

# **Constructing the needy and working welfare recipient in paternalist neoliberalism: The case of Switzerland**

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## The problem

- Problem “paternalist neoliberalism”
- Benefits become conditional upon participating in a work integration programme or in taking up “reasonable” work: **Workfare**
- **What are the constructions of the image of the working and needy welfare recipient in Switzerland?**
- **How we can explain the differences between cantons?**

## Switzerland as liberal and federal democracy

- 8 mio. inhabitants and 26 constituencies: rather small-scale
- Heterogenous country with peculiar institutions to cope with diversity:  
  **“consociational democracy”**
- political procedures to reach compromises and include all relevant actors in political decision process
- strong federalism and principle of subsidiarity
- virtually all-party governments
- structural conservatisms, incremental and slow change
- sometimes inconsistent results or policies
  
- Switzerland is a liberal conservative welfare state latecomer
  - **liberal**: low level of regulation, substantial share of market in welfare production, individualist notion of anti-discrimination
  - **conservative**: social security and tax system preserve social inequalities and favour modernized breadwinner model; low public investments in child care; traditional motherhood beliefs strong

## Swiss versions of the welfare state

- 1996 Unemployment Insurance follows activating paradigm
- 1998/2005 newly drafted guidelines of Swiss Conference on Social Assistance (SKOS) follow
- 2000: «Right to assistance when in need» in new Federal Constitution
  
- Nowadays, all citizen-state relations are legal and professional relationships
  - informal, authoritarian practices abolished

## **Social assistance in Switzerland: prevalence**

- 3.2% of population received social assistance in 2015 (between 1% and 7% in the cantons)
- Compared to majority of OECD countries, social assistance lifts almost over the relative poverty threshold

### **Risks**

- Single parent households: 22% of all these households received social assistance in 2015
- Children: 30% of all persons supported are under age 18
- Divorced
- no upper secondary education
- Non-European nationals
- Average duration on the rise, median 24 months

## Organisation of social assistance: corporatist governance

- Regulated on the cantonal level
- 3 models: mainly cantonal regulations, mainly tasks of municipalities, mainly joint venture canton/municipalities\*
- Attempts for federal framework legislation so far unsuccessful
- **SKOS Swiss Conference on Social Assistance:** guidelines for amount of social assistance since 1963
- Guidelines are not binding law, but are referenced in cantonal legal regulations: Misty legal significance
- Crucial for containing heterogeneity

## Data and method

- Analysis of laws, regulations and manuals as well as SKOS guidelines
- Assumptions:
  - legal texts reflect political power relations and tentative political compromises at time of voting of the law
  - legal texts contain condensed social and cultural knowledge about the objects of law
- Peculiar source: general ideas and rules, not praxis of street level bureaucrats
- Inductive and deductive coding, qualitative and quantitative text analysis

## SKOS guidelines: packed with compromise

- **Objectives of social assistance:** Subsistence, promotion of self-sufficiency, social and professional integration
- **Principles:** Human dignity, subsidiarity, individualization, subsistence, appropriateness of help, professionalism, cost effectiveness, «demand and promote» (Fordern und Fördern)



## **SKOS guidelines: social and professional integration as an individualized task**

### **Diagnosis**

“The economic and social framework has changed fundamentally. For a growing group of persons of working age, in particular the long-term unemployed, there is little prospect of a rapid and lasting integration into the labor market. That's why measures of social and professional integration are necessary.” (Chapter D.1)

“The classical social assistance ... reaches its limits wherever structural problems such as long-term unemployment or the lack of (appropriate) professional qualifications, are the main cause of need.” (Chapter D.1)

Serious negative impacts of unemployment on recognition and integration of the welfare recipient

Serious possible negative impacts on society: crime, ghetto, psychic diseases, high costs

## **SKOS guidelines on integration programs**

- Broad range of professional integration measures necessary
- Integration starts «with reliability, punctuality, engagement, willingness to learn and relationship building capacities»

## Cantonal regulations: Aims and purposes of social assistance

**Aims and purposes of cantonal social assistance laws**

Thanks! Type another answer here... submit

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A word cloud visualization of social assistance aims and purposes. The most prominent words are 'social & professional integration', 'prevention', and 'means of subsistence'. Other visible terms include 'independence', 'self help', 'personal responsibility', 'human dignity', 'prevent exclusion', 'solidarity', 'access to integration', 'promote private initiatives', 'promote general welfare', 'resource mobilization', 'alimony', and 'counselling the needy'.

## Cantonal regulations: social and professional integration

### Definition of social and professional integration

Type your answer here...

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## Cantonal regulations: Agency of authorities and recipients

- Emphasis on reciprocity
- Authoritarian relationship (Valais) :
- 3 For the purposes of the assessment procedure, the beneficiary is subject to :
  - (A) the verification of his ability to work in the form of an internship or temporary employment;
  - (B) drawing up a balance sheet of his professional abilities;
  - C) if necessary, the medical assessment by the treating physician or by the cantonal IV body.
- 4 Within three months of the start of social assistance, an assessment and a review of the employability of the beneficiary shall be carried out by an organization approved by the Department. (...)
- 5 Based on this assessment, the municipality and the person seeking help complete a social or professional integration contract with the support of the responsible department. (...).
- 6 This contract obliges the person seeking assistance to participate in a charitable activity or to take the step towards training or professional integration. (...)  
(Art. 11, Social assistance regulation VS)

## Agency of authorities and recipient

- **Expert – lay relationship**

Experts set up a balance sheet of competences, needs and possibilities, propose measures and will convince and motivate the recipient

- **Collaborative relationship**

- Social worker and recipient shall develop and implement integration projects.

- In all groups emphasis on need, neediness and necessary sanctions

## Conclusion

- Gainful employment only game in town
  - Lack of employment leads to «social decomposition»
  - Other forms of work are irrelevant
  - Ambivalent constructions: responsible individual must be actively pursue re-integration versus irresponsible individuul must be guided, counselled and disciplined
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- Workfare is more present in discourse than in practice
  - Swiss cantonal diversity is proverbial, but good data is lacking to explore the reason for the differences among cantons