 in order to clarify and harmonise procedures in this area.

#### Emergency asylum planning

With the sudden increase in the number of asylum applications in the autumn of 2015, reception and processing centres were barely able to keep up with the surge in workload; emergency measures had to be taken to ensure accommodation was available. Even after the Balkan route was closed off in March 2016 and the number of asylum applications began to fall noticeably, the migration situation remained anything but calm. There was still an urgent need for the SEM to continue and improve on its emergency asylum planning measures.



*While the proportion of UMAs in the total number of asylum applications had remained at 1–3% in the previous ten years, it reached 7% in 2015 and 2016.*

As a result, an asylum task force comprised of federal and cantonal representatives was formed to coordinate activities and convey information in response to the asylum situation. The asylum task force met once per week, regardless of how the situation progressed, for the purpose of discussing the various measures that needed to be taken. Daily updates from the SEM on the asylum situation were used as the basis for decision-making. In anticipation of potential asylum-related emergencies, an internal asylum support team was established to be deployed at a moment's notice. Its role would be to provide assistance when regular establishments could no longer cope with registration and processing of asylum applications. So far, this asylum support team has not had to be called into action.

On 14 April 2016, the Confederation, the cantons, towns and communes agreed on the key features of emergency asylum planning. The organisational, structural and HR-related conditions with this framework were established in such a way as to ensure that all newly arriving persons could be housed and their asylum applications registered even in an emergency scenario and that all necessary security screening and health

checks at the border could be carried out. For this reason, the SEM maintains a continuous capacity of 5000 beds in definitive and temporary housing structures. This constitutes double the available capacity at the start of 2015. Moreover, 1000 additional beds have been set aside in four drop-in centres that can be quickly opened up as needed. A registration centre has also been opened in Muttenz with a current accommodation capacity of 500 persons (900 if necessary). The SEM also made preparatory arrangements with the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS) to enable temporary federal asylum centres to be set up with additional capacity for 3000 persons.

On 20 April 2016, the Federal Council commissioned the DDPS to take all measures needed to enable up to 2000 military personnel to be dispatched to assist civilian authorities, namely the Swiss Border Guard (BG). The DDPS has also been asked to place an additional battalion (around 700 soldiers) on call to intervene in the event of a major catastrophe. Given current developments, a renewed surge in asylum applications in 2017 cannot be excluded. It is therefore wise to remain vigilant.



*The Confederation and the cantons have increased their accommodation capacities significantly*

## Adaptation of asylum and deportation practices

### Sri Lanka

In the summer of 2013, the Federal Office for Migration (as the SEM was known at the time) temporarily suspended all returns to Sri Lanka as well as issuance of decisions to enforce removal orders after two asylum seekers were arrested in Sri Lanka shortly after their return. In December 2013, the FOM made arrangements with the Swiss Embassy in Colombo to send a delegation on a fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka. In March 2014, the FOM organised a situation meeting with representatives of various federal agencies (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Federal Criminal Police, the Federal Intelligence Service [FIS], the Federal Administrative Court) as well as UNHCR. At the end of this meeting, the FOM decided to fully lift the moratorium on decisions on asylum applications from Sri Lankan nationals, effective 26 May 2014.

During an official visit in January/February 2016, the SEM once again assessed the security and human rights situation on the ground. Drawing on additional information provided by international organisations and experts, the above-mentioned authorities carried out an extensive situation analysis, which the SEM then used as the basis for its decision in July 2016 to adapt its asylum and removal practices for Sri Lanka. The country has made considerable progress in the protection of human rights, namely in the area of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly; nevertheless, it still needs to make progress in the area of fundamental rights. At the same time, the security situation in the former conflict zone in the north of the country has improved overall. While the SEM will continue to consider these circumstances in its normal examination of asylum applications, it now considers enforcement of removal orders to all parts of Sri Lanka to be fundamentally acceptable.

In 2016, Switzerland received 1373 new asylum applications from Sri Lankan nationals. Sri Lanka is therefore the fifth main country of origin of asylum applications. The proportion of asylum seekers who are granted refugee status has fallen since 2014 and in 2016 stood at 46.9% (2014: 71.4%; 2015: 58.3%): 610 persons were granted asylum, of which 163 were original asylum seekers and 447 were persons who came to Switzerland under the terms of family reunification. In addition to the positive asylum decisions, 102 persons were temporarily admitted to Switzerland. 289 asylum seekers were denied asylum and were not granted temporary admission.

### Eritrea

The SEM's Country Analysis Section examines reports on Eritrea on an ongoing basis and interacts with experts and partner authorities. During a fact-finding mission in February and March 2016, SEM's Country Analysis Section reviewed, updated and deepened its knowledge of Eritrea. On 22 June, the SEM produced a report entitled, "Update on National Service and Illegal Exit", which was based on the latest information mentioned above and various reports from the past few years. The SEM's report includes a chapter entitled "Country Focus: Eritrea", which is relevant for asylum practice. A version of this report was validated by European partner authorities and published by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in November 2016.

In June 2016, the SEM decided to change its practices in relation to the processing of asylum applications for citizens of Eritrea, both in light of the new assessment of the situation and on the basis of the detailed findings from the SEM's Country Analysis Section. A decisive factor was the fact that the handling of returns by the Eritrean authorities was dependent on whether the return to Eritrea was voluntary or forced and on what national service status returnees had prior to their departure from Eritrea. The SEM now assumes that Eritrean citizens that have not yet been called for national service or who have been freed from or discharged from national service have not suffered any asylum-relevant persecution as a result of their illegal exit from Eritrea. Eritrean nationals who have neither refused to enlist nor deserted from national service have not violated the terms of the Proclamation of 1995 on National Service, whereby the likelihood that they would suffer serious disadvantages following a return to their country of origin is not "significant" within the meaning of jurisprudence with reference to Art. 3 AsylA. The requirement that there be justified fear of future persecution therefore is not met. As a result, such persons are no longer recognised as refugees and must leave Switzerland as long as there are no obstacles preventing enforcement of their removal orders.

The Federal Administrative Court confirmed this change in practice in a landmark decision dated 30 January 2017.



*Idahosa Dickson, participant in building services work training programme, from Nigeria*

## 4. State of implementation of Art. 121a Cst.

On 9 February 2014, Swiss voters and the cantons adopted the popular initiative “Against Mass Immigration”. This led to a systemic shift in immigration policy. The new constitutional Article 121a Cst. contains two requirements: first, the number of residence permits for foreign nationals in Switzerland shall be restricted by annual quantitative limits and quotas; and second, international agreements that breach Art. 121a Cst. must be renegotiated and adapted. Under the terms of transitional provisions, both of these two requirements must be fully met by February 2017. On 4 March 2016, the Federal Council adopted a draft bill for Parliament. At the time, no solution had yet been found with the EU. The Federal Council therefore suggested that immigration be controlled by means of a unilateral safeguard clause. At the same time, it continued ongoing talks with the EU to find a mutually amenable solution. The process, however, was postponed pending the outcome of the UK’s Brexit referendum and then definitively suspended when the UK decided to leave the EU.

In its final decision on 16 December 2016,<sup>16</sup> the National Council and the Council of States approved a legislative text to implement Art. 121a Cst., which calls for indirect control of immigration. This solution is compatible with the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP) and ensures continuation of existing bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU. The Swiss Parliament has opted for a three-pronged approach:

First: the Federal Council will be given the authority to establish measures aimed at tapping the potential of the domestic labour force.

Second: in occupational groups, areas of activity or economic regions that have a higher-than-average level of unemployment, employers will be required to notify public job placement offices of job vacancies. These job placement agencies will present employers with application files from registered job-seekers who match the job profile. The employers will then invite suitable candidates for an interview or aptitude assessment and will inform the job placement office of the outcome. The Federal Council may stipulate exceptions to this announcement of job vacancy requirement.

Third: if these measures do not have the desired impact, then the Federal Council will propose additional measures to the Swiss Parliament.

With Swiss Parliament approval of implementation of Art. 121a Cst., there were no more obstacles standing in the way of ratification of Protocol III extending the freedom of movement to citizens of Croatia. On 17 June 2016, both the National Council and the Council of States approved Protocol III and empowered the Federal Council to ratify it as soon as an immigration control agreement could be reached with the EU that is compatible with Swiss law.<sup>17</sup> Protocol III was then ratified on 16 December 2016 and came into effect on 1 January 2017. Following ratification, Switzerland once again became a full-fledged member of the EU’s research framework programme Horizon 2020, effective on 1 January 2017.

However, the amendments made to the Foreign Nationals Act do not constitute literal implementation of Art. 121a of the Federal Constitution. For this reason, the Federal Council decided to present a direct counter-proposal to the Federal Popular Initiative “Get out of this blind alley. Don’t reintroduce immigration quotas!”, which calls for Art. 121a Cst. to be completely removed from the Federal Constitution. This would resolve the current conflict between EU and Swiss legislation. It therefore presented two possible variants for consultation. The first variant of the counter-proposal calls for Art. 121a para. 4 Cst. to be replaced by a provision that would enable Switzerland to control immigration in line with its international agreements that have far-reaching implications for Switzerland’s position in Europe. In addition, the transitional provision (Art. 197 no. 11 Cst.) would be repealed. In the second variant, only the transitional provision would be repealed – Art. 121a Cst. would remain in place unchanged.

Discussions on free movement of persons will continue with the aforementioned Federal Popular Initiative and a possible referendum on implementing provisions of Art. 121a Cst. The issue of free movement of persons and the management of immigration will also figure prominently on the political agenda both in Switzerland and in Europe.

<sup>16</sup> BBl 2016 8917

<sup>17</sup> BBl 2016 4999

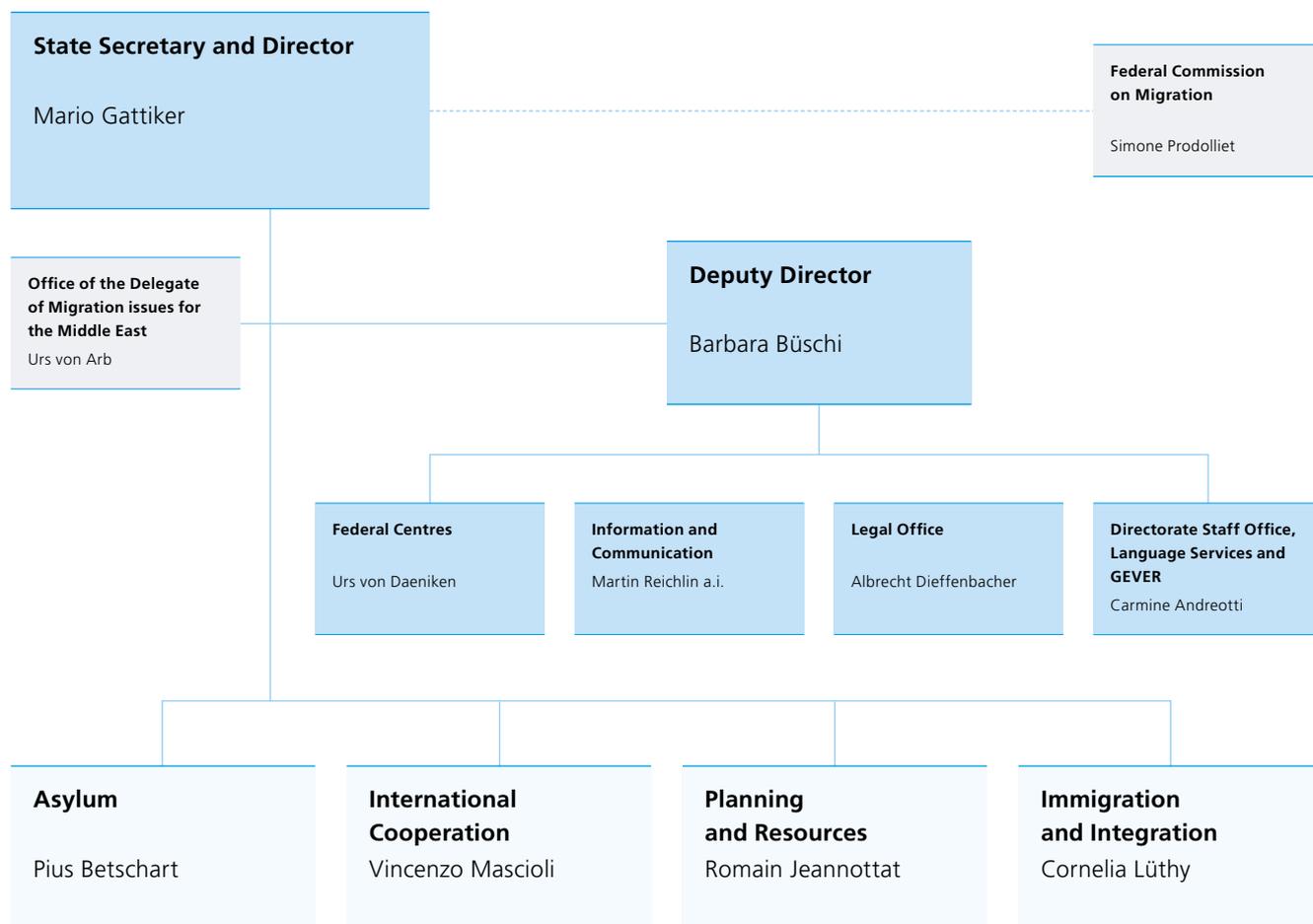


# State Secretariat for Migration



*In 2016, the State Secretariat for Migration had 1130 employees.*

## 1. Organisation chart



*Last update 1 April 2017*

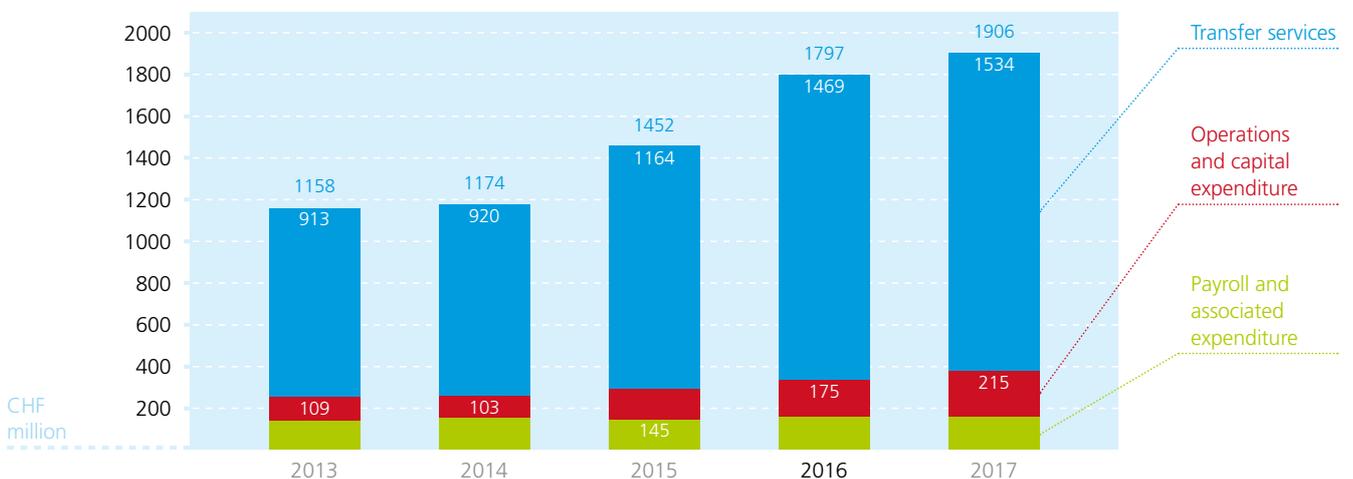
The SEM establishes the conditions whereby a person may enter, live and work in Switzerland and it decides who receives protection from persecution in Switzerland. The FOM coordinates migration activities at the federal, cantonal and communal levels and is responsible for naturalisations at the federal level. In all areas of migration policy, the FOM actively fosters international dialogue with countries of origin, transit or destination as well as with international organisations.

## 2. SEM activities

The SEM's expenditure can be broken down into three categories:

- Transfer services: around 82 % of total expenditure relates to support services for asylum seekers; support services for persons admitted on a temporary basis and refugees; enforcement of removal orders; return assistance; integration measures for foreign nationals; and international cooperation in the area of migration.
- Payroll and associated expenditure: around 8 % of the total expenditure relates to payroll (including social insurance contributions for all categories of staff), namely associated expenditure such as initial and continuing education and training.
- Operations and capital expenditure: around 10 % of the total expenditure relates to running reception and processing centres; maintaining and developing IT infrastructure; consultancy; and other operating costs; and capital expenditure.

SEM activities – only major expenditures (Government accounts for 2013–2016, Budget for 2017)

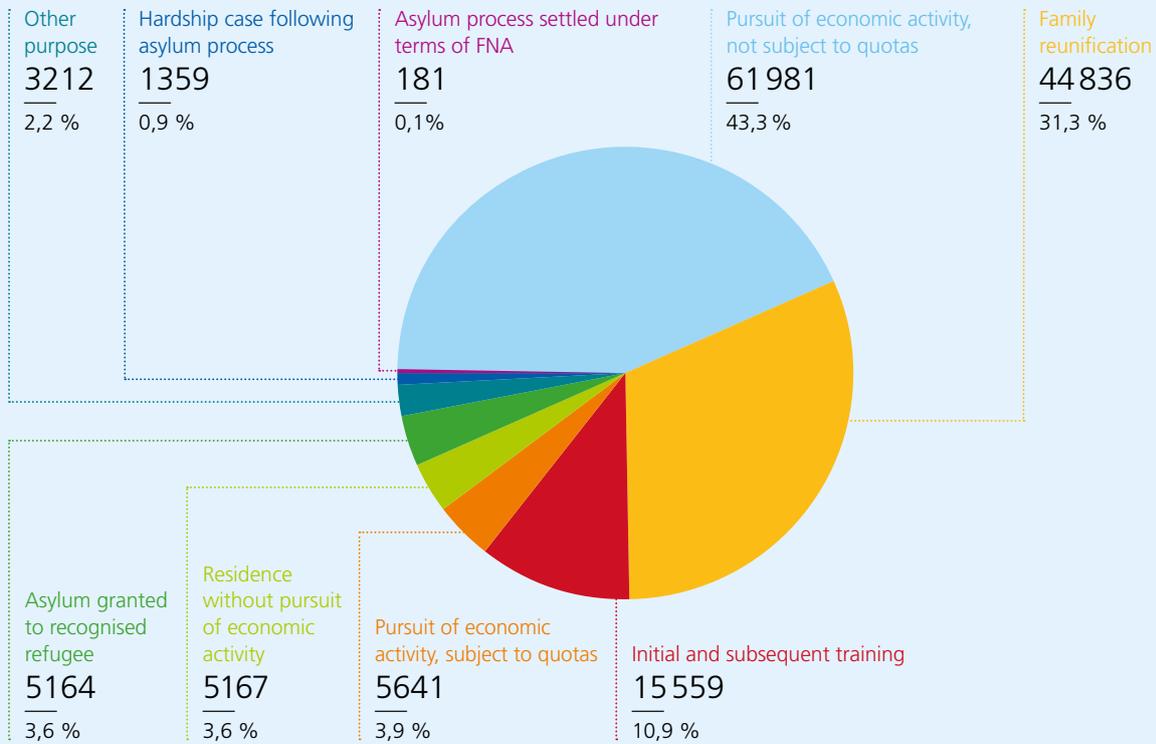




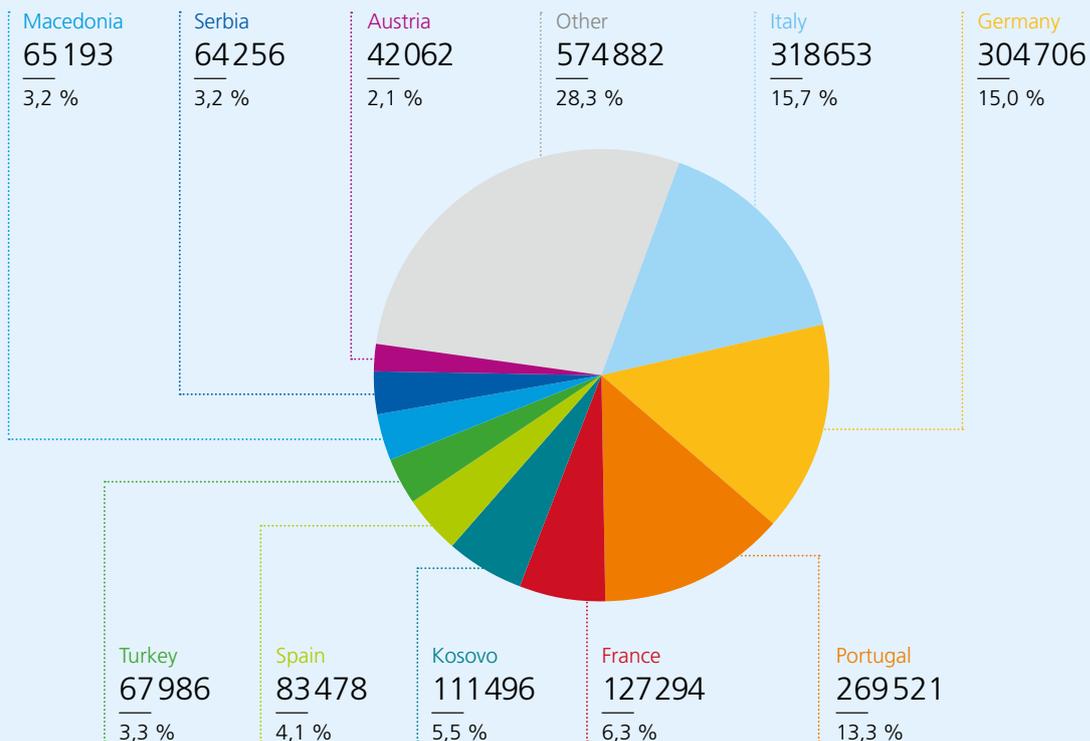
*Mariya Nasir, baker-confectioner from Somalia*

# Annex

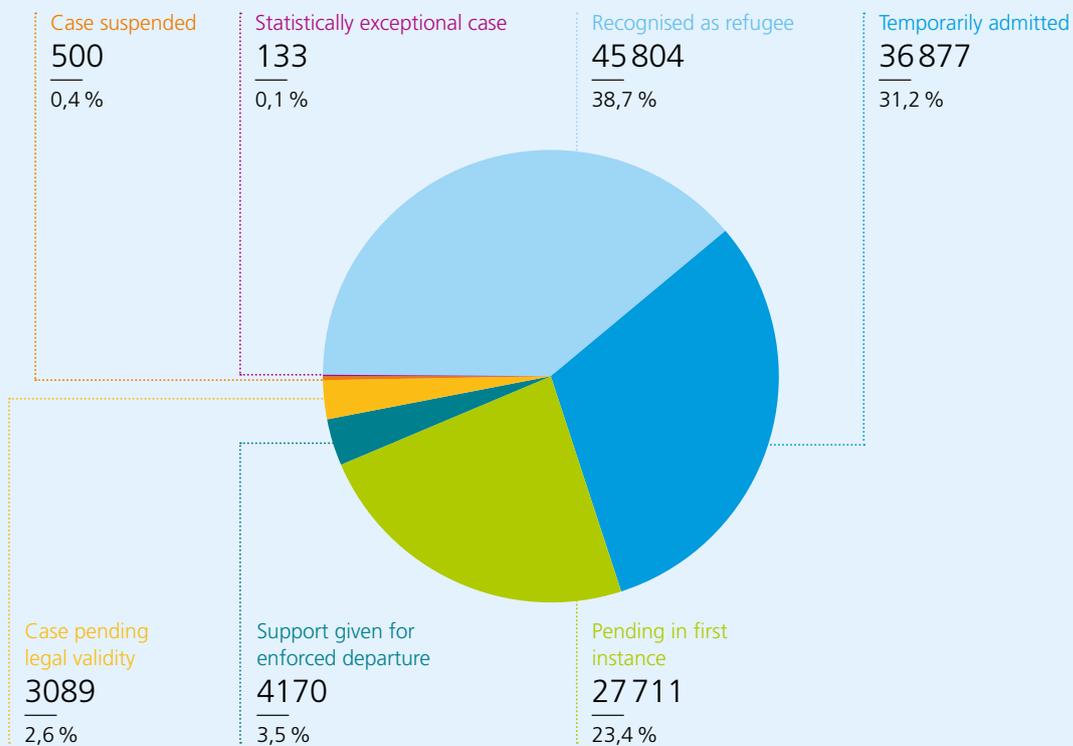
## Basis of migration in 2016



## Usual foreign resident population in 2016



## Asylum seekers 2016



## No. of temporarily admitted persons by country 2016

