

Final Report ENARO visit to Sweden 2004
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Introduction

Within the framework of the ENARO project, I visited the Swedish Migration Board (*Migrationsverket*) in Karlskrona in the last two weeks of April 2004. The assignment they gave me was: find out how to motivate asylum seekers to return voluntarily to their country of origin, how this is organised, and how the case manager deals with it.

To prepare myself for my visit I intently read the reports of Anette Diender and Maurice Beljaars, who visited Sweden in 2002 and 2003, and these reports gave me a wealth of information. Before my departure I shared my mission with my Swedish tutor Susan Poka, and when I arrived in Karlskrona, she cordially welcomed me, and we went through the programme for the coming two weeks.

The programme was focussed on working closely with the handling officers (our *trajectbegeleiders*), and visiting the various locations where repatriation was an important item, including a detention unit and an application centre, called the Trans-unit.

I was really made welcome during these weeks; everyone was willing to let me take a look behind the scenes without any limitations. For this, I am very grateful to the *Migretsverket*.

General information

As you may already know, the Migrationsverket is an organisation that takes care of both the reception of asylum seekers and the assessment of their request for asylum. The advantage is that the lines are shorter and clearer.

When an asylum seeker is admitted to the procedure, the accommodation is carefully selected. They can stay with friends or relatives, and if this option is not open to them they will be accommodated with the assistance of the Migrationsverket. So far, the Migrationsverket has been very busy replacing the central reception system (the AZC in the Netherlands) by decentralised accommodation. In Karlskrona, some 875 asylum seekers are now accommodated in apartments spread all over the municipality. The main reason for this approach is because the

Migrationsverket is convinced that asylum seekers are better able to concentrate on their own procedure, and therefore also on the consequences of a negative decision.

In general, the asylum seekers stay at one and the same place during the time that they are accommodated. This has the advantage that the handling officer can follow the client during the whole procedure; fewer changes create more transparency both for the asylum seeker and for the staff.

Aspects of the handling officer's attitude

My assignment was so interesting because I had to find out how the handling officer could activate rejected asylum seekers to return to their countries. Such being the case, much energy is put into the initial phase of the procedure.

The asylum seeker is confronted with his return from day one; return as a consequence of a negative assessment of the request for asylum. In fact, there are only two possibilities: the asylum seeker is granted a status, or the asylum seeker is rejected and must go back. They express the expectation that the rejected asylum seeker will return voluntarily and/or independently. There is no other option. The staff of the Migrationsverket may assist them in their return: tickets are financed, the trip is planned by mutual consultation, and in some cases they provide an escort, depending on the number of persons and their ages. In fact, returning to their country of origin is an item that is discussed throughout the procedure. Staff also are trying to hammer into them the importance of the proper documents. They assume that 80% of the persons that have to return do have a document that can be used to travel back again. All this is done in a confronting but respectful way, and wherever I looked in the organisation, all staff displayed the same attitude. As an outsider, I found this an outstanding feature: one and the same expression in word and gesture of all staff, and on all fronts. I had the feeling that the Swedish members of staff have more confidence in how and what decisions are taken when referring to applications for asylum. And this also becomes entirely clear to the asylum seeker: if you return voluntarily/independently we will help you; if you do not co-operate, we will hand you over to the police and you return handcuffed. This may sound hard, but I never caught anyone acting bluntly without respect. I think 'strict' is the word that is here best suited.

Training courses for staff

Every new staff member takes an introduction programme, which includes an exploration of the organisation, a visit to departments and working with colleagues. Extra training is provided when the policy has changed. Participation in knowledge exchange between colleagues is standard, and therefore a compulsory item in consultations. This is a good way of training each other in handling difficult situations or clients. Practising with actors for role-playing and coaching is done several times a year.

Registration of data and information

In Sweden, all information and personal data of the asylum seeker and his application is recorded in a system, called the *Individplan*. All staff members at all levels can use this system: the person who does the intake, the decision officer, the handling officer, and the police. They all have their own authorisation/licence and can enter the system.

When an asylum seeker enters the country his photo and fingerprints are taken. The photograph is processed in the *Individplan*, and is placed on his identity card. The fingerprints are sent to the Luxembourg-located Schengen Information System to be checked.

When the person responsible has taken a decision about the application, it is ticked off and the decision is entered into the system. This means that the decision can be consulted by all members of staff. If an asylum seeker has not had the first decision, it is impossible to tick off the item of 'information first negative decision'. When the program is in use, the procedure can be changed. For instance, if it is apparent that a request for asylum was a Schengen claim after all, the person with a licence for the program can change the data, and the steps to be taken become automatically clear. All in all a very convenient and easy-reference system for all persons involved.

Some figures.

In the year 2003, a total of 31,355 asylum seekers were staying in Sweden.

The Migrationsverket helped 8,647 persons with their repatriation.

The police deported 1511 persons, and 7,380 persons were reported to have left with an unknown destination (*'abskondet'* - absconded).

One could say that the number of asylum seekers that repatriated with the help of the Migrationsverket is rather high. Anette Diender, who visited Sweden in 2002 within the framework of the ENARO project, summed up a number of aspects that contributed to these high numbers. She also mentioned the persuasiveness of the staff, who also display a high degree of trust in the decisions taken. The members of staff approach their clients in a penetrating, confronting manner and try to enforce their cooperation, which often proves to be successful. I can fully subscribe to these factors, and I found that the staff members are amply equipped with the right baggage: conversation techniques, information about the home countries, confidence in the decisions taken, facilitating the return trip, all this with the objective to induce the rejected asylum seeker to return to his country of origin.

Recommendations.

As a result of my visit to Sweden I would like to make the following recommendations:

- The registration system must become a univocal system: the same registration system for COA [Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), the IND (Immigration and Naturalisation Services)
- Handling officers assigned to the task of 'return' must have more power to facilitate their return, together with the IOM and the Immigration and Naturalisation Services.
- Interviews during reception must more explicitly handle the issue of 'return', and the duty to comply. We must no longer allow the asylum seeker's 'noncommittal attitude' (see also Anette Diender's report ENARO 2002).
- Asylum seekers must have more opportunity to do training courses and to work: keep them active, this keeps them involved. (See also Anette Diender's report ENARO 2002).

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