



COA Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers

Reception and Integration of Asylum Seekers in Norway

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EUROPEAN NETWORK OF ASYLUM RECEPTION
ORGANISATIONS

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1.Introduction

Enaro, the European Network of Asylum Reception Organisations is an association fostering cooperation between ten European organisations involved in asylum reception.¹

Hero is a Reception Organisation in Norway, taking part in the association.

From the 15th to the 29th of April I went to the North of Norway. During these two weeks Hero organised an exchange-programme for me and for Freida Delaney, staff-member of the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) in Ireland.

The Exchange-programme consisted of a visit to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), visiting two reception centres of Hero in the North of Norway and several meetings with other organisations involved with asylum seekers in the region. (For the detailed programme of the exchange, see appendix 1.)

The main goal of the exchange was to get information about the way Norway organises the reception of asylum seekers, return policy, and especially integration. Since it was the first time somebody from The Netherlands visited Norway for an exchange programme of ENARO, I'll try to give some common information about asylum seekers in Norway.

During the exchange programme I had the opportunity to learn a lot about the Norwegian system concerning the reception of asylum seekers. I did not get answers to all questions, but I had a lot of impressions. Of course I looked at the reception of asylum seekers in Norway from the perspective of the Dutch system. I'll give some impressions and for me significant points in the last chapter of this summery.

I want to thank the staff of Hero, especially the employees of the centres Heimly and Lødingen, for their great hospitality and for the way they organised our visit. And I want to thank Gunn Søfting, who organised the programme and who choose to plan our visit in the very North of Norway, which wasn't the easiest choice. Going so far north made the programme for us even more special. It was a great opportunity to see and experience this beautiful part of the country. It must also be very special and sometimes strange for a lot of asylum seekers to come in this land of mountains, fjords, snow, reindeers and polar light.

¹ Participating Asylum Reception Organisations in Enaro are from the countries: Ireland, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Hungary, England



2. Asylum and Immigration in Norway

2.1 Asylum, facts and figures

Norway has signed the UN Convention relating to the status of Refugees from 1951 (Refugee Convention), and will therefore grant refugees protection. The Norwegian Immigration Act of 1988 determines who is entitled to protection in Norway.

The number of people asking for asylum in Norway dropped during the last 2 years.² In 2004 Norway received about 7.900 asylum applications. Compared to 2003 the number shows a decline of 7.700 applications. For Norway it was the lowest number since 1997.

Number of applications during the last 9 years

	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>
1996	1.800	22.200
1997	2.300	34.400
1998	8.500	45.200
1999	10.200	39.300
2000	10.800	43.900
2001	14.800	32.600
2002	17.500	18.700
2003	15.600	13.400
2004	7.900	9.800

Compared to other European countries Norway experienced in 2004 a steeper decline in the number of asylum applications. France received the highest number of asylum applications in 2004 and experienced even an increase as well as Slovakia and Cyprus. The total number of asylum applications in all EU countries in 2004 dropped by 18 % compared with 2003. In Norway the decline in this period was 50 %.

Compared with other Nordic countries: The decline in Denmark was 35 %, in Sweden 26 %, in Iceland 5 %. Only Finland experienced an increase (13 %). Sweden had the highest number of applications in 2004 (23.000).

In The Netherlands the number of applications in 2004 was 9.800, compared with 13.400 in 2003. That comes to a decline of 27 %.

Main home countries of people asking for asylum in Norway and in the Netherlands in 2004

<i>Norway</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>
Afghanistan (13,5 %)	Iraq (11 %)
Somalia (13 %)	Somalia (8 %)
Russia (12 %)	Afghanistan (7 %)
Serbia Montenegro (11 %)	Iran (5 %).

In 2004 12.500 decisions were reached in asylum cases in Norway, in The Netherlands 21.800. In close to 26 % of the cases in Norway it was decided that the application should be processed by another country (party to the Dublin Convention). In The Netherlands 1.900 cases proved to have Dublin-claims (9 %).

² The numbers in this chapter are from the websites of the UDI (The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration), the IND (The organisation for Immigration and Naturalisation in The Netherlands) and the ECRE (The European Council on Refugees and Exiles)



8.500 asylum cases were examined in Norway in 2004. 3.460 permits were granted in asylum cases. The percentage of granted permits increased from 29 % in 2003 to 40 % in 2004, in the Netherlands the percentage of granted permits in 2004 was 39 %.

More specific facts about the 3.460 permits granted in Norway in 2004:

460 persons were granted asylum (5 % of the cases). Mostly this concerned people from Russia (ethnic Chechens), Iran, Serbia Montenegro (minorities).

1300 persons got the decision for residence on other protection grounds, mostly people from Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

1700 persons were granted residence on humanitarian grounds, 20 % compared to 6 % in 2003. More than 50 % of this group were ethnic Chechens; others were mostly persons from Somalia and Iraq.

Almost 850 resettlement refugees arrived in Norway in 2004. Compared to 2003 the number of arrivals was halved. Most of these refugees came from Liberia, Myanmar, Iran, The democratic republic of Congo and Sudan.

The decline of all asylum applications in Europe is partly due to the declining number of conflicts in the areas asylum seekers are coming from. Besides that, the policy in European countries has become stricter (Dublin Convention, Fingerprint-register). The greater decline in Norway is most probably an effect of the Norwegian measures to reduce the number of asylum seekers to Norway.

Norwegian measures in the last 2 years were:

- Age examinations of unaccompanied minors, introduced in 2003
- Ending the offer of accommodation to persons who have received a final rejection, as from 1 January 2004
- The 48-hour procedure, introduced the 1st of January 2004. (See chapter 2.2)

2.2 Asylum Procedure

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) has the main responsibility for the handling of asylum seekers in Norway. This includes the assessment of asylum applications and providing accommodation during the asylum processes.

A person has a right to asylum in Norway if he or she has well founded fear of being individually persecuted in his or her country of origin because of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. A person who can receive protection from the authorities of the country of origin will normally not be granted asylum.

A person, who does not meet the asylum criteria but still cannot safely return to a country of origin, may be granted a residence permit on protection grounds.

If strong humanitarian considerations so indicate, an asylum seeker can be granted a residence permit on humanitarian grounds. Mostly this is the case when there are serious health problems considered in relation to difficult conditions in the country of origin.

Shortly after arrival in Norway the asylum seeker will be called in for an interview. The UDI uses the interview and an application with a personal statement of the asylum seeker as basis for assessing if there are grounds for being granted asylum. If not, the Norwegian authorities will automatically assess whether there should be granted a residence permit on protection grounds or on humanitarian grounds.

If the UDI rejects the application, a person may appeal the decision within 3 weeks after the lawyer receives the UDI's decision. The UDI will determine first whether there are new facts in a case. Normally the asylum seeker may stay in Norway while the appeal is processed, except if the UDI believes it is obvious that there are no grounds for protection.



If the UDI does not find that new facts are a ground for protection, the appeal will be forwarded to the Immigration Appeals Board (UNE), an autonomous administrative body similar to a court of law. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is responsible for the board.

If the Norwegian authorities reject the application and there are no grounds for granting a permit, an asylum seeker must leave the country. He or she should contact the police for an agreement on voluntary return or apply to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for assistance with return. If a person does not leave the country voluntarily, the police will escort him or her to the country of origin, if necessary by force. In this case the asylum seeker will owe the Norwegian public authorities for the cost of being escorted.

During the exchange weeks, the people working in the asylum field and the news-items in Norway spoke of new plans of the Ministry to open a special Waiting Centre. Rejected asylum seekers should stay there waiting for their return to countries of origin.

On January the 1st 2004 a rapid procedure model, the 48-hour procedure, was implemented. The 48-hour procedure was introduced for asylum seekers with assumed groundless applications to help reduce the number of asylum seekers without any need for protection. Applications from persons arriving from countries the Directorate of Immigration considers generally safe are processed within 48 hours and a simplified procedure. In 2004 200 decisions were reached in this procedure. In all of these cases the applications were rejected.

2.3 Immigrants

The situation in Norway concerning Immigration Policy and the public debate about asylum and the multicultural society are similar compared to other countries in Europe and The Netherlands. To understand the situation and the context of asylum and of integration, I'll give some figures about the population and different types of immigration in Norway.³

Norway had a population of 4.579.000 in 2004. For an image: the country is 385.155 km² big, the main land 323.738 km² (The coastline is 25.148 km, including the fjords).

Immigrants in Norway in 1970 and in 2004

1970	2004
59.200 (1,5 % of the population)	349.000 (7,6 % of the population)
In 1970 16 % of the immigrants in Norway was of non-western origin, compared to 72% in 2004.	

The largest groups of immigrants in Norway come from Pakistan, Sweden, Denmark and Vietnam.

In the rural area the percentages of immigrants differ compared to the percentages in the countryside.

Some figures about the population of Oslo:

11 % of the total population of Norway live in Oslo.

33 % (116.333) of all immigrants in Norway live in Oslo.

20% of the population of Oslo are immigrants.

During the exchange programme I visited two reception centres in Nordland and Troms, two of the three most northern counties of Norway.

Some figures about the population of the three most northern counties (Nordland, Troms and Finnmark):

11 % of the total population of Norway live in the northern counties.

5,2 % (18.195) of all immigrants live in these 3 counties.

³ The figures mentioned in this chapter about immigration are from the UDI's reports "Annual Report 2004" and "Facts and Figures 2004" and from the website of "Statistics Norway"



3,6% of the total population of these counties are immigrants.

In 2004 in total 55.500 new permits were granted allowing individuals to stay in Norway.

A large part of the permits (33.000) were given to persons intending to work in Norway (temporary and permanent). Short-term employment contracts are the most important reason for the increased immigration in Norway (more then 25.000 of the persons given these permits came from the new EEA member countries).

5.400 permits were given to applicants wishing to acquire an education.

12.800 permits were given for family unification reasons.



3. Norwegian Directorate of Immigration; UDI

3.1 Organisation, departments

The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) is the central administrative body dealing with immigration in Norway (including the reception of asylum seekers). The UDI 's aim is "to contribute to the implementation and development of a humane immigration, integration and refugee policy, with a solid basis in political decisions and human rights, and which earns the trust of the users and the public at large"⁴. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional development has the responsibility for refugee immigration and integration policy and directs the UDI. The Ministry gives legislation, regulations, budget, and allocation letters. The Ministry also gives the framework for integration activities (Introductory Programme Act, integration subsidies for settling) of local authorities.

The UDI has 6 regional offices. They are responsible for Asylum reception centres and integration in the local communities. The 2 Departments of the UDI offices, which are responsible for asylum seekers and asylum policy, are the Asylum Department and the Integration Department.

As part of the exchange programme we visited the regional office of the UDI in Narvik. The office in Narvik establishes and supervises the operation of reception centres in the northern counties of Norway and cooperates with reception centres and municipalities on the settlement of refugees. Besides that the office works on integration of immigrants and provides information on integration and return.

3.2 Asylum Department; asylum applications, rules and regulations

The primary task of the UDI's Asylum Department is to process applications for asylum seekers. The department also helps to develop the regulations in the asylum field. (See chapter 2.2)

At this moment the UDI works on developing requirements and policy for the new system of Waiting Centres and also new is the development of a policy for Centres for Asylum Seekers with Unaccepted Behaviour.

3.3 Integration Department; reception and settlement

The Integration Department is responsible for providing asylum seekers with accommodation during the asylum procedure, for settling persons who were granted a permit in municipalities and for their integration in Norwegian society. At the end of 2004 there were 103 reception centres in Norway, housing 12.200 asylum seekers. In 2003 17.200 asylum seekers were living in 140 centres. The centres are operated either by local municipalities, by NGO's or by private companies.

The employees of the office in Narvik told that they now supervise 20 reception centres in the 3 northern counties. Last year there were still 37 centres. 17 centres were closed because of the decline of the number of asylum seekers. The situation in the north is different from the rest of Norway. There are only half a million inhabitants; the municipalities in average only have 200 inhabitants. Unemployment-rates are higher compared to the rest of the country. The political aim is to spread the asylum seekers and reception centres.

The UDI makes the requirements for the operation of reception centres. Most centres are privately run. Short-term contracts make the capacity flexible. The requirements for reception centres are written in a document of the UDI called "The Specification of Requirements for the Operations Regulation". Specified are requirements about housing, organizational and administrative activities and activities for residents and groups with special needs.

⁴ See website of the UDI: www.udi.no



The office in Narvik also deals with applications for transfers of asylum seekers in the region. Every asylum seeker gets one offer for a place in a reception centre. A lot of people want to move to the south. Permission for a transfer is only given if there is a close relative in another place, if special medical treatment is necessary, if a person is attending education or if he or she has a job (on certain conditions asylum seekers in Norway can work, see chapter 5.8).

For settlement of asylum seekers the office negotiates with municipalities. Reception centre employees make the individual match between a resident with a permit to stay and a municipality. Municipalities make their own political choices on this subject. There are no forced targets for settlement in municipalities. About half of the municipalities in the North settle former asylum seekers. See chapter 5.9 for more information about settlement.

The UDI works with a registration system, which is also used by the police, but not by reception centres. Reception centres do receive a special registration system developed by the UDI for registering personal facts about residents.



4. Hero

4.1 Organisation

Hero is the largest organisation for the reception of asylum seekers in Norway. The UDI delegates the reception of asylum seekers to Hero and to other organisations. The name Hero has no special meaning, but stands for the initials of the people who started the organisation. Hero has 19 reception centres in Norway and is a private organisation. The company ISS (International Service Solution) owns 50% of Hero. Hero has been active in the field since 1988 and has about 200 employees. The organisation wishes to be a multicultural concern and approximately 35 % of the employees have a refugee or immigrant background; the goal is to reach 40%. The head office is situated in Stavanger, a branch office in Bergen and reception centres of Hero are located in different parts of Norway

The organisation has the capacity to operate transit centres (see chapter 4.2), ordinary reception centres and centres for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum and can offer emergency stand-by centres. The primary goal of the organisation is “to offer the UDI a professional concept for operational reception services and to provide refugees with the best possible foundation for mastering a new life situation”⁵. Hero wishes to be a leader in its professional field and an important actor in the development of the multicultural society.

Hero offers also advice and counselling to employees and other organisations and develops competence in the field of asylum seekers and refugees. The company organises lectures and courses in themes such as: cross cultural communication, the multicultural work place, asylum seekers in Norway, operational service of reception centres and working with children and youngsters with refugee background. .

4.2 Reception centres

The UDI decides in which region a reception centre should be established and specifies what the requirements for the reception are. Hero responds to this with a plan for housing the asylum seekers and operating a centre and calculates what this will cost. The UDI decides which organisation will get a contract based on comparing quality and prices of different applicants.

Each reception centre has to make an annual report for the UDI to show how the centre is operated, which information programmes have been given, what activities were organised and how the budget was spend. Every week a centre has to report vacant places to the UDI. Once a year the UDI has a meeting with the staff of each centre and there are announced and unannounced inspections. The UDI writes a report after an inspection and gives deadlines to improve eventual problems.

Every asylum seeker in Norway will be offered a place in a reception centre. If a person prefers to stay with family or friends, this is possible. In this case the asylum seeker won't get money from the state. All asylum seekers, who chose to stay in reception centres, will go at first to the “1st Transit Centre” in Tanum (operated by Hero). A person will stay there for 3 weeks up to 1 month and will get the interview there and a tbc check.

After this the asylum seeker will get a transfer to a “2nd Transit Centre” in Oslo. The UDI will check there if a person will enter the 48-hour procedure or the normal procedure. Also the fingerprint registration and the Dublin-check take place in this 2nd Transit. The stay in this centre will take 1 to 2 months.

Afterwards the asylum seeker, who follows the normal asylum procedure, will get a place in an “Ordinary Reception Centre” until he or she will get a final decision on the asylum application.

⁵ See the website of Hero: www.hero.no



For the exchange programme I visited 2 Ordinary Reception Centres of Hero in the north of Norway.

Heimly

The first reception centre we visited was Heimly, located in Finnsnes, county Troms. It has 127 residents. The centre is a former school and has room for about 150 people. Every floor has a shared kitchen and shared toilets and showers.

There are people of 20 nationalities in the centre. The nationalities-top 5 of the residents in Heimly is:

1. Russia
2. Eritrea
3. Afghanistan
4. Somalia
5. Iran.

Employees in the centre are:

Manager of the centre

Responsible for economics, budget of the UDI, payment of residents and buildings, policy of the centre concerning health, environment, security, etc., annual reports, plans, cooperation with local organisations and municipality, guiding of the staff, competence

Information counsellor

Responsible for the information programme, communication with external contacts, introduction programme, education for adults, settlements of people with permits

Social consultant

Responsible for guiding of children, youth and families in social matters, contacts with school, organising special care and support

Employee for organising activities

Responsible for homework-classes, education in own language, play-room, sports, activities-plan, participation, work-permits

Employee for technical service

Responsible for maintenance of the building, technical reparations, residents' participation in technical jobs, electrics economy-programme (instructions about saving electricity, gas)

Employee for medical service

(Employed, not by Hero but by the municipality health care organisation.) Responsible for nursing, giving information about health and health-care system in Norway, referring to specialists

Lødingen

The second reception centre we visited was in Lødingen, county Nordland.

This centre had 103 residents when we were there. It is a former hotel and has room for about 140 persons. Every floor has a shared kitchen here as well and shared showers and toilets.

Besides the main building there are 3 houses with 4 apartments in the village, rented from the municipality and used for families.

The top 5 of countries of origin of the residents is:



1. Russia
2. Afghanistan
3. Azerbajdzjan
4. Somalia
5. Iraq

The staff in Lødingen is similar to the staff in Heimly, except there is no employee for organising activities. The social consultant is also responsible for activities here.



5. Participation and Integration

5.1 Preface

The main goal of activities in the reception centres I visited is participation of residents. The aim is to keep people active (empowerment) and let them be responsible themselves for daily life in the centre, for work that has to be done and for activities. Hero has the vision that “the reception centre is the primary arena for participation in and understanding of the society”. So participation is seen as a first step in integration. This is why I’ll describe activities aiming on participation and integration in one chapter here.

An information programme in the centres stimulates the integration of the residents and there are organised special information meetings for people who got a permit to stay.

In municipalities the “Introductory Programme” is offered to people who received a permit. They are obliged to follow this programme to help continue the integration process. We got information about the participation and integration activities from employees of the reception centres, the UDI, adults’ education, municipalities and NGO’s

5.2 Activities in the reception centre

In each centre we visited there was (as required by the UDI) a playroom for children, a computer-room, a recreation/television-room, a youth-group, and a women-group and there were sports and cultural activities. All activities are organised or run by residents themselves, coordinated by the social worker or activities-employee. The employee is guiding the residents to organise activities themselves. When we visited Heimly, there was a celebration of the 3 years anniversary of the reception centre. There was a programme in the afternoon with guest from the municipality and other organisations. Residents and children contributed to the programme and it was also one of the residents doing the opening speech. The manger did a presentation showing all kinds of activities organised by residents. (See appendix 2 for a local press article about the celebration, also mentioning the ENARO exchange programme)

5.3 Participation

Besides activities there are the “things that have to be done” in a centre. There is a reception-group responsible for post and renting DVD’s, a technical group and a health-group (people with first-aid certificate). The staff is depending on residents for doing tasks concerning safety and hygiene. For example there is a small group of residents part of a fireguard. There is no security service in the centre at night, but residents stay awake at night by turn to be guards (make check-up-rounds and respond when there is a fire-alarm).

In both centres every week there is a “cleaning day”. Both residents and staff are cleaning for 1 or 2 hours this day. Everybody is expected to take part in it and all public rooms and tasks are divided.

5.4 Residents Counsel

In each activity-group in the centres one resident is the “leader”. The leaders of activity-groups are also members of the Residents Counsel. This counsel is having meetings to discuss about plans and requests for activities. We attended a meeting of the counsel in Lødingen and for example there was a request on paper from a resident for a special chair for his handicapped child and a written plan of some orthodox Christian residents to organise a celebration. The counsel is in charge of a budget for activities. When there is a plan and request on paper with calculated costs, they discuss about it and afterwards they vote to make a decision. 2 staff-members are members of the counsel and guide the process.

5.5 Voluntary groups



In a lot of places in Norway there are local voluntary groups who support asylum seekers. In Lødingen we were invited to a meeting of the local voluntary group. Inhabitants of the village are members of this group on personal title. The aim of the group is to stimulate contacts of residents of the reception-centre with the local population. They contact local clubs and organisations to make it easier for asylum seekers to join for example a local sports club. The group we visited also organised a buddy-project and brainstormed about possible new cultural activities to organise.

5.6 Education

Children and youngsters until 16 years old attend primary and secondary school. We visited in Lødingen a secondary school. In both centres children until 16 attend regular schools in the town. Until 16 years of age children are obliged to go to school. From 16 years old children in Norway go to high school, but during the asylum-procedure youngsters do not get permission to attend high school. The reception centres organise homework-classes and classes in the language of origin. In both centres we visited there were also special short-term courses organised for adults like fire-courses, cleaning-instructions and first aid-courses.

Education for adults to learn the Norwegian language is not paid for by the UDI. The idea is that asylum seekers should not focus on learning Norwegian when they maybe have to return to the country of origin. Employees we spoke with in the centres said they thought it is quite unnatural not teaching Norwegian, since people have to use language-skills for a lot of things (daily life, doing voluntary or paid jobs, attending vocational courses, etc). In both centres we visited, there were voluntary teachers teaching Norwegian with own materials and methods.

As soon as a person has a residence-permit, he or she can attend classes in the school for adult-education of the municipality. Residents of a reception centre who receive a permit to stay can immediately join classes of people settled in the municipality.

5.7 Information Programme

According to the requirements of the UDI⁶ the reception centre must have a structured information programme that deals with the topics in the UDI's guide entitled "Information programmes in state reception centres", as well as other topics requested by the UDI. This must be a written programme, which includes a description of: content and educational methodology; cooperation with the adult education authority and other relevant external agencies; method for quality assurance and evaluation; use of interpreters and language assistants.

The requirements say that the content must include sections with arrival information, ordinary information, information preparing for settlement for residents with a residence permit, and information about return for residents whose asylum applications have been rejected. And each centre has to issue participant diplomas for everyone completing the sections of the programme.

The UDI requires a structured programme, which has a fixed subject in each week. Every centre in Norway gives information-meetings about the same subject in the same weeks.

In the centres of Hero they showed us how they organise the required programme.

Introduction: When an asylum seeker has a transfer to the centre, a resident of the centre will go to the airport to pick up the person and will tell him or her about the centre, the town etc.

First appointments: When a new person has a room, he or she will get an appointment as soon as possible. In this first appointment the person has to fill in his personal file (name, tel. no., language, education, work experience etc.). In the following appointments the new resident will get information from the information counsellor about the first 3 subjects / modules of the information programme

⁶ The document "Specification of requirements for the operations regulation" of the UDI describes the content of the information programme and of the file and portfolio, which a centre has to create for every resident over 18.



concerning life in the centre, activities, house rules, fire-prescriptions, local environment, IOM and he or she will receive (borrow for a few days) a folder with the most important information on paper.

Information meetings: After the first appointments, the new resident of the centre is expected to visit the regular information meetings, which are organised for different language-groups. In half a year the subjects or modules 4 to 13 of the information programme (10 meetings during 6 months) are handled:

4. The asylum procedure;
5. Health;
6. Education and qualification;
7. Norwegian values and way of living;
8. Living together;
9. Norwegian law and rules (by a police-officer);
10. How to avoid conflicts and how to handle conflicts;
11. Repatriation, voluntary return; what happens if somebody doesn't cooperate to repatriate; how to prepare children on return.
- 11.B. Information about first negative, second negative, options, duties;
12. Collecting information;
13. Preparing on settlement.

The UDI gives suggestions about methods and literature, which can be used. Young people from 12-18 years old get the same information but adapted to their level and interests.

Hero made DVD's about the subjects the UDI requires. It's an interactive programme, in which the subjects are divided in small parts. Every six months the same subjects pass, so every time they can focus on different details and sub-subjects. Besides Hero made leaflets about several subjects about the Norwegian society. They use a special method for making these leaflets. There are several groups of immigrants with different backgrounds asked to explain a subject from the perspective of the customs of their country of origin. They are asked to look at a subject (for example the tax-system) and imagine that they would have to explain it to somebody from their country of origin who never heard about the Norwegian or western customs and regulations.

If a person has a resident permit and settles in a municipality, the information counsellor of the reception centre will send the file and a portfolio of the person to the "receiving" municipality. A file or portfolio is created when somebody arrives or when a resident turns 18. The creation and transfer of a file and portfolio is required by the UDI and the contents are:

- * Personal information about a resident
- * A complete CV
- * Documents concerning any participation the resident has had in the centre
- * References and documents from employment outside the centre
- * Course certificates and participant diplomas from the Norwegian language course
- * Participant certificates for the sections of the information programme

5.8 Work

It is possible for asylum seekers to get a working permit. When someone asks for asylum, at the same time the UDI asks if the asylum seeker wants to ask for a working permit.

If there is some reasonable chance the person will get a resident-permit, if the identity of the person is clear and if there is a job opportunity, the asylum seeker can get a working permit during the asylum procedure. Also after a negative decision in the asylum procedure people can still get a working permit.



In Lødingen we met an employee of Aetat, the employment office of the municipality. The reception centre has contacts with this service on a regular basis to match asylum seekers who are looking for work with training-/practice-jobs in companies in the region. Some companies are interested and offer temporary contracts. The most important aim is that people can practice language and vocational skills. At this moment asylum seekers in Lødingen can work in for example a technical shop, a mechanical company for ships, a cleaning company, a crèche for children and a health organisation. The social worker of the reception centre helps the asylum seeker to make a CV and the asylum seeker can look for jobs himself in the computer of Aetat. The employee of Aetat gives information in the reception centre. About 25 persons have a working permit; about 5 of them are working at the moment. The motivation of most people to work is that they will get a good reference from a company.

5.9 Settlement

Asylum seekers who get a permit to stay in Norway are settled mostly in the environment of the reception centre where they stayed. The Ministry wants to spread settlements but the local policy can decide how many refugees they want to settle in the municipality. A municipality gets funds for each settlement.

The reception centre helps people to find a place to live. The target is to settle people within 6 months after a resident permit is granted. The information counsellor of the reception centre tries to make a match by contacting municipalities and asking a person with resident permit for his or her wishes about settlement. Not all wishes are granted. The centre does look at skills of a person and the situation of the person and the municipality. The centre will give the file and portfolio of the former asylum seeker to the municipality (with permission of the person). The file and portfolio are seen as a reference to the municipality.

For people who are “hard to match” (for example people with disabilities or psychiatric problems) municipalities can get extra money for settlement.

A lot of people want to settle in Oslo and surroundings. People are motivated and sometimes obliged to settle in the region where they lived in a reception centre. Only if people have close relatives or a job or special education in the south of Norway, they can move there. If a person is settled for example in Narvik (in the north) and finds a job in Oslo, he or she can move there. But if the same person gets unemployed again within 6 months, he or she has to go back to Narvik, because in this case Oslo will not get the funds to help this person.

5.10 Introduction Programme

When a person is settled in a municipality, he or she has to follow the “Introduction Programme”⁷ for 2 years. There’s a new integration law introduced the 1st of September 2004, which says that every new resident has to follow this programme. The programme contents minimal 850 hours of Norwegian language classes (1400 hours for people who are analphabetic), maximal up to 3000 hours. Besides language classes there are classes with information about the Norwegian society and job-practice. The programme is 7,5 hours a day.

⁷ See the UDI website: www.udi.no, subject Integration for more information in the the publication: For you who are starting an introductory programme



If a person with a resident permit still lives in a reception centre, he or she can already start the programme in the nearest centre for adult education for free. If a person with resident permit has a job or if he or she already has a certain level in the Norwegian language, a municipality is free to judge if the programme can be shortened.

During the Introduction Programme the resident gets an allowance of the state (comparable with an allowance for unemployed). Each person gets 9.760 Crones a month + some subsidy for the rent. Taxes have to be paid over this amount. In the north of Norway the problem is that a lot of people want to move to the south during the programme. The Ministry tries to prevent this. People will not get help and support with settling and allowances when they move themselves to another region.

In Finnsnes we visited a centre for adult education and got information about the practical experiences with the new Introduction Programme. The Programme here consists of 18 hours of classes with teacher, 8 lessons of individual studies and 2 days of language practice in all kinds of companies/organisations. So far they find it is quite easy to find practice-places. Teachers visit the practise places and do coaching on the job. 3 lessons a week are about work in Norway (laws and regulations and language-within-the-job). At the end of the programme people make a test and should reach at least the level B2 in Norwegian language, analphabetic persons have to reach only level A1. Most people are positive about the programme so far.

If a person wants to learn more after the 2 obligatory years (for example because he or she wants to go to a regular school), he or she can follow 1 more year of classes in an adult education centre. On the adult education centre people who didn't attend secondary school can also follow special classes like English, mathematics, history, geography and science. People can apply for a grant or a loan to go to a regular school afterwards.

The Introduction Programme is not for people who are already staying with a residence permit in Norway for some years and who did not learn the language for some reason. The municipality is not obliged to pay for these people. Sometimes the unemployment office can decide that they will pay for a programme for people who settled some years ago and still don't have a job. Sometimes these people get a special short-term programme.

5.11 NGO's

In every municipality the way they work together with adult educational centres is about the same. Every municipality has its own way to organise its unit for organising settlement and the guiding of settled refugees. In Finnsnes settled refugees get a consultant for 3 years to help them arrange things in the beginning. Mostly NGO's guide settled refugees and help them to find their way in society. We visited a meeting in Finnsnes with members of several NGO's and paid a visit to the Red Cross in Harstad. There are for example self-aid groups, organised homework groups, refugee guide projects and all kinds of activities for arranging the meeting of Norwegian residents and settled refugees.



6. Return

6.1 Preface

The return of refused asylum seekers to their country of origin is an important point of discussion in Norway, like it is in The Netherlands. Policy is developed on one hand to stimulate rejected asylum seekers to return to their home countries voluntarily and on the other hand to deal with people who do not return voluntarily. We got some information about the return policy from the UDI and the reception centres and in Lødingen we visited an information meeting of the IOM.

6.2 Guiding in reception centres

The policy in reception centres generally is aiming on return. For example no professional teaching in Norwegian is organised to prevent people from focussing too much on staying in Norway. In the reception centre of Hero classes in language of origin are organised for children. The idea is that the language of origin should stay alive for young children and reading and writing skills should be developed in case they have to return. Adult residents do the teaching themselves.

During their stay in a reception centre, asylum seekers attend information meetings about the option of return and voluntary repatriation. They receive information about and from the IOM. The Information counsellor also gives information about return to youngsters. And for parents there is special information and discussion about 'how to prepare children on repatriation'.

In the reception centres we visited, there were a few residents (2 or 3 in total) who officially no longer had the right to receive reception facilities. People whose application for asylum is rejected are officially told that they have to leave a reception centre. When they do not leave themselves, the centre does stop the payment of allowances, but people are not removed from a centre by force. In Norway local courts will not allow people being put on the street.

6.3 IOM

The international organisation for migration (IOM) has opening hours in their offices for asylum seekers who want to return to their country of origin. Besides that the employees of the IOM pay visits to centres to organise information meetings to different language groups. In Lødingen we were invited to an information meeting of the IOM with the Russian-speaking residents of the reception centre. The IOM employee gave common information about the organisation, figures about people receiving and not receiving permits and the support IOM can give people who want to repatriate. The positive sides of repatriating voluntarily, compared to forced return were explained. The employee used a DVD⁸ made by the IOM with a documentary-like story of a person going back to Moldavia. It showed concretely the arrangements and preparations of a person for repatriation, the person preparing her children that they were going back, the paperwork of the IOM, etc. There were a lot of reactions in the group attending the meeting, showing that the DVD was quite confronting to them. The IOM employee told that mostly people react negative and shocked watching the DVD in a meeting. Often people start talking about it afterwards and question about it in appointments later on.

6.4 Facts and figures

In 2004 5300 persons left the reception centres without leaving forwarding address or information about where they were going. Some of these people may have left Norway without notifying the authorities. Some probably will stay illegally in Norway. 1100 persons returned voluntarily with assistance of the IOM. The largest groups returning voluntarily went back to Serbia and Montenegro, Iraq, Russia and Bosnia.

⁸ DVD "Journey Home" Information on Voluntary Return, IOM Norway





7. Basic reception facilities; rules and regulations

7.1 Preface

The regulations and requirements for reception centres' basic facilities are developed by the UDI. In total the reception of asylum seekers in Norway did cost 1.546 million Norwegian Crones (NOK) in 2004, compared to NOK 1.770 million in 2003, a decline of 13 %.

Specified requirements about housing are given by the UDI concerning conditions (beds, washing machines, hygienic conditions, the opportunity to make meals, etc.), about common areas (play room, separate toilets for men and women, common areas for socializing, etc.), about safety (regulations for unwanted attention, regulations for contacting police or ambulance when necessary, etc.), security (written procedures for crisis management, fire contingency, dealing with crime, etc.) and equipment (activities for children, recreational activities for adults, etc.)

7.2 Allowances

Every single person gets NOK 2.790 each month (€339).

A couple gets NOK 4.700 a month and

a child under 18 gets NOK 1.340.

Single parents get NOK 620 for a child extra each month.

7.3 House rules

The reception centres make their own house rules, contributing to the safe, secure and hygienic standards that the UDI requires. In the reception centres of Hero the staff made basic rules and the residents counsel expanded the rules with more detailed ones. If a person does not obey the rules or shows unaccepted behaviour, the staff will speak with the person and can give an official warning or, when necessary, a fine. When nothing works, the UDI can give a person a transfer. According an employee of UDI: we try not to transfer a person, but only transfer a person to solve a problem. As mentioned before in this report, the UDI also develops a policy now for a special reception centre for asylum seekers with unaccepted behaviour.

7.4 Obligations, sanctions, stimulants

If an asylum seekers lives in a reception centre, he or she has to join information meetings, has to take part in cleaning of public rooms in the centre and is expected to clean his or her own room and direct environment. If a person does not do this, the staff in the centre contacts the person and talks about his or her responsibilities. The social worker can make an appointment to talk about this or the information counsellor. Normally speaking about responsibilities, reasons and consequences is enough and sanctions are not necessary.

If a person consequently refuses to do the expected work or to join the information meetings, he or she can get a fine of NOK 100.



8. Significant points and impressions

8.1 Preface

In the 2 weeks I spent in Norway visiting the reception centres, I saw a lot of things that were significant to me. In this chapter I'll tell something about my impressions. Some of the points I'll mention will be based on more or less objective observation but most of the things I'll describe are personal and therefore subjective impressions.

8.2 Common significant points and impressions

The *Asylum field* in Norway meets a lot of same problems, same trends and discussions compared to the Netherlands. There's the same trend in the application figures (a decline the last years after some years of climbing figures) after stronger measures of the Government. In Norway also right wing parties have more influence now, than some years ago. Norway didn't receive the same large numbers of asylum applications as The Netherlands did, but of course Norway also has less inhabitants in total. Because of the decline of applications, reception centres are closing now.

The UDI has a good sight on what reception centres do and the *specified requirements and inspections* force the reception organisations to operate the centres in a professional and responsible way.

Making the report I found the UDI has a lot of *information about the field of asylum, immigration and integration*. Searching on the net I easily found on the UDI website a lot of figures and facts about a large scale of different subjects related to asylum and immigration. It was more difficult to find the same kind of detailed information about these subjects in the Netherlands.

The *private owned* centres and the short contracts make it possible for the UDI to make choices, which centres they will close down, based on quality and/or finances. I think money is an important issue here as well, but in general the centres offering bad quality have less chances to survive.

The *competition* between centres and between reception organisations has a positive influence, I think, on the *initiatives* in the field. I found the staff of Hero is very enthusiastic, trying hard to offer good quality and develop new ideas. It was obvious that employees of Hero were very involved with their organisation and *proud* on their centres and the things they do.

When a reception centre has to be closed down, it is the policy of Hero that *the contracts of the staff of the closing centre will be stopped*. The employees who lose their contracts do get the first chance to apply, when there are vacancies within the organisation. The good thing is that there are not changes at the same time in teams of several other centres every time a centre has to close (which is the practice now in the Netherlands). Hero can try to keep the best or most experienced employees by offering them the chance to apply.

The policy of Hero is to engage *a large percentage of employees with an asylum or immigrant background*. I think this gives the organisation special competence. And they give a good example in Integration (to both residents of the reception centres and external contacts).

8.3 Participation and integration

The *participation of residents* is extremely well developed in the Hero centres, I think. It seems they manage to make the residents feel really responsible for the operation of, and daily life in the centres. The activities organised by residents and the residents' counsels really function well. I think the fact that residents themselves decide about spending the budget for activities, is one of the secrets of



success. Besides the staff very directly speaks to people about responsibilities. They know the individual residents well and try to use people's skills and competences.

The *information programme* organised for residents in the centres is very structured. The fixed subjects passing every six months make it sometimes hard to bring something new for people who stay for a long time in a centre. On the other hand the information can be given from different points of view. Reception organisations like Hero can work out the details of the required programme. Therefore employees can help to develop the programme, which makes the work interesting and stimulates new ideas and initiatives.

The way Hero makes *information material* is very interesting to me. To ask people from a certain country to explain a subject from the perspective of their background can result in more specified and relevant information for asylum seekers from different countries.

To arrange the *settlement* of a resident with a permit to stay, the staff of the reception centre at first tries to make a match with a municipality in the region (only if it doesn't work, the UDI arranges the settlement). The staff of the reception centre can look at the skills and the plans of a person and at the possibilities in a certain municipality or area.

Because the staff of the reception centre has *close contacts with municipalities* for settlement, the transfer of a file and portfolio of a person to a municipality is easy. The file and portfolio really get the function of giving "references" of a person in the next part of his or her integration. And a person with a permit can be well prepared on settlement in a certain municipality.

8.4 Return

The UDI has a contract with the IOM, which says they will visit each centre twice a year to organise *information meetings for different language groups*. I think meetings like this on a regular basis do work out positively. People talk about the subject return with each other. On the other hand giving information in groups can make it harder for individuals to react or ask questions. The pressure of a group can for example make it hard to be positive about return. The IOM also has special opening hours for consults, but the office is quite far away for most of the residents of the reception centres.

Showing a *DVD of the IOM* in an information meeting about a real story of a person repatriating, is I think a good measure to get discussion and to make voluntary return with support of the IOM more concrete.

There is no *required and specified method of individual guiding and coaching*, following up a negative answer in the asylum procedure of a person. The staff of a centre knows the individual residents very well and knows about their stage in the procedure, so in all contacts the procedure and the option of return can be a subject of the discussion. I think people are quite open about it and often talk about it.

In the information programme there is attention for '*children and return*'. There are special information meetings about the subject for youngsters and with parents the counsellor talks about 'how to speak with children about return'. I think it is important to have special attention for this subject.

Like in The Netherlands it is clear that in Norway the last part of the procedure and *what to do when there is a final negative answer*, stays a difficult subject. In the Norwegian reception centres people are not forced to leave the centres, unless they are escorted to the country of origin. There is the same struggle about how to deal with residents with rejected asylum applications in reception centres as in



the Netherlands. Norway obviously doesn't have the answers as well, but I like the Norwegian policy to let people stay in reception centres better than the policy in The Netherlands to put them on the street. In Norway a policy for a Waiting Centre will be developed now, for people who have to return. I think it is interesting to see if the policy in Norway for these centres will be similar to the Dutch policy for the Departure Centres in The Netherlands.

8.5 Basic reception facilities, rules and regulations

In the reception centres I visited there are open *offices and frequent contacts* with residents. Employees do not use walkie-talkies like in the Dutch centres and people can walk in and out easily except when there are meetings.

The *small scale of reception centres* contributes to more personal contacts between staff and residents. Employees know about individual skills, competences of a person and about the personal situation (concerning background, procedure etc.) of the residents. This makes it easier to stimulate participation, to speak directly with people about for example return and responsibilities in the centre and about personal plans of residents for the future.

The COA, the Dutch reception organisation at the moment is developing new policy to *motivate people to be active and to follow obligatory programmes* by a regulation of "stimulants and sanctions". It seems to me that the COA chooses to work out in detail a strict programme for residents of reception centres with little escape possibilities by arranging everything in fixed rules and regulations. In the reception centres in Norway I saw that most residents follow the information programmes, most people participate in cleaning and lots of residents are active in organising activities. It appears that this is not a result of regulating everything in detail and using regulated sanctions or stimulants. Obviously people are motivated as a result of the investment in personal contacts, in giving people responsibilities, using competences of individuals and maybe also because of the investment in making the programmes (like the information programme) really interesting.



9. Epilogue

I tried to make a summary in this report about the reception and integration of Asylum Seekers in Norway. During the exchange programme I got an image about the way the reception in Norway is organised in general and with a main focus at the way the integration of asylum seekers in the reception centres and after settlement is stimulated. In the last chapter I mentioned some of the things I noticed and found interesting.

There's a lot more to tell and there are a lot more interesting aspects of the reception and integration of asylum seekers in Norway. (See appendix 3 for links to some more information.)
I hope this report made more people curious about it.



Appendix 1

The Exchange Programme

Programme week 1

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Focus: Presentation of the Norwegian reception system (by Gunn)	Focus: The role and responsibility of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Meeting at UDI's regional office in Narvik with director Bjørn Fridfeldt, Paul Knudsen and Jo Aurvoll	Focus: Introduction to Heimly Reception Centre (by manager Vidar Torheim)	Focus: Similarities and differences. A comparison of the reception systems in the Netherlands, Ireland and Norway. Meeting with the staff at Heimly	Focus: Settlement and Integration. Presentation of the Introductory programme. Meeting with the head-master at the Norwegian language centre in Finnsnes
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Focus: Presentation of the Irish and Dutch reception systems (by Freida and Erna)	From Narvik to Finnsnes by car	Marking of the 3-years anniversary of Heimly (with invited guests from the local municipality*)	Focus: Cooperation with the local community. Meeting with the chairman of the Troms County and several NGO's	Focus: The Information Programme for asylum seekers in reception centres (by information officer Anne Grete Normann)

* The guests from Ireland and the Netherlands give a presentation of the reception system in their countries.

Programme week 2



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>Focus: Introduction to Lødingen Reception Centre (by manager Zhanna Bøgeberg)</p>	<p>Focus: Employment. Meeting with the representative of Aetat (The Employment Office) and the leader of the local business community</p> <p>Meeting with the Mayor of Lødingen and other representatives for the local municipality</p>	<p>Departure to the Lofoten Islands</p>	<p>Exchange of experiences ideas and dilemmas with particular focus on residents' participation in and outside the reception centre / empowerment (with the staff of Lødingen Reception Centre)</p>	<p>From Harstad to the airport Evenes. Departure.</p>
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
<p>Focus: Presentation of the Irish and Dutch reception systems (by Freida and Erna) Focus: The voluntary return / repatriation programme (by the IOM) Focus: Cooperation with the local community. Meeting with local NGO's</p> <p>Evening: Presentation of the project "The Refugee Guide" by the Norwegian Red Cross</p>	<p>Focus: Education and language training. Meeting with the head master of the local secondary school/ adult education centre</p> <p>Focus: Residents' participation: Meeting with the residents' council</p>	<p>Exchange of experiences, ideas and dilemmas with particular focus on: the asylum process, integration, cooperation with the local municipality and settlement (with the staff of Lødingen Reception Centre)</p>	<p>Arrival from Lofoten.</p> <p>From Lødingen to Harstad</p>	



Appendix 2

Article of the local press about the celebration of the 3 years anniversary of Heimly



» Å hvile på sine laurbær er like farlig som å hvile i snoen. Du slummer inn, og før mens du sover.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)
Østerriksk filosof



«Ryddesjau». Når det går mot vår kommer nye fram i lys og da både ber og skal det ryddes i alle kroker og trolkar. Svisdram Rår AS i de gamle melnikkalene på Finnsnes er intet unntak fra regelen.
FOTO: STAM JAKOBSEN

Mønstermottak feiret seg selv

FINNSNES: I går fylte Heimly Mottaksenter tre år. – Heimly er et mønsterforetak, sier administrerende direktør i Hero.

Ingunn Bendiksen

Jubilanten ble feiret med brask og bram i auditoriet til Metodistkirka. Representanter fra Leivik kommune, Finnsnes Næringsforum, naboer til mottaket – og selvfølgelig ansatte og beboere på Heimly – deltok i selskapet. Til sammen var det rundt 100 fremmøtte og taler, musikk, dans og sang sto på programmet. – I en turbulent tid hvor tallet på asylsøkere synker, og skaper usikkerhet om videre drift ved mange asylmottak, utmerker Heimly seg som et mønstermottak, påpeker administrerende direktør Ahmed Bozgil i Hero mottak og kompetanse som driver Heimly.

550 asylsøkere

I fjor la Utlendingsdirektoratet (UDI) ned 40 av totalt 137 asylmottak. Fire av disse ble drevet av Hero.

Helt siden oppstart har Heimly fylt kravene fra UDI. De har satset på kvalitet, nytenking og videreutvikling og samarbeidet med Leivik kommune har også vært svært bra. Jeg frykter ikke for deres framtid, understreker Bozgil.

Ifølge mottaksleder Vidar Torheim har 550 asylsøkere hatt Heimly som hjem i kortere eller lengre perioder i løpet av disse tre årene.

– Under oppstart var det sterke reaksjoner mot mottaket, men de kraftige røstene har nå forstummet, forteller Torheim og fikk støtte fra leder i Finnsnes Næringsforum Alf Tråsdahl.

– De tilbakemeldingene jeg har fått er udeelt positive og jeg er stolt av det arbeidet som dere har utført på Heimly, sier han.

Inkludering

Ifølge Torheim er målet ved mottaket ikke å sette skillelinjer mellom ansatte og beboere.

– Inkludering og samarbeid står sentralt. Vi har blant annet et samarbeidsråd, egen barnebase og beboere har brannvakt. De som ønsker det får norskundervisning, deltar i fargerik fotball



Mønsterforetak. Administrerende direktør i Hero, Ahmed Bozgil, beskriver Heimly Mottaksenter som et mønsterforetak. ALE
FOTO: INGUNN BENDIKSEN

og i forkant av hver 17. mai rydder vi sentrum samt at vi har egen plass i toget. Men julestisen på Heimly er ikke fra Nordpolen. Han kommer fra Libya, ler Torheim.

Freda Delaney fra Irland og Erna Muller fra Nederland deltar i et europeisk utvekslingsprogram om innvandring og deltok også i feiringen.

– Selv om vi nylig er ankommet har vi allerede lagt merke til atmosfæren av engasjement og dedikasjon blant de ansatte. De inkluderer beboerne i de daglige gjøremål. Dette vil gjøre deres integreringsprosess i samfunnet mye lettere – en lærdom vi også kan dra nytte av, forklarer de.

Ingunn Bendiksen @bivestlaget.no
77 89 20 83

Deltok. Nederlandsk Erna Muller (til venstre) og irske Freda Delaney deltok også på bursdagsfeiringen av Heimly Mottaksenter.



Feiret av likesinnede. Barna fra mottaket deltok også i bursdagsfeiringen av treårsfeiringen i går. De toget inn i auditoriet med flagg fra hjemlandene til ære for den unge julestisen.



Dans. Disse to byråsjenske barna danset til ære for jubilianten.



Appendix 3

Relevant links

Norwegian Directorate of Immigration:

www.udi.no

Hero, Organisation for Reception of Asylum Seekers:

www.hero.no

Norwegian Refugee Council

www.nrc.no

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

www.odin.dep.no

European Council on Refugees and Exiles

www.ecre.org/

IOM International Organization for Migration (Norway)

www.iom.no

International Centre for Migration Policy Development

www.icmpd.org

Statistics Norway

www.ssb.no

Children and war foundation. Website with information about an interesting project (not mentioned in this report), which took place in the reception centres of Hero for children with war traumas.

www.childrenandwar.org

Dutch Immigration and Nationalisation Service

www.ind.nl

Dutch Organisation for the Reception of Asylum Seekers

www.coa.nl