

***Reception of Asylum Seekers
in Sweden***

enaro
EUROPEAN NETWORK OF ASYLUM RECEPTION
ORGANISATIONS

**A Report from the ENARO-exchange programme
in April 2005**

by

**Ingrid Skavhaug
Hero Mottak og Kompetanse AS
Norway**

<i>Reception of Asylum Seekers</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>in Sweden</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Ingrid Skavhaug</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>1. Introduction</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2. The Swedish Migration Board</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2.1. Ideology</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2.2. Organisation</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>2.3. Directorate</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>2.4. Local Board Offices</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>3. Asylum and migration in Sweden</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>4. Processing an asylum case</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>4.1. The Aliens Appeals Board</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>4.2. Custody</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>4.3. "PUT"</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>5. Pending a decision</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>6. Benefits</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>6.1. LMA – card</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>7. Division Karlskrona</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>7.1. The Migration Board case officer</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>7.2. In charge of housing</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>7.3. Responsible for children</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>7.4. Organized activities</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>7.5. The Reception service</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>7.6. The Economy officer</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>7.8. The Secretary</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>7.9. The Administration</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>7.10. The Head of Division Karlskrona</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>7.11. Asylum Application Officers</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>7.12. Information-work</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>8. Reflections</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>9. Appendixes</i>	<i>13</i>

Vang in Valdres, Norway. November 2005

Preface

This report is from my visit to the Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket), division Karlskrona. I was there two weeks this spring, from Monday 18.april to Friday 29.April.

Through these two weeks the Migration Board, Karlskrona organised the ENARO exchange programme for me coming from Norway, and Luis Martin Garcia Fernandez, from Spain.

My background due to the work with asylum seekers is six and a half year as Information Counsellor in a reception centre in Norway, run by the Reception Organisation Hero. My main responsibility is the Information program, compulsory for all asylum seekers as long as they live in the reception centre.

My special interest for the exchange was to learn how the reception of asylum seekers was organized in our neighbour country Sweden, how they did the information and how they communicated and cooperated with the asylum seekers.

I want to thank the Migration Board in Karlskrona, for their hospitality and for the way they organised our visit. As a part of the program we also got the opportunity to learn about the very special history of Karlskrona as a Naval Base.

I also want to thank Hero for giving me this opportunity to participate in the Enaro Exchange Programme. It is a great inspiration!

Ingrid Skavhaug
Information counsellor
Vang Reception-centre in Valdres, Norway
Reception-organisation: HMK (Hero)

1. Introduction

When I arrived Karlskrona in the afternoon the 18th, I did in fact not know anything about the town and only a little about the Swedish Migration Board. It was late in the afternoon, so I just went for a walk to see if I could find the refugee centre. I knew it was about 800 asylum seekers living there, so I expected quite a big refugee centre!

The centre where I work in Norway is centralised, which means that up to 140 asylum seekers are living in the same building while they are waiting for their answer from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). It is in an old Tourist Hotel on the countryside. The municipality Vang has only 1650 inhabitants. In the reception centre we work very closely with the asylum seekers every day and our results depend on how well we manage to motivate them to participate and cooperate.

Karlskrona was very beautiful and reminded me of the bigger old towns in Europe! The town is built on 33 islands. In the year 1679, the King needed a new Naval Base to control the Swedish territories on the other side of the Baltic, so he started to build Karlskrona. The Naval town of Karlskrona was designated as a World Heritage Site in 1998 because, as the committee said: "Karlskrona is an exceptionally well preserved example of a European naval base...."

I found the office of the Migration Board in one of the main streets, but it did not look like a Refugee centre. I looked forward to the next day, to find out more about this this!

The next morning I was welcomed by the staff in the Migration Board, division Karlskrona. Eva Franzèn informed me about the program (Appendix 1) and gave me an introduction about the Swedish Migration Board and about the division Karlskrona. This was the main office of the division Karlskrona. They are responsible for the reception of asylum seekers, but nobody was living in this building! The asylum-seekers lived among Swedish people in different municipalities. Gunnel Segerfeldt is the head of the division.

2. The Swedish Migration Board

The Migration Board is the central governing authority for foreigners in Sweden. This means that they are responsible for

- permits for people visiting and settling in Sweden
- the asylum process, from application to a residence permit or to a voluntary return home
- citizenship affairs
- helping out with voluntary return migration
- international work in the EU, UNHCR and other collaborative bodies
- Ensuring that all the relevant public authorities work together satisfactorily.

2.1. Ideology

The Migration Board expresses the ideology for the way they are organized: It deserves respect having had the courage to leave his or her country to search protection, or a better life, often in another part of the world. To show this respect, every asylum seeker is supposed to be treated individually and not as a group. The authority is not supposed to control the asylum seeker out in the society. It is a goal to make the length of time it takes to reach a decision as

short as possible not to brake down their self-respect and to have an open and legal process. The life is supposed to be as normal as possible for the asylum seeker pending the decision. The total organisation reflects this ideology.

2.2. Organisation

The Swedish Migration Board is headed by its Director-General, Janna Valik, assisted by the Deputy Director-General and the Director for Legal Affairs.

The consultative Senior Management also includes the five Heads of Division.

- Asylum
- Visas, Work Permits and Residence Permits
- Citizenship
- Planning of Reception of Asylum Seekers and Supervision
- Administration and International Issues

(Appendix 2)

2.3. Directorate

The Directorate of the Migration Board is appointed by the Government and comprises representatives of most of the parliamentary parties and of the relevant staff organisations. It is chaired by the Director-General. It monitors operations to ensure that the Board is performing efficiently and in accordance with its mandate. The Directorate approves the annual audit plan and also supplies the Government with annual reports and preliminary budget figures each year. In addition, it determines standard practice for the granting of visas.

It does not, however, involve itself in the day to day activities of the Board, nor does it take decisions on individual applications for asylum, etc.

2.4. Local Board Offices

Local Board offices are organized in the division ASYLUM. They are located in the various regions and accept applications for residence permits, for alien's passports and for travel documents, grant extensions to residence permits and provide information on various matters.

Everyone working with the asylum seekers is working for the Migration Board. All the divisions belong to one head office. They do not have regional offices like in Norway. The reason for this is to assure that the Migration Board acts equally all over the country.

The Asylum seeker can decide if he wants to live privately (EBO) or in flats hired by the Migration Board (ABO). Many want to live in the biggest towns. For that reason the Board has special offices here, to serve asylum seekers living in their own residences.

3. Asylum and migration in Sweden

Sweden is a party to the UN **Refugee Convention**. This means that Sweden must grant **asylum** to persons defined in the Convention as refugees.

Convention refugees are those who have reason to fear persecution in their native country due to

- their race
- their nationality
- their affiliation to a particular social group
- Their religious or political opinions.

Under Swedish law, persons who are not convention refugees may also qualify for asylum. This category is described in law as ‘persons in **need of protection**’. Persons in need of protection are those who have left their native country and

- have good reason to fear capital punishment, torture, etc.
- need protection due to war or an environmental disaster in their native country
- fear persecution due to their gender or homosexuality

People with strong **humanitarian grounds** may also be granted permission to stay in Sweden. This applies for instance to those suffering from a grave illness for which no treatment is available in their own country.

The rule is that a person granted asylum in Sweden is given a permanent residence permit (PUT), which means that he or she can stay here for good. Alternatively, under certain circumstances, Sweden may grant a temporary, fixed-term permit. When the war in Kosovo was at its height in the 1990s, for instance, 3,700 people from the region were granted permission to remain in Sweden for 11 months.

According to the Dublin convention, asylum seekers arriving in Sweden may be sent back to another EU country if they travelled there first.

In 2004 the amount of asylum seekers was reduced also in Sweden. 23 141 applied for asylum. This was $\frac{1}{4}$ less than in 2003 when 31 355 people applied (App. 3). The Board also gave less permissions to stay in Sweden, because a bigger part of the asylum seekers did not have good enough reasons. 6 140 asylum seekers were granted permanent residence permit. The reasons giving PUT was divided like this:

- 9 % Asylum – refugee
- 49 % Humanitarian reasons
- 13 % other needs for protection
- 29% Quota refugees

(App. 4)

Voluntary return increased with 10 % from 2003. About 10 000 people returned.

Most asylum seekers came from Serbia and Montenegro, and African nations.

(App.5)

4. Processing an asylum case

Asylum seekers arriving in Sweden contact the Migration Board in Malmoe, Gothenburg or Stockholm (Norrkoeping). As soon as possible after asylum seekers submit their applications, they examine whether their reasons for applying are adequate. This first goal of the examination is to find out who needs a normal procedure and who will get an answer very fast. In transit they are supposed to be just in five days. They are living in Youth Hostels and get the food served. After this they go to a flat, private or rented by the Migration Board, to wait for the answer. An applicant sometimes meets the case officer several times before Migration Board staff are in a position to decide whether the person's grounds for seeking asylum are strong enough to warrant him or her being allowed to stay in Sweden.

If they judge that the asylum application may be turned down, they ensure that he or she is provided with legal assistance in the form of a public counsel. Such counsel is paid by the Migration Board to help asylum seekers present their grounds for asylum.

Asylum seekers requiring it are also provided with an interpreter in their dealings with the authorities.

The length of time it takes to reach a decision depends on such factors as the number of asylum seekers who have arrived in recent months and how complicated their cases are, but Sweden are close to reach their goal, six month in average

4.1. The Aliens Appeals Board

If the applicant does not have strong enough grounds for asylum, the application is turned down and the person concerned refused entry. The applicant can then either accept the decision and return home, or appeal to the Aliens Appeals Board. The majority of the rejected asylum seekers make an appeal. This means a new period of waiting. Many asylum seekers have to wait a year or two for their cases to be settled once and for all. If the Aliens Appeals Board also decides that the person's grounds for asylum are inadequate, the appeal is turned down. The applicant is then supposed to leave Sweden voluntarily. The Migration Board can provide certain kinds of assistance, such as arranging and paying for the journey home. If someone fails to return home of their own accord, the police are called in to ensure that they leave Sweden. Only 6 % of the appeals turned out successfully last year.

4.2. Custody

In Sweden it is possible to keep asylum seekers in detention in order to investigate their identity, though only if there is reason to believe that the person will go into hiding in order to avoid having to leave. There are 7 custodies in Sweden. By March 2005, 255 asylum seekers were kept in custody, 2 children included. The Migration Board can judge 2 Month custody. Children can stay maximum 2 days. The Migration Board strives to make the period in custody as short as possible and the living conditions as normal as possible.

4.3. "PUT"

Those whose applications for asylum are granted, either by the Migration Board or by the Aliens Appeals Board, are normally given a permanent residence permit (PUT). This means that you are entitled to settle in Sweden for good. Within eight weeks after given PUT, the goal is that a local authority has provided a home.

Local authorities are required to draw up an introduction plan for each of these newcomers. To offset the costs, the local authority receives a government grant for each person it takes in.

5. Pending a decision

People who have applied for asylum in Sweden and are awaiting a decision can choose whether they wish to live with friends or relatives or at one of the reception centres. More than half of them choose to arrange their own accommodation. In March this year 36 437 asylum seekers were living in Sweden. 17 207 were living in flats rented by the Migration Board and 19 232 in own accommodations. Most reception centres consist of ordinary flats in which asylum seekers cater for themselves. Single asylum seekers have to share a room. As an example a flat with two bedrooms, living room and kitchen will house six single persons. A family may be provided with a room of their own, but in that case, they are expected to share the flat with others.

During the waiting period all asylum seekers (including those who have arranged their own accommodation) are required to take part in some form of organized activity. Such activities may include learning Swedish or English, using computers, sewing, carpentry, practical training or helping fellow countrymen to settle in. Asylum seekers are allowed to work if the Migration Board's handling time is expected to be longer than four months.

Those with money of their own have to pay for their upkeep. But anyone without funds can receive benefit in the form of a daily allowance.

6. Benefits

Asylum seekers can get help with the following::

- Health checks, emergency medical and dental care. Asylum seekers pay SEK 50 of the patient's fee out of their own pockets and SEK 50 for medicine on prescription. For a medical transportation they pay a maximum of SEK 40. The Migration Board can compensate for costs over 400 SEK. Asylum seeking children have the same access to medical and dental care as children residing in Sweden.
- Money. Asylum seekers lacking money of their own may be granted a daily allowance by the Migration Board. These are the rates:

Adults:

SEK 71/day

Cohabiting partners:

SEK 37–50/day (from the third child onwards the amount is halved)

Children (aged 0–17):

SEK 37–50/day (from the third child onwards the amount is halved)

These sums are supposed to cover food, clothing and shoes, leisure time activities, health and toiletries, etc.

Asylum seekers who fail to turn up for interviews or who otherwise impede investigation of their cases, or who fail to take part in the activities organized for them, risk having their daily allowances reduced, with a maximum reduction of 24 SEK/day.

Totally an asylum seeker incurred a cost of 200 SEK for the society in 2004.

6.1. LMA – card

This plastic card is given to all asylum seekers and other foreigners who have the right to receive money. With this card they can withdraw their money in a supermarket.

(App. 6)

7. Division Karlskrona

(Appendix 7)

Most reception centres used to have big concentration of asylum seekers living in the same local area. Karlskrona reception centre used to have big concentration out in the suburbs around the city. The Migration Board had its own activities connected to the places the asylum seekers lived, like cafés, kindergartens, schools, doing handicraft, workshops....

In 1998 they changed the organisation. The goal, to have the asylum seeker in the centre and to give him or her a life as normal as possible, now reflects the organisation.

1 000 asylum seekers are living in Karlskrona, 800 in flats hired by the Migration Board and 200 in their own accommodations. The reception centre is geographically divided into three quite big areas; Karlskrona – 388 places, Ronneby - 200 places and Karlshamn – 216 places. The reception centre is responsible also for the asylum seekers who live in own accommodations.

Each area has a group of people with different responsibility for the asylum seeker. The members of this group have their base in the main office in Karlskrona, but are spending most of the time out, where the asylum seekers are living (except the case officer). The group consists of:

- Charge of house (Områdesansvarlig)
- Case officer (Mottagningshandleggare)
- Responsible for children (Barnhandleggare)
- Responsible for the organized activities. (OV-handleggare)

Every week the group has a meeting where also the police usually participates. Important information may come up, and normally it is the case officer who takes contact with the officers in the Asylum division, to share information.

7.1. The Migration Board case officer

The case officer is following the asylum seeker through the process and can be contacted when necessary. He or she gives the main information about rights and duties. The officer is in the staff of the reception centre. Already in the first meeting with the asylum seeker I saw how different her position was compared to mine. The setting in the office is different. It is very clear that the officer is representing the authorities. The officer has the documents about the asylum application on her desk and asks questions as if the asylum interview is still continuing. The main question in all situations where information is given, is if the asylum

seeker has any possibility to bring any kind of identity document (ID). Only 6 or 8 % bring ID when they reach the Swedish border. It is important for the arrangement of the return if the last decision is negative. If the answer is positive, it is necessary at the moment he is applying for citizenship.

The officer informs the asylum seeker about the decision. The decision is not sent by post. The case officer works closely with the police, IOM and the Asylum division. She is the one who may go with the asylum seeker out of the country, or at least into the plain, if the application is rejected. The case officer is responsible for about 100 asylum seekers each. An example is the area of Karlskrona has about 400 asylum seekers and the responsible group has four case officers.

7.2. In charge of housing

This person is responsible for the practical matters where the asylum seekers are living. He is the one who meet the newcomers and bring them to their flat. He has a local office in the area that is open some hours a week where he gives the first information about the practical things important for the daily life, rules and regulations and the local society. Already the first day he gives them an appointment with the case officer in Karlskrona.

His main duties was to visit the flats, especially where the single were living. The Migration Board bought the necessary cleaning equipment to these flats, which gave him an opportunity to visit the flats. As far as possible they tried to put people from the same nationality in the same flat, but it was not always possible. Of course problems could occur when six young men, often not knowing each other and maybe also from different nations are put together. If there were not too many flats with asylum seekers in the same building it normally went ok. But with two or three flats with the same entrance it could become noisy.

A very important part of this job was to keep a good relationship with the neighbourhood, the company from whom they rent the flats and to the caretaker. He had to listen to complaints, attend the meetings and always have a good dialog with both sides. He had to drive a lot! The day I went with him we drove 200km. It is a good thing that the cars of The Migration Board are Volvos! Maybe it was by chance, but both the responsible in this area had their earlier work experience from working in prison.

7.3. Responsible for children

The areas had one or two persons responsible for children. The Migration Board used to have their own kindergartens for asylum seekers, an activity which made very good contacts between the asylum seekers. Now her role is to arrange contact between the families and the school, kindergarten and healthcare. Parents with small children do not have to go to school, but they have a duty to meet with their child in an open kindergarten. If they do not meet the daily allowances will be reduced. We visited one kindergarten which was open from 08.30 – 12.00. Here could all parents come with their children in the age of 0 – 5 years old. The majority was Swedish. It was very popular both for children and parents. The asylum seekers felt that this was more a service than a duty.

The children of asylum seekers do not have to go to school, but through giving information about the UN convention for children, they try to motivate parents to send their children to school. The responsible for children also works as a connection between the family and the school. She also works closely with the local nurse who is the main contact for the asylum seekers healthcare.

7.4. Organized activities

Pending a decision the asylum seekers have to participate in an organized activity. In this job the responsible is supposed to make an individual plan for every asylum seeker in her area. Each had a responsibility for 100 people. Normally every asylum seeker starts in school where he learns Swedish and about the society. Every half year she checks status. If he is one not doing any progress in school or because of other reasons, she will try to find another activity. In this job they have to be good with people! They also must be in good connection with the school, municipality and different working places.

7.5. The Reception service

The reception service was open every day. Among a lot of duties the reception ordered interpreters for the whole staff. Applications for citizenship were done from here. Asylum seekers could come and ask different questions, and they were sitting here waiting when they had appointment with one of the staff about his or her case.

Because all meetings with the asylum seekers in the main office were arranged, the atmosphere was very calm and quiet upstairs in the offices.

7.6. The Economy officer

Based on reports from the group, all decisions about economy were taken here. Automatically the information were plotted into the data system and when the asylum seeker used his LMA-card in the automat he got the decided amount.

7.8. The Secretary

The whole system was based on a lot of reporting. In transit the Board opens two files for each asylum seeker, one having to do with the asylum application and one for all matters regarding the daily life, individual plan, economy and more.

These files always have to be up to date and therefore takes a lot of time.

7.9. The Administration

One person has the overview of free places. This has to be reported to Malmö (transit) every Friday. Different administrative duties belong to this job and information about the organisation goes out to school classes and others.

7.10. The Head of Division Karlskrona

On the top leading this staff, is the head of the division Karlskrona.

7.11. Asylum Application Officers

In Karlskrona there were two officers working with the applications for asylum. Their head office was in Norrköping but they worked in the same building as the reception centre. They had their lunch together and were colleagues. The asylum seekers in Karlskrona came to this office for meetings regarding their application for asylum.

7.12. Information-work

Sweden has developed a lot of written information. This can be found on the Internet (www.Migrationsverket.se) and printed on different papers called "Facts about..." In transit they receive a booklet with information about the most important an asylum seeker needs to know.

School is compulsory and here they learn about the Swedish society. But the part about the society was less developed. The one who is responsible for the organized activities does give this information but they did not have a standard. It was expected that this should be worked out in the central office in Stockholm.

8. Reflections

I came to Sweden with my image of a reception centre, but met a very different system in Sweden. Respect, helping and giving information to make it possible for the asylum seeker to be as independent as possible is also our guideline in Norway. But it seems like the system in Sweden make it more realistic to reach this goal. In a way they do not keep as much control as in Norway. The fact that the asylum seeker is allowed to hold an ordinary job if the Migration Board's case processing time is expected to be longer than four months, must be very good for his or her mental health!

Other parts of the system I mean are successful:

- Everybody who work with the asylum seekers were working in the Migration Board. My impression was that they were mostly satisfied with that. The feeling of working with the same matter was good.
- The asylum seekers were followed up individually. The system with the groups seemed to work very well and secured good contact, also with the asylum division.
- The decentralized living.
- School and other organized activity.
- Very cheap healthcare (compared with Norway)
- Short case processing time
- The LMA-card for getting money.
- Free day care centre for children, 0 – 5 years old.

Challenges:

- The files are supposed to be a tool for the work every day. It requires a lot of registration and takes a lot of time.
- Some felt the work less motivating today, compared with the period the Migration Board had its own activities.
- The contact with the asylum seeker was very formal for most of the staff. Those who worked with children and organized activities, and in the reception, had the best opportunity to get in contact and work directly with people.
- Children with stress reactions and apathy.
- Decentralized housing loose the possibility to make the good social life that we can have in a reception centre. When the asylum seekers live in the same building they will keep an eye on each other. It is almost impossible for a child to be isolated. There are many adults and many children to play with.
- Children do not have to go to school. Then the parents may keep them home.
- Because you work in the Migration Board you are supposed to inform the Board about details you are told if they may influence the asylum process. It can become a personal conflict this feeling of being an informer.

I left Sweden with an impression that it maybe is better **to be** asylum seeker in Sweden, but more motivating to **work with** the asylum seekers in Norway. Our two countries are different in many ways. It is not fare to compare directly. One thing is the housing situation; Sweden

has more houses which make it easier to have decentralized housing. But about work, maybe we could do as Sweden does, make it possible to work legal if the case processing time becomes long. We could also let the asylum seekers go to school again and/or other activities. To me it also seems interesting to work for a more open process handling the asylum application.

Let me end the report with the words of Gunnel, The head of division Karlskrona: "I am **so** happy having left the system with centralized refugee centres! Now, the asylum seekers dress up, and are coming proudly to meetings in office of Karlskrona. We have got rid of the "slippers".

Thank you very much for two very interesting weeks together with you all in Karlskrona!

Ingrid Skavhaug
Vang mottakssenter
November 2005

9. Appendixes