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Providing a refuge for the Poles

DETAILS have just been announced of a Swiss government programme for resettling Polish refugees at present in camps in Austria. Switzerland is to accept 1,000 of the estimated 50,000 refugees following an appeal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The resettlement programme was announced by the Swiss government, the Swiss Red Cross Society, and the Roman Catholic aid organisation, Caritas. ELSBETH DANZEISEN of Swiss Radio International reports:

ABOUT 22,000 Poles last year asked for political asylum in Austria, and up to 30,000 more are currently in Austria, many of them officially as tourists. This is a very large number for a small country like Austria, which hopes that many of the Poles will be accepted by other countries.

In Switzerland, nearly 1,000 refugees from Poland last year asked for political asylum, and although their requests have not yet finally been processed, most of them are expected to be granted asylum. A further 2,000 Poles are believed to be staying in Switzerland with tourist visas, and it is expected that some of those will eventually also request asylum.

In addition, 1,000 Polish refugees, who are now mainly in camps in Austria, will be allowed to resettle in Switzerland. The Swiss government says these Poles will include handicapped people who find it difficult to be accepted by other countries for permanent resettlement.

The director of the Caritas aid organisation says there is much goodwill among the Swiss public towards the Polish refugees, and

it is therefore hoped that those looking after the refugees will receive enough offers for permanent accommodation and employment for them.

Caritas and the Red Cross have also appealed to Swiss parishes and communes to co-operate, so that the refugees can be given new homes immediately without having to spend more time in camps.

Over the past few years Switzerland has also had special aid programmes for refugees from Indochina, and other Swiss charity organisations – not involved in the current campaign to aid Poles – say they are still much involved in caring for these earlier groups.

Whereas it is difficult for people from countries like Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos to be integrated into Swiss society because they come from an entirely different cultural background, there will be fewer obstacles for the Poles.

A total of about 45,000 refugees currently live in Switzerland, including large groups from other Eastern European countries and Latin America.

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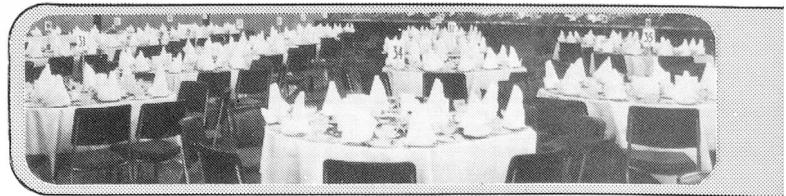
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