Swiss Federal Council conclusions on payment cards for asylum seekers

The Swiss Federal Council concluded that there is no need for new federal legislation to introduce payment cards for asylum seekers. The decision on whether to use such cards to provide social assistance rests entirely with the cantons, which are constitutionally responsible for administering social aid.

The conclusion is based on a report adopted by the Federal Council in response to two parliamentary requests. The report clarifies that, under the Asylum Act and the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act, the granting of social assistance is governed by cantonal law, and that assistance should, where possible, be provided in kind. Payment cards, according to the report, qualify as a form of in-kind benefit, meaning that cantons are already free to introduce them for asylum seekers, temporarily admitted persons, individuals seeking protection without residence permits, and recipients of emergency aid, without requiring changes to federal law.

The Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Affairs (CDAS) would be responsible for issuing recommendations on the potential introduction of such a system. However, in autumn 2024, the CDAS Committee unanimously rejected the idea of adopting payment cards. A survey cited in the report found that 14 cantons expect higher costs from such a system, while five anticipate cost savings. The Federal Council concluded that a meaningful cost–benefit assessment would require detailed information on the specific type of card system and the groups of people it would cover.

Source(s)

- Federal Council | Der Bundesrat | Conseil fédéral | Consiglio federale (20 June, 2025), Introduction de cartes de paiement pour les requérants d’asile : aux cantons de décider [Introduction of payment cards for asylum seekers: the cantons decide], https://www.news.admin.ch/fr/newnsb/Vjc7fjpy50trvW93Syz93

Date of development
20.06.2025
Country

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Document generated on 25-11-2026
For more information, please contact: ias@euaa.europa.eu

Switzerland

Thematic area(s)

Content of protection

Development type

Legislation

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