

# Students at Risk – Dossier

## A Project of VSS-UNES-USU

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## 1. Introduction

This dossier aims to provide an overview and an understanding of the project Students at Risk, henceforth named StAR. The dossier covers the specifications of the first five years of the project from the initiation until the end of the pilot project. There is no claim to answering all questions on the project but to lay out its basic structure. StAR was brought forward by the Solidarity and International Commission of the Swiss Student Union (VSS-UNES-USU) and was proposed as project idea to the delegation assembly of VSS-UNES-USU in May 2022. The delegation assembly voted clearly in favour of the project. In August 2022 the project was officially launched and filled with a 30% position.

For VSS-UNES-USU, there were two reasons for establishing StAR at VSS-UNES-USU: on the one hand, the participation of students in a programme for students is extremely important; on the other hand, VSS-UNES-USU already has broad expertise and an established network in the area of humanitarian access to education with the projects Perspectives-Studies and INVOST, which the StAR-programme can draw on.

### Motivation

The project originates from the idea of international solidarity with fellow students anywhere in the world. We want to support students who are victims of attacks or repressions due to their humanitarian engagement for better living conditions, better society or simply for the upholding of human rights with all means possible. Especially the higher education area as promoter of critical thinking for a more just society is a target worldwide for attacks on which the international academic society must respond. The Norwegian and German StAR-Programmes as well as the international Scholars at Risk (SAR) Network act as role models.

As Swiss Student Union we consider it additionally as a duty to uphold and actively contribute to the Swiss humanitarian tradition in form of the StAR programme.

### Aim

The long-term goal of StAR is to offer a safe haven at a Swiss Higher Education Institution (HEI) to students and PhD-students who are denied their right to education or any other human right or who are in any other way at risk. By completing these studies which were hindered or denied in the country-of-origin StAR fosters the possibilities for students to act as protagonists of change and as protagonists of their own lives creating an environment for the realisation of the human rights of self-determination and education.

Short-term, the goal is to launch a pilot project that lays out the foundation for a permanent StAR-programme in Switzerland. Therefore, it is important to find partners and financiers. More on this in the following text.

### Important

StAR is a humanitarian project. Persons coming to Switzerland through the StAR are finding themselves in a situation of risk and might be under surveillance. To this end, it is paramount that these persons are not put at further risk, which is why this programme and all parties involved act with extreme caution. Even after entering Switzerland, the person should be able to live an anonymous life due to the protection of personality. Accordingly, all data on persons in this project are treated with the utmost confidentiality and are only passed on with the clear consent of the person concerned.

VSS-UNES-USU is committed to ensuring that the StAR-programme is not used for the purpose of circumventing the stricter eligibility requirements.

For VSS-UNES-USU, the service of such individuals to society anywhere in the world is of paramount importance. For this, they have earned the designation "StAR- students".

## 2. Timetable

The following is a timetable for the development of the StAR-programme. The plan is roughly divided into phases of each one year. This division serves as an orientation throughout the document. The concrete tasks are presented in 3. Structure.

The timetable covers a period of 5 years, ending with the completion of the pilot project and the launch of the project phase.

### Funding Phase

Time frame: August 2022 – July 2023

The focus on the Funding phase lies in the conceptualising of the project. The most important actors should be informed about the project to obtain their agreement to participate. It is important to create synergies with the parties involved and to define the most important procedures and formalities of the programme. The aim of the Funding phase is to secure the financing for the Set-up as well as for the Pilot Project.

### Set-Up Phase

Time frame August 2023 – July 2024

The Set-up phase is characterised by the administrative work for setting up and preparing the programme. It includes the preparation and nomination as well as evaluation of the first potential StAR-students. The goal is to welcome the first StAR-students to Switzerland in summer 2024. This means that the first

admission cycle will already start in the Set-up phase (see 6. Procedure). If not yet done, the administrative work of the following pilot phase should also be covered, as well as the funding of the StAR-students' scholarships.

### Pilot Phase Year 1

Time frame: August 2024 – July 2025

The pilot phase starts with the public launch of the Pilot Project and the arrival of the first StAR-students and is therefore in the middle of the pilot phase. The Pilot phase comprises the same administrative work as the Set-up phase, with the addition that arrived StAR-students are supervised and start their studies or, if necessary, language courses to prepare them for their studies. In addition, it is important to evaluate the experiences made and to optimise the process.

### Pilot Phase Year 2

Time frame: August 2025 – July 2026

The second year of the Pilot phase marks the continuation of the Pilot Project and serves to further evaluate the processes and formalities. The aim of this year is to ensure the continuation of the programme with all actors involved and, if necessary, to attract further parties to participate by demonstrating the project.

### Pilot Phase Year 3

Time frame: August 2026 – July 2027

The third year of the Pilot phase will be the last year of the Pilot Project and aims to integrate the project as an integral part of the Swiss humanitarian tradition in the following years. It represents the transition phase from the Pilot phase to the Project phase. It is also intended to enable long-term financing of the programme.

### 3. Structures

A functioning StAR-programme needs several parties involved. These include VSS-UNES-USU, the higher education institutions (henceforth named HEIs), the financiers, the cantonal migration offices, the Swiss embassies and the nominating institutions. Hence, a distinction is made between two phases: the role during the set-up phase, and the anticipated role from the pilot phase onwards.

#### VSS-UNES-USU

**Set-up phase:** As the initiator of the project, the primary role of VSS-UNES-USU is that of a coordinator. This includes establishing contacts and mediating between the individual actors. As a coordinating body, VSS-UNES-USU acts as a representative of the project towards the public and to potential financiers. VSS-UNES-USU explains and persuades potential partners to rally as many institutions as possible behind the project. Ultimately, VSS-UNES-USU is responsible for working out the principles and formalities of the programme together with the parties involved to ensure smooth cooperation and to keep the bureaucratic hurdles for potential StAR students as low as possible.

**Pilot phase:** VSS-UNES-USU coordinates the nominations of potential StAR students and checks them against the agreed formalities. VSS-UNES-USU also administers the scholarships of StAR students on a fiduciary basis, as long as these are based on private funds and no public scholarship fund has been established. VSS-UNES-USU acts as a contact point for information and forwards specific questions to the competent actors. Supervision of potential StAR students is primarily the responsibility of VSS-UNES-USU until their arrival. The pilot phase is to conduct several evaluations of the pilot project under the leadership of VSS-UNES-USU together with the parties involved.



## The Higher Education Institutions (HEI)

**Set-up phase:** The HEIs will be kept constantly informed about the process and progress of the programme. In addition, the HEIs that are in favour of participating in this project will be regularly consulted on important questions in order to define the basics and formalities of the procedure and specifically the nomination and admission process. It is desired that the HEIs prepare structures and offers in order to be able to accept StAR students in the future. It would be effective to have a clearly defined contact point at the respective HEI for concerns regarding the StAR- programme.

**Pilot phase:** The HEIs that have expressed their participation in the programme will select nominated StAR-students validated by VSS-UNES-USU during the pilot phase and, if possible, admit them to their universities. This includes supervising and ensuring the safety and anonymity of StAR-students, treating them publicly like other 'international students'.

## The Financiers

**Set-up phase:** Potential financiers are identified by VSS-UNES-USU and informed about the project launch. Interested financiers will be kept informed about the process and progress of the programme. Financiers who express a financial interest will be consulted regularly on important issues. If desired, the financiers will be connected to the programme in a public way. The aim is to secure the financial backing of the start-up phase and the pilot project through financiers. Financiers can come from the private as well as the public sector. Donations over CHF 10,000 are made transparent.

**Pilot phase:** The contributing financiers will be informed by VSS-UNES-USU about the continuous evaluations of the pilot project and included in the evaluation. The aim of the pilot phase is to win potential financiers for the long-

term financing of the project phase and thus the permanent launch of StAR. In particular, public financiers are being sought.

### Cantonal Migration Offices

**Set-up phase:** The cantonal migration offices are informed about the programme by VSS-UNES-USU or the local HEIs and kept up to date. The focus is placed on those cantonal migration offices that come into question as a place of residence for StAR- students. Cantons with participating HEIs are contacted primarily. If necessary or desired, cantonal politics will be involved in the process.

**Pilot phase:** The cantonal migration offices concerned will be informed about accepted StAR-students in order to accompany the visa decision and the residence permit process. In the process, the HEIs will provide proof of admission and VSS-UNES-USU will provide the required financial guarantee through the promise of a scholarship.

### Swiss Embassies

**Set-up phase:** Swiss embassies are informed about the development of the StAR-programme. The primary aim is to instruct those Swiss embassies in which attacks on academic freedom are regularly or acutely recorded. The aim is to raise awareness about the programme among the Swiss embassies so that they can provide information on the programme to potential StAR-students if necessary.

**Pilot phase:** Affected Swiss embassies are to be informed by the parties involved when potential StAR-students are about to apply for visas. The coordination of the cantonal migration office, the HEIs and VSS-UNES-USU should provide the Swiss embassy concerned with the necessary information and guarantees.

## The Nominating Institutions

Unlike the afore mentioned institutions, this group is not identifiable by name. There are several reasons for this: On the one hand, it is not intended to fully set out the identity of the nominating institutions in order to ensure the safety of such on the ground. On the other hand, this group is extremely heterogeneous: Nominating institutions could be the HEIs themselves, Swiss embassies, local student organisations or other institutional as well as non-governmental organisations.

**Set-up phase:** Together with the parties involved, VSS-UNES-USU defines who these nominating institutions are and what requirements these institutions must fulfil.

**Pilot phase:** The nominating institutions are responsible for identifying potential StAR-students and nominating them to VSS-UNES-USU. In doing so, they shall adhere to clearly defined framework conditions that are intended to facilitate the process and evaluation of individual nominations. It is the responsibility of the nominating institutions to provide VSS-UNES-USU with evidence of the actual or potential vulnerability of the nominee.

## Independent Committee on humanitarian issues

This committee, unlike the previously mentioned parties, is not a separate institution. It is composed of volunteers from various institutions with expertise on humanitarian and migration issues.

**Set-up phase:** The aim of the establishment phase is to lay the foundations of the committee and to find suitable persons to fill the positions. To this end, the size of the committee, its composition and its tasks must be defined together with the parties involved.

**Pilot phase:** In the pilot phase, the committee acts as an independent, supporting body for the evaluation and assessment of questions regarding the individual risk situation of potential StAR-students. VSS-UNES-USU consults the committee for controversial, challenging and delicate nominations and refers the nomination dossier to the committee for an independent and expert assessment. The committee reports its assessment to VSS-UNES-USU, which is included in the overall evaluation and communicated transparently to the respective HEIs. The committee also plays a supporting role for HEIs in dealing with sensitive cases. In this way, proposals for action and risk analysis should lead to better assessment and competent treatment of potential StAR-students.

## 4. Finances

Secured funding is essential for the successful launch of the StAR-programme. The project budget can be found in a separate document. Below, a brief explanation of the basis for calculating the budget can be found.

The budget is divided into Funding, Set-Up and Pilot phase.

### Funding Phase

The administrative work of the Funding phase is provisionally covered by a credit from VSS-UNES-USU and amounts to 30'000 CHF for salary costs of a 30% part-time job, expenses and other expenditures. The budget was deliberately minimalist, as this would otherwise have exceeded the financial framework of VSS-UNES-USU. It would be desirable to increase the financial possibilities in all areas of expenditure.

### Set-Up Phase

The costs for the subsequent Set-up phase to prepare the Pilot project are currently still uncovered and mainly amount to administrative costs. In order to

cover the increased administrative workload due to the evaluation and coordination of the nominations of potential StAR students, it would make sense to increase the position to 40%.

## Pilot Phase

The three-year Pilot Project is financially shaped by the arrival of StAR-students and will depend on how many spots are available for the StAR-programme. The costs for individual StAR-students are also made up of various requirements.

### **Requirement 1: Cost of Living in Switzerland**

According to Swissuniversities, the cost of living for students is 22'200 CHF per year, although this figure can vary depending on the region.<sup>1</sup> The cost of living can also vary depending on the offers HEIs make available to StAR-students. In addition, the waiving of tuition fees or the provision of a place in a student dorm can also reduce the cost of living.

### **Requirement 2: Sufficient financial means for visa and residence permit**

According to the various cantonal migration offices and the Federal Law on Foreign Nationals and Integration<sup>2</sup> persons applying for a visa or residence permit for Switzerland must provide the proof of sufficient financial means to confirm that they can cover the cost of living. This amount varies from canton to canton, with the highest available amount in the canton of Zurich being 21'000 CHF.<sup>3</sup>

### **Costs per StAR-Spot**

Since the StAR-programme cannot be implemented without compliance with requirement 2, the 21'000 CHF per person are the required minimum. However, as the cost of living is assumed to be higher, the minimum approach according

to requirement 1 is to provide a 22'200 CHF scholarship. In order to establish financial security, the goal is to have 25'000.- Swiss Francs available per StAR-spot, whereby not the entire sum is to be paid out as scholarship, while the rest serves for emergencies such as illness or accidents as well as for psychological support.

Furthermore, it must be taken into consideration that the costs for StAR-students must be secured long-term, which means that calculations must be made for the entire study duration of a BA, MA or PhD cycle:

- BA standard cycle of 3 years + ½ year extension or language course
  - o 87'500 CHF per Student at Risk
- MA standard cycle of 2 years + ½ year extension or language course
  - o 62'500 CHF per Student at Risk
- PhD standard cycle 4 years + ½ year extension or language course
  - o 112'500 CHF per Student at Risk

### **Administrative costs**

The administrative costs for Project Year 3-5 are expected to remain unchanged since Project Year 2. Subject to change.

As the workload will be multiplied by the accompanying supervision and evaluation of potential StAR students the administrative costs for the pilot project will change. By doubling the administrative work, the position will be increased to 80%. The additional work of VSS-UNES-USU must also be considered, due to the payment of scholarships and the provision of important documents. It is important to note that the administrative costs do not change significantly if the number of places changes. According to the experience of equivalent projects, the effort involved in evaluating and coordinating the nominations does not

depend on the number of spots. Despite a small number of spots, crisis situations in other countries can lead to a very high number of requests. In order to be able to respond to these requests and to guarantee a fair selection process, an appropriate workload must be guaranteed.

## Calculations

In order to finance the 3-year Pilot phase and to secure the StAR spots beyond the Pilot Project, it makes sense to plan and cover the costs of each spot over several years. If an average three-and-a-half-year occupation of a StAR spot is assumed, financing of 87,500 Swiss francs per spot would be necessary. It would be important not to keep the financing of spots static in order to be able to make flexible adjustments. If a person needs more than three years for their studies, it should be possible to use the funding for the places dynamically on an individual basis if there is a realistic prospect of completing the studies within a reasonable time frame.

It might seem reasonable for budgeting purposes to already divide the available spots into BA/MA/PhD. However, the need to have a flexible offer available in case a certain quota of spots cannot be filled while another has an excessive number of nominations speaks against this.

If it is more attractive for financiers to finance a certain number of spots, the possibility should remain open to choose between the two calculation methods.

The minimum target of VSS-UNES-USU is the funding of 15 StAR spots for the three-year pilot project, the desired target is 25 StAR spots, whereby the administrative upper limit in the presented structure is estimated at 35 StAR spots.

## 5. Nomination Requirements

*The following requirements are based on the proposal of VSS-UNES-USU and will be elaborated together with the parties involved.*

In order for StAR-students to be nominated, they must meet the following criteria:

### Age

No age limit is provided, as the hurdle of the migration offices' usual practice of limiting the age to 30 years according to BGE 147 I 89 violates the prohibition of discrimination in Art. 8 para. 2 BV.

### Academic Status (Student)

The main requirement is the eligibility to study. This means that the HEI entrance requirements are met at the time of nomination.

For a master's degree programme, at least a recognised bachelor's degree (or comparable) is required by the start of the scholarship at the latest.

For a doctorate, at least a recognised master's degree (or comparable) is required by the start of the scholarship at the latest.

Additional admission requirements of the HEIs are reserved.

The last matriculation should in general not be dated back more than four years at the time of application. For applicants aiming for a bachelor's degree, the acquisition of the higher education entrance qualification applies at the time of nomination applies.

According to the Swiss migration law, the nominee must be in their primary education cycle. Secondary education cycles can unfortunately not be considered.



## Language Courses

A requirement for the eligibility to study is the knowledge of the language of study.

The language skills do not necessarily have to be proven by certificates but can also be elaborated through interviews.

## Risk Status (at Risk)

At-risk status implies a threat or risk to personal well-being, especially to the right to education, and to the security of life in general. The threat or risk does not have to have already materialised. The threat must be demonstrated in a plausible manner. Evidence may include written records (e.g., official documents, posts on social media, letters documenting specific incidents in detail, etc.) and/or witness statements.

## 6. Procedures

The project phase aims to admit the first Students at Risk. Since Switzerland allows students to start their studies in autumn and spring, admission will take place in two cycles per year. Each pilot project cycle will be structured in six phases:

### Nomination Phase

The nomination phase consists of two goals: On the one hand, the identification of a student at risk and, on the other hand, their nomination. In the nomination phase, it is mainly the nominating institutions that act in pursuit of these two goals. In doing so, the nominating institutions are guided by the nomination requirements for the identification and nomination of students at risk. This includes personal contact with the person at risk and clarification of all necessary documentation on the person's risk status. Nomination is done by completing

the nomination forms, sending all required documentation as specified in the nomination requirements and the required documentation of the organisation for the accreditation of the nominating institution. The nomination phase ends with the submission deadline for nominations. VSS-UNES-USU remains at the disposal of the nominating institutions for questions and support.

### Validation Phase

The validation phase aims at validating the information and the risk situation of the nominee, as well as the validation of the nominating institution. VSS-UNES-USU is the primary actor and carries out these validations. The nominating institutions remain available for further inquiries. The validation is carried out according to the nomination requirements and may also involve further personal clarifications with the nominees. Nominations that meet the basic requirements are usually forwarded to the independent committee for risk assessment. The report of the committee is included by VSS-UNES-USU in the evaluation process. After validation, students who do not meet the nomination requirements will be informed of the negative decision. The files of those students who fulfil the nomination requirements will be forwarded to matching universities, which is considered to be the end of the validation phase. The validation phase can already start before the end of the nomination phase.

### Admission Phase

With the arrival of the validated dossiers of the potential StAR-students at the HEIs, the admission phase begins. The goal of the admission phase is the admission or non-admission decision of the HEIs regarding the validated nominations. Hence, the HEIs act as the main actors, while VSS-UNES-USU will remain available for queries and support and will maintain its presence as a coordinator. The HEIs evaluate the forwarded dossiers and inform VSS-UNES-

USU of the decision on the respective potential admission or non-admission. If desired, the HEIs can already contact potential StAR-students and conduct further interviews for clarification. Based on these decisions, VSS-UNES-USU prepares a dossier which is sent to the potential StAR-students. They can then select the HEI that best suits them from the available admission decisions. After this selection, the HEI establishes concrete contact with the person at risk in order to clarify the formalities of admission and to finalise the decision. The admission phase begins with the sending of the individual dossiers and ends with the final decision of admission or non-admission.

### Entry Phase

The aim of the entry phase is to enable admitted StAR-students to enter Switzerland. To this end, there will be a coordinated cooperation between the respective embassy, the cantonal migration office in question and the host HEI. VSS-UNES-USU provides assistance in this process and remains in contact with the admitted students. The person at risk applies for a study-related stay in Switzerland (D-visa). VSS-UNES-USU issues a letter of guarantee covering the financial requirements while the HEI confirms their admission. If the visa decision is positive, VSS-UNES-USU, the HEI or the embassy will provide support in the event of difficulties with entry and finding accommodation. The entry phase begins with the positive admission decision and ends either with the entry of the person or with a negative visa decision.

### Arrival Phase

The arrival phase aims at the arrival and the settlement of migration-related circumstances. The actors involved are the receiving HEIs, the respective cantonal migration offices and VSS-UNES-USU. With the help of local ESN sections or local student unions VSS-UNES-USU arranges a so-called "buddy". A "buddy" is a

volunteer student who helps international students on their arrival in Switzerland to find their way in society and explains the most important customs of their new place of residence. This kind of buddy relationship often lasts for more than an academic year. VSS-UNES-USU and the HEIs support the StAR-students within the 14 days after their arrival to apply for a residence permit (B) at the respective cantonal migration office as well as with other administrative issues (e.g., health insurance, opening a bank account). VSS-UNES-USU transfers the first payment from the scholarship fund upon arrival and can reimburse any costs arising from the visa process. The arrival phase begins when the StAR students arrive in Switzerland and ends when they start their studies, preliminary course or language course at the HEI.

### Evaluation Phase

The aim of the evaluation phase is to analyse the previous process and draw conclusions on how to improve it. VSS-UNES-USU coordinates this evaluation and carries it out together with the participating HEIs and financiers. In addition, interested nominating institutions and migration offices will be consulted. StAR-students are treated publicly like other 'international students' after the end of the arrival phase. VSS-UNES-USU remains in contact with the StAR-students in order to include their experiences. It is up to the StAR-students whether they have the capacity or wish to participate in the evaluation phase and, if they wish, make a public appearance on behalf of the StAR-programme. For this purpose, VSS-UNES-USU organises a meeting of all StAR-students in Switzerland each year to share their experiences and express their needs in a secure framework. The evaluation phase begins at the end of the arrival phase and ends at the end of the StAR-students' studies. Throughout the study period, VSS-UNES-USU supports the StAR-students financially through the scholarship fund and is also

available for further enquiries, while the HEIs support the students like other 'international students' and with established offers.

## Timeline

The admission of students at risk takes place over two cycles. There is a distinction to be made as to when the person starts their education or training in Switzerland.

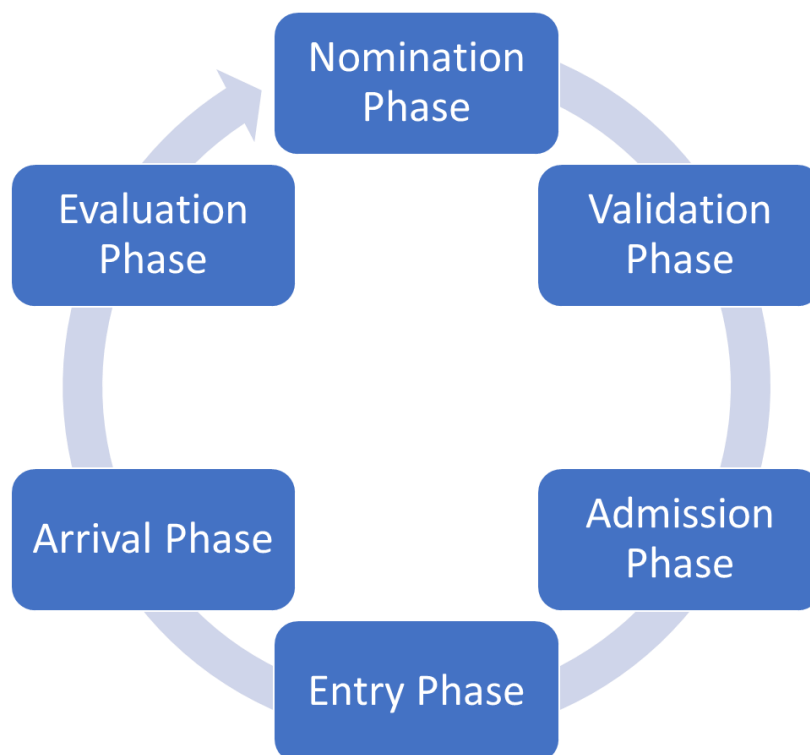
*Note: The following timeline represents a possible prototype. Arrangements with partners and other circumstances may result in significant changes.*

### Start Autumn Semester:

- Deadline Nominations: 31. December (End Nomination Phase)
- Validation Phase: 01. December – 15. February
- Admission Phase: 01. February – 30. April
- Entry Phase: 15. April – 31. July
- Arrival Phase: 01. August – 15. September
- Evaluation Phase: 15. September – End of study cycle

### Start Spring Semester:

- Deadline Nominations: 30. May (End Nomination Phase)
- Validation Phase: 01. May – 15. July
- Admission Phase: 01. July – 31. September
- Entry Phase: 15. September – 31. December
- Arrival Phase: 01. January – 15. February
- Evaluation Phase: 15. February – End of study cycle



### Ad-hoc

Particularly vulnerable students may not be able to wait for the 9 months of a cycle without being exposed to major risks to life or health. It is therefore necessary to establish an 'ad-hoc solution' for particularly vulnerable students. The idea is to deviate from the programme-cycle dates under certain circumstances and not to wait until the deadline of the nomination phase to carry out the evaluation in order to accelerate the process, without neglecting the migration and admission requirements.

## 7. Offers and Necessities

StAR-students generally come from a different cultural and educational background and will be uprooted from their previous lives on arrival in Switzerland. In addition, a threat, whether acute or abstract, can cause

psychological damage. Therefore, it is important that StAR-students receive support and services when they arrive in Switzerland.

### Psychological Support

It is important that professional psychological support is available to StAR-students when needed and that this workload does not fall on those responsible for 'international students' at HEIs. A structure should be established to evaluate the need for psychological help in order to help at an early stage. It is important to be aware that StAR-students have individual histories and therefore deal with psychological trauma differently. A case-by-case assessment is essential. This early intervention infrastructure should be set up with the help of psychological services. Many HEIs have an established psychological counselling, which can serve as a first point of contact for a professional assessment.

### Accommodation

In order to facilitate arrival in Switzerland, it would be beneficial for StAR-students to have easier access to accommodation. Student residences in particular offer a good opportunity to facilitate arrival and the establishment of a social network. The HEIs could make a further major contribution by providing places in student dorms.

### Admission Procedures

Outside the Bologna Process, higher education systems can differ greatly from those in Switzerland. It must also be considered that the withdrawal of state accreditation from HEIs can be a typical method of exercising reprisals. Since StAR aims precisely at helping students who are exposed to such attacks on the freedom of education and research, it would be counterproductive not to admit students due to the lack of state accreditation of a university. Relying on personal educational references could make it possible to replace documentation if lost

due to flight or other circumstances. This check will lead to an additional effort, but it can be carried out at the same time as the clarification of the endangered status as well as the language skills.

Furthermore, it would be important to consider that documents such as language certificates may not be presented when assessing language ability. Since StAR students have usually not prepared for a stay abroad, they cannot be expected to have sought such certificates before they were placed at risk. Likewise, it may be impossible for StAR students to obtain such certificates due to their situation.

UNESCO's 'Global Convention on Higher Education' can serve as a model.

### Commission for the evaluation of study abilities

A Commission for the evaluation of study ability serves the purpose of having a group of people available who have expertise in study ability issues and who can be consulted on nominations in case of ambiguity. The commission consists of volunteers with a background in higher education, preferably people from the Swiss higher education landscape. In the absence of the necessary documents for university admission, the commission can carry out an evaluation of potential StAR students, which is recognised by the HEIs, to substitute for missing documentation. This would make the programme more inclusive, as it must be assumed that persons in risk situations may be denied or unable to access such documents. Through the evaluation of the commission, the ability to study can be checked and guaranteed as far as possible. This commission will only be formed if the HEIs are in favour of such flexibility and recognise the evaluation competence of such a commission.



## Language Courses

Language skills alone should not be the reason why a person at risk cannot be helped. The provision of language courses can therefore help a person's ability to study as well as facilitate their stay in Switzerland. Particularly in connection with the war in Ukraine, many student refugees were provided with language courses so that they could begin their studies at Swiss HEIs. This serves not only the students, but also the HEIs themselves, which can thereby ensure that a person has the necessary language skills to take up studies. It should be possible for StAR students who would just not meet the requirements due to a lack of language skills to attend language courses free of charge for the first six months of their studies in order to reach the desired language level. The offer can be provided by HEIs themselves or, if necessary, financed by third parties.

## Preparation Course

Many HEIs offer preparation courses for refugees in order to foster their ability to study in Switzerland. This offer was set up because the HEI culture in third countries differs from the Swiss HEI culture. Hence, third country students who do not meet the regular admission requirements can still be admitted to HEIs in this way. Such structures would also be helpful for StAR-students. These preparatory courses already include language courses. Also, for A-Students from third countries a preparatory course can be of help to better understand the Swiss HEI culture. The host HEIs also benefit from this. If a university does not offer preparatory courses, a peer-to-peer mentoring programme can serve a similar purpose.

## Fee Waiver

HEIs can make a further contribution to supporting the project by waiving fees. This support is also voluntary and not a requirement to participate in the programme.

## Guarantee of Return

Although the requirement to provide a guarantee of return has been removed from the Federal Law on Foreign Nationals and Integration<sup>4</sup>, it is still a common practice to demand a signed guarantee of departure from Switzerland after completion of education or training in order to issue a student visa. This can build up additional psychological pressure for people from a vulnerable situation, associated with the idea of being put back in the same position in two to four years. It would therefore be sensible to suspend this practice for StAR-students.

## 8. Document Change Tracker

Date	Changes in the document
15.09.22	Creation of the Dossier – <b>1st Draft</b>
17.11.22	Independent committee on humanitarian issues as an integral part of the programme. Committee for the evaluation of study eligibility listed as a possibility. Explicit proposal for enrolment flexibilisation. Adding page numbers in footnote – <b>2nd Draft</b>
02.03.23	Adjustments at 2. Timetable. 4. Finances: Budget externalised, explanations adjusted. Timeline with note. - <b>Version 1.3</b>