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enaro
EUROPEAN NETWORK OF ASYLUM RECEPTION
ORGANISATIONS

Report of an exchange program in the Netherlands

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1. INTRODUCTION

My name is Marcela Bužgová and I work in the Czech Republic in a reception centre for asylum seekers Vyšní Lhoty for more than two years as the manager of organisational department. The name of our organisation is SUZ MV ČR (Refugee Administration Facilities) and it belongs to Ministry of Interior. Our reception centre is the centre for first identification, initiation of asylum grant proceedings and medical obligatory examinations. We also provide services as accommodation, catering, medical service, social service, and psychological aid and offer leisure time activities. The reception centre is the closed centre.

One of my job descriptions is to take care of Enaro candidates during their visits in the reception centre Vyšní Lhoty. During these two years I met approximately 6 colleagues from others countries (the Netherlands, Sweden, Great Britain, Norway). This experience made me think about my own Enaro exchange. I was very much interested in care for asylum seekers especially in countries, which have long experience in providing services to this category of clients. This is the reason why I applied for my exchange to the Netherlands. I was especially interested in general policy of legislative background in this field, in repatriation projects and in integration programmes.

I would like to thank Mr. Aleš Belka from SUZ and Ms. Robeske Tupan from COA for organising my exchange, and mainly to Mr. Cor van Loon from COA, who was my tutor during my Enaro exchange.

2. PROGRAMME OF MY STAY IN THE NETHERLANDS

I arrived in Amsterdam on 1st October in the evening. A colleague from COA, Mr. Maarten Visser, picked me up the next day and brought me to COA's headquarters in Rijswijk. There we (me and my colleague from Belgian Fedasil Mr. Patrick Spinnoy) received a basic introduction of the system of organisational structure of COA (Mr. Michel Slaager), with the system of reception of asylum seekers in the Netherlands (Mr. Maarten Visser) and presentation of placing department of COA (Mr. Stefan v.d. Meij). In the afternoon our tutor Mr. Cor van Loon, who is a coordinator in Limburg, brought us to the beautiful town of Roermond, where we lived during our exchange. We also had a first short visit and introduction at the

repatriation centre Baexem. In the evening we met Ms. Miriam, who works as a coordinator for the Living department in Limburg.

On the next day, 3rd October, we visited AZC Baexem. Our tutor explained to us the Dutch asylum procedure, the difference between the “old” the and “new” Alien Act. Next, social worker Mr. Jos showed the whole centre to us and also described the work of each department in the centre. In the afternoon we gave a presentation of our asylum procedure, both in the Czech Republic and in Belgium, to our colleagues from cluster Limburg.

On 4th October, we visited AZC Echt, which is also a repatriation centre. Ms. Sonia described us the job of the so-called case managers, who work with clients on their repatriation programmes. Next, our tutor arranged a talk with one asylum seeker from Sri Lanka, who lived in the centre. Then we had a tour of the centre and in the afternoon we had a discussion about IOM’s help with repatriations.

On 5th October we visited AZC Schweikhuizen, which is also a repatriation centre. Ms. Maud presented the PLEXA project, which served for so-called ex-unaccompanied minors (ex-AMAs). Then we visited the medical department, which is in all centres, but staff is not employed by COA. We were speaking about medical care of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. In the afternoon we visited AZC Heerlen, looked at the centre and especially at the rooms for disabled persons. The program of repatriation training was presented to us. We also had a meeting with representatives from VVN (NGO) and talked about their helping programme for asylum seekers.

On 6th October we were in Baexem again. We watched the part of the centre for AMAs and were informed about specialized social work with them. In the afternoon we made an evaluation of whole week with our tutor, about our remarks and about our program for next week.

On Saturday our tutor organized a great trip for us around whole Limburg (incl. historical caves, Valkenburg, Vaals, Maastricht). On Sunday, Patrick and I went to The Hague.

Our second week started in AZC Echt. We joined our colleague from COA to perform a hygienic control. In the afternoon we drove to AZC Vught, which is one of two departure centres in the Netherlands. We were informed about the position of the centre in the organisational structure of COA, we

had a meeting with IOM and we also met with representatives from IND and Alien Police.

On 10th October we had an appointment with two representatives from HIT foundation (NGO), Mr. Frans Bastiaens and Mr. Jan Vranken, who presented a project of Return and Reintegration to us. In the afternoon we visited AZC Venlo and had presentation about a system of sanctions.

On 11th October we visited AZC Amersfoort, which is the only centre in the Netherlands for so-called invited/quota refugees. In the afternoon we made a trip to Den Bosch.

On 12th October we were in the village Eckelrade, in which place the project Wereldwijd is, provided by a NGO. We were informed about possibilities of a new start in countries of origin for persons, who have chosen to voluntarily return. In the afternoon we had an evaluation of the whole exchange program, first with our tutor, and next with COA workers, Mr. Michel Slaager and Ms. Robeske Tupan. We also had an interview with COA journalist Auke Schouwstra.

And on 13th October I had my flight back to the Czech Republic.

3. ORGANISATIONS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

A) IND – Immigration and Naturalisation Services

IND is an organisation, which decides about asylum seekers' applications. The IND implements the admission policies of the Ministry of Justice. Based on a first interview and the general situation in the country of origin, the IND will draw up a report and decide whether asylum seekers will be allowed to stay in the Netherlands or will not be admitted.

B) VP - Aliens Police

VP is a section of the Dutch police force. After asylum seekers' arrival, they have to report to VP to register their personal details and to take an electronic asylum seekers identity document. VP also has a role in expelling aliens whose application has been definitely rejected.

C) COA – Central Agency for the Reception of asylum seekers

COA is responsible for the reception of asylum seekers. COA provides accommodation during the asylum procedure and prepares asylum seekers for staying in the Netherlands or for returning to their country of origin. COA is

an independent administrative body funded by the Ministry of Justice. The Minister for Alien Affairs and Integration is politically accountable.

At present, COA manages reception centres throughout the Netherlands divided into 12 clusters. There are 3 different types of centres where COA provides services to asylum seekers, depending on their asylum procedure's stage.

Furthermore, there are 3 organisations that help prepare asylum seekers for repatriation. Of course, there are more than these three organisations in the Netherlands, which provides services for asylum seekers and which are important partners in this field.

D) IOM – The International Organisation for Migration

IOM arranges the transport and resettlement of asylum seekers who decide to return to their country of origin. IOM is a very important partner in the repatriation policy of the Netherlands.

E) SRA – The Foundation for Legal Aid in Asylum

SRA provides free legal advice and representation to asylum seekers during their asylum procedure.

F) The Nidos foundation

Nidos foundation is a guardianship institution for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (AMAs).

G) Municipalities

There is also very important role of municipalities in asylum seekers' policy. Municipalities provide support in establishing reception centres for asylum seekers and they also have duties in the field of accommodation and integration of asylum seekers who have received a residence permit.

H) VVN – Dutch refugee council (Vluchtelingen Werk Nederland)

VVN is an independent organisation which can assist asylum seekers with their asylum procedure, such as preparing for interviews with IND.

I) MOA – Healthcare service for asylum seekers

MOA is a branch of the General Health Department GGD and has a staff of nurses and doctors. They are not employees of COA. In every centre, there are representatives of MOA providing medical issues or medical examinations.

4. ASYLUM PROCEDURE

There are two more or less different types of asylum procedure in the Netherlands depending on when the asylum procedure of individual asylum seeker has begun. This is because of a new so-called Alien Act 2000, which became effective on 1st April 2001. This Act provides mainly shorter and quicker procedures.

The main difference is in the competence for taking decisions. The first decision for both types is given by IND. Cases belonging to the old Alien Act are then decided also by IND in the second instance, cases belonging to the new Alien Act are decided by an independent court. Last appeal can be given to independent court for the cases belonging to the old Alien Act, but cases belonging to the new Alien Act might lodge an appeal to the Supreme Court (Raad van State).

Also the whole Dutch policy of asylum procedures has changed very much. The main emphasis is on repatriation policy. This is also the reason, why the types of centres have changed.

Now there are several different types of centres depending on the stage of asylum procedure.

A) Temporary Accommodation

After arrival in the Netherlands, aliens may stay at a temporary accommodation for a few days before reporting and registering at the Application Centre by IND.

B) Application centre

The application centre is the place where IND determines whether request of aliens is rejected or whether further investigation is required. They also identify the Dublin cases. If the request is not rejected, asylum seekers are sent to an O&I centre (orientation and integration centre). The average time to spend in AC centre is 48 working hours (6 days). These centres are not the facilities of COA, but IND.

C) O&I centres – Orientation stage

After the initial procedure in the application centre is finished, asylum seekers go to the O&I centres. There are two of them in the Netherlands. This orientation stage continues until the first decision from IND. The programme in the orientation stage includes information and advice, Dutch language course for beginners and obligatory consultations and training programme. The average

time spent in this centre is about 6 month. If an asylum seeker receives a permit to stay he goes on with integration programme. If the first decision is negative, asylum seekers go to one of the repatriation centres.

D) Repatriation centre

These are the most common centres in the Netherlands nowadays. Asylum seekers with negative first decision stay in these centres. Here starts the repatriation programme, which have 4 stages.

Stage 0: building up the file – personal file with all data from COA, IND and AP is built

Stage 1: return interviews – an asylum seeker is informed by the COA case manager about the repatriation programme and about his/her personal possibilities - whether of voluntarily return or forced departure

Stage 2: if an asylum seeker does not voluntarily leave the country, then he/she is brought to the Departure centre. If the asylum seeker's procedure is finished, and he/she does not agree on repatriation, he/she has to leave the repatriation centre, and if they do not leave the country they become illegals. They can be controlled by AP and without valid visa they are consequently brought to Detention centres.

E) Departure centre

This period lasts for 8-12 weeks and is designed for asylum seekers who agreed on voluntarily repatriation. When the repatriation cannot be carried out during the stay in the departure centre, the following possibilities occur:

- transfer to the detention centre (expulsion)
- transfer to the remand prison
- termination of the maintenance payments
- receiving permission to stay based either on the fact he/she is technically not able to leave the country or unpredictable circumstances

5. GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

In this short report I cannot mention all the things I have learnt during my stay in the Netherlands. Every programme, every problem and every process were clearly explained to us in details. For example: repatriation programme, special programmes for AMAs, health care, NGO programmes, programme for invited refugees and others. During our stay we were overfilled with information but it was very interesting. When I came back I prepared

presentation about Dutch asylum system for my colleagues in our Reception centre Vyšní Lhoty.

I would like to thank my tutor Mr. Cor van Loon not only for this great experience and well prepared programme, but also him and my Belgian colleague Patrick for long general discussions about asylum and political systems. I can recommend this experience with Enaro exchange programme to everyone who wants to have wider and deeper view of system of asylum procedure in different countries in European Union.