

# Reception of Asylum Seekers in Denmark



**A Report from the ENARO-exchange programme  
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**by**

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## 1. Introduction

The exchange programme to Denmark is arranged by ENARO, European Network of Asylum Reception Organizations which is an association fostering cooperation between ten European organizations involved in asylum reception. The host organization Danish Red Cross is a member of ENARO and is actively involved in these exchange programmes.

The main goal of this programme is to see how the Danish reception system functions, how it is organized and how the integration aspects are addressed. By comparing the system in Norway with the Danish system we may get new ideas which may help both the reception organizations and the residents.

The exchange programme consisted of a twelve day visit to Denmark, of which one day was at Danish Red Cross head office in Copenhagen and eleven days were at Centre Jelling. The whole programme was organized by the HR consultant Maja Rettrup Andersen in the head office. She took us to the head office and explained generally about Danish Red Cross and its asylum department, Danish asylum policies and took us to the Cultural House.

During these twelve days I had the opportunity to learn a lot about the Danish asylum reception system. The experience was both useful and impressive even though it was more or less similar to the Norwegian system. By seeing the problem and challenges in a different way in a different location, helped me to get new ideas of how we can organize new activities to the residents in addition to the existing activities.

I would like to thank Maja Rettrup Andersen for her excellent coordination in organizing the exchange programme and Henny Jørgensen for involving us in all her tasks so that we could learn their way of organizing reception and accommodation of asylum seekers. And I want to thank all the staffs and residents of Jelling and Thyregod for their great hospitality.

### **Participants:**

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## 2. General asylum procedure in Denmark

An asylum seeker who enters Denmark, and applies for asylum, is called a “**Spontaneous asylum seeker**”.

When a spontaneous asylum seeker enters Denmark, he or she must contact the police. It is the National Commissioner of Police to establish the nationality and identity of the asylum seeker. The Police will fingerprint and photograph the asylum seeker, as well as record an official statement from the applicant, including a statement on the route he or she traveled to Denmark.

During the examination phase of an asylum case, the applicant is usually assigned to an accommodation centre. Accommodation centers are spread throughout Denmark, most of them are operated by the Danish Red Cross.

### **Examination of an asylum application**

If the Danish Immigration Service determines that an asylum application is to be examined in Denmark, the Immigration Service itself will decide hereafter whether or not the applicant will be granted asylum. The asylum seeker must fill out an official application form for asylum, in which he or she can explain in more specific terms about the reason for their application for asylum. After that the Danish Immigration service will hold an interview with the applicant, assisted by an interpreter. During the course of the interview, the asylum seeker has the opportunity to further clarify why he or she is applying asylum in Denmark.

Following the interview, the Danish Immigration Service will deliver a decision, based on an overall assessment of all the relevant information in each individual case. The Immigration Service will consider the statement provided by the asylum seeker, as well as information on conditions in the applicant's country of origin. In most cases, the Immigration Service will be able to reach a decision based on these grounds alone. There may be instances where the Immigration Service requires additional information to reach a decision: if, for example, there is some doubt regarding conditions in a specific country.

### **Three procedures**

Most cases are decided according to so-called **normal procedure**. This means that, if the asylum applicant is rejected, the case is referred to the Refugee Board, which will deliver a final decision in the case.

A minority of cases are considered **manifestly unfounded**. This occurs when the Immigration Service assesses that the applicant clearly cannot be granted asylum in Denmark. These cases are sent to the Danish Refugee Council (NGO), which will deliver a pronouncement on the case. If the Danish Refugee Council agrees with the Immigration

Service that the application is manifestly unfounded, the application will be rejected without contest. On the other hand, if the Danish Refugee Council disagrees, the Immigration Service will generally still reject the application, but will nevertheless refer the matter to the Refugee Board for a final decision.

In certain cases, asylum applications are addressed according to an **expedited version of the manifestly unfounded procedure**. This is when the asylum seeker comes from a country where, according to the most up-to-date information available to the Danish Immigration Service, it is unlikely that the applicant would risk persecution on return. In these cases, the asylum seeker does not fill out an official application form for asylum, and is quickly referred for an interview with the Danish Immigration Service. The Danish Refugee Council will then deliver a pronouncement on the case: if this is in accordance with the findings of the Immigration Service, the application will be rejected as soon as possible. These cases are decided within a few days.

#### **When an asylum seeker is granted a residence permit**

If an applicant is granted asylum, the Danish Immigration Service will decide where he or she is to live in Denmark.

#### **When an asylum seeker is rejected**

If an asylum applicant receives a final rejection, he or she must leave Denmark immediately, but will be granted adequate time to prepare for the departure from the country. Authorities will take into consideration if an applicant is suffering from an acute illness, is in an advanced stage of pregnancy, or has given birth shortly before the final decision. A final rejection means that an applicant does not have any more avenues available to appeal the decision. Rejections delivered by the Refugee Board or by the Immigration Service in so-called 'manifestly unfounded' cases are regarded as final. If a rejected asylum seeker will not leave Denmark voluntarily, it is the responsibility of the police to ensure the applicant's departure.

#### **Residence permit (for protection) on other grounds**

The Ministry of Refugee, Immigration, and Integration Affairs has the authority to grant a temporary residence permit on humanitarian grounds to an asylum seeker who has received a rejection of his or her application for asylum. That said, very few permits of this type are ever actually granted.

### **3. Unaccompanied children**

When children under 18 years of age come to Denmark and seek asylum without their parents, or other adults traveling in place of parents, these children are handled as 'unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.'

#### **What rules apply to unaccompanied children?**

All children can seek asylum in Denmark, although the Danish Aliens Act includes no

special rules for the treatment of asylum applications from children. Unaccompanied children must therefore fulfill the same conditions as other asylum seekers in order to obtain an eventual examination of their applications and subsequent grant of asylum.

However, children are considered a particularly vulnerable group. Therefore, some **special guidelines** for the examination of their applications have been devised. According to these guidelines, asylum applications from children will be examined as quickly as possible, and child applicants will be housed in special accommodation centers with specially trained personnel.

### **Maturity plays a role**

Unaccompanied children will only be permitted to go through an asylum case examination if they are mature enough to do so. If the Danish Immigration Service assesses that a child is not sufficiently mature, the child will be granted a residence permit without examination of his or her asylum application.

### **The child's situation in the country of origin is taken into account**

If a child's application is examined, and the Immigration Service delivers a rejection, the child may, in certain cases, receive a residence permit anyway. This can happen, for example, if the child would have inordinate difficulty surviving in his or her country of origin due to the lack of an adequate support network in the form of family, other adults, public assistance, etc. Information on the child's health and need for particular care or support will also be taken into consideration. Finally, the general situation in the child's country of origin, as for example, conditions of war, will be taken into account.

### **The child will be represented**

every unaccompanied child registered as an asylum seeker in Denmark after 1 April 2003 will be appointed a personal representative to preserve the child's interests. The representative will offer support to the child during the asylum case examination: for example, by accompanying the child during the asylum interview. The representative will also support the child on a more personal level. Once the Danish Immigration Service has established that the applicant is an unaccompanied, underage individual, the Danish Immigration Service will ask the Danish Red Cross to recommend a representative to the local authority, which will formally appoint the representative. The representative will not be affiliated with immigration authorities, and can, for example, be a relative or other private citizen.

### **The child will receive an attorney**

If a child's asylum case is decided according to the manifestly unfounded procedure, the Danish Immigration Service will appoint an attorney to represent the child.

### **Investigation of the child's parents**

Following the child's arrival to Denmark, the Danish Immigration Service will launch an investigation of the child's parents. The investigation may occur in cooperation with the Danish Red Cross, or other similar organization appointed by the Minister for Refugee,

Immigration and Integration Affairs. The investigation requires the explicit consent of the child or his/her personal representative.

### Residence permit

If an unaccompanied child is granted a residence permit, the permit is initially limited to a period of 2 years and 10 months. When the residence permit expires, the child can seek an extension. In order to receive such an extension, the child must continue to fulfil the conditions for residence in Denmark.

## 4. Facts and figures (Figures brought from the Danish Immigration Service's homepage)

The number of persons applying for asylum in Denmark.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2001	1.167	897	969	1.031	957	843	1.087	1.399	1.183	1.149	1.048	782	12.512
2002	779	652	673	574	470	408	382	378	397	506	422	427	6.068
2003	404	420	397	343	381	376	327	460	422	380	355	328	4.593
2004	324	300	296	235	304	288	246	302	292	221	205	222	3.235
2005	192	265	251	214	209	196	154	159	151				1.791

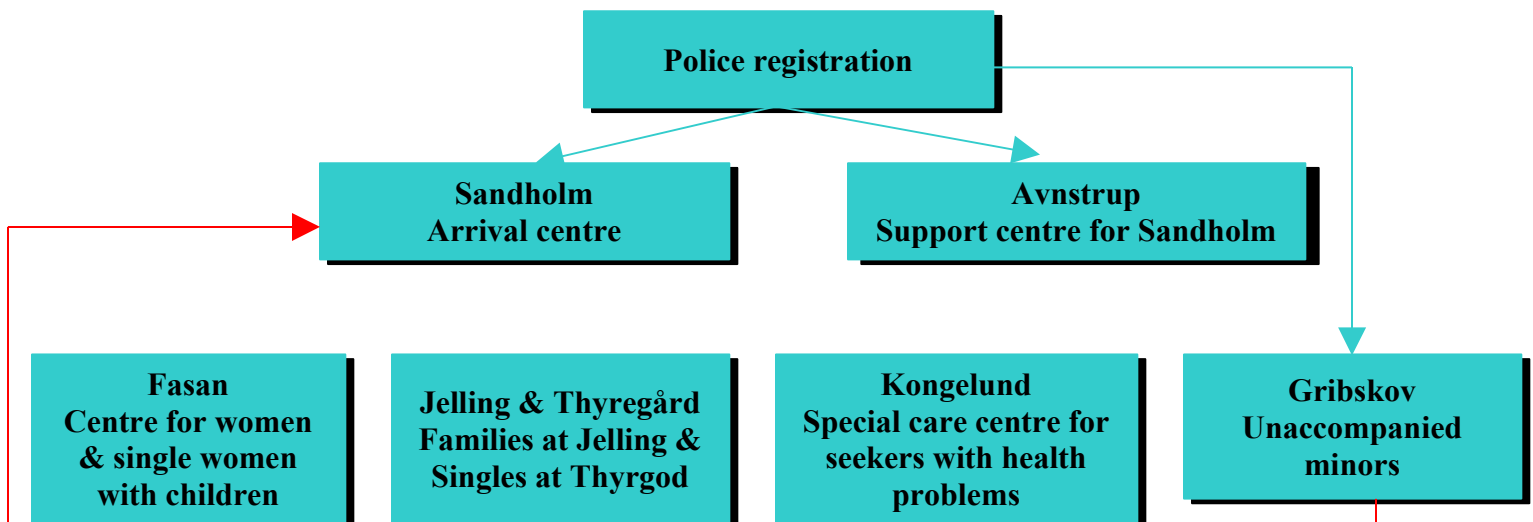
The number of persons applying for asylum in Denmark broken down by main nationalities.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2005 total	2004 total
Serbia and Montenegro	27	65	53	65	38	24	18	11	15				316	784
Afghanistan	10	13	18	17	14	13	13	16	10				124	285
Iraq	16	21	25	26	16	28	25	16	30				203	217
Russia	13	23	18	20	5	14	6	8	1				108	163
Somalia	11	13	11	1	5	5	7	8	3				64	154
Statel. Pal.	6	17	10	6	9	3	4	6	4				65	148
Iran	7	10	9	4	24	12	2	10	12				90	140
Bosn.-Herz.	4	7	2	7	3	2	5	4	5				39	102
Nigeria	8	3	3	4	8	8	3	2	4				43	89
Turkey	5	3	2	0	4	11	2	5	2				34	84
Pakistan	8	7	5	4	4	3	2	0	6				39	81
China	4	7	5	1	7	9	7	6	6				52	64
Syria	3	2	2	3	4	3	6	5	8				36	56
Algeria	1	5	5	5	9	3	4	5	2				39	50
Macedonia	5	11	5	8	2	0	0	6	0				37	50
Others	64	58	78	43	57	58	50	51	43				502	768
Total	192	265	251	214	209	196	154	159	151				1.791	3.235

Overall figures on asylum in Denmark.

Category	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Asylum applications lodged in Denmark	12.512	6.068	4.593	3.235	1.791
Recognition rate in the first instance on asylum applications registered and processed in Denmark*	53%	28%	22%	10%	16%
Total number of persons granted refugee status or other status in Denmark (all types of cases, all authorities)	6.263	4.069	2.447	1.592	762
- Geneva Convention	2.020	1.267	724	278	134
- Protection Status/ De facto Status	3.116	1.689	602	229	157
- Other residence permits (e.g. Quota refugees and residence permits given on Humanitarian grounds)	1.127	1.113	1.121	1.085	471
Number of refugees allocated to municipalities in Denmark for integration (by the Danish Immigration Service)	4.549	2.681	1.866	1.413	614

## 5. Placement plan from the Danish Immigration Service



## 6. Danish Red Cross and its service for asylum seekers in Denmark

Since 1984, The Danish Red Cross stood for accommodation, social and humanitarian support to the asylum seekers in Denmark while the authorities were processing their cases. Danish Red Cross accommodated all the war refugees (around 20,000) who came to Denmark under the war in the Ex- Yugoslavia in 1992. In order to handle the accommodation needs, the Danish Red Cross operated (opened and closed) around 320 asylum centers across the country.

During the last few years, because of the strict asylum politics, the arrival of the asylum seekers to Denmark remarkably declined. At present Danish Red Cross operates eleven centers, including six special centers and a cultural house.

The Danish Red Cross Asylum Department operates at Sandholm, Aunstrup, Jelling & Gribskov, Fasan and Kongelund centers are operated by the local municipal Management of the asylum centers in Denmark and are not intended to be tendered out for the private sector (i.e. only the Red Cross and the local municipal communities manage these centers). At present 3300 AS are living in the centers around Denmark. Only 1000 applied for asylum in 2004.

## **7. Cultural House**

Danish Red Cross Cultural house have been functioning as a place for activities for the asylum seekers from the asylum centers in Sjælland area. The house is known for its open and unique international atmosphere, where the activities and courses are developed in cooperation with the participants, Red Cross employees and volunteers.

Culture house offers studies, courses and practice for the asylum seekers and refugees. They will be trained in Danish language and society, English, IT, Media and journalism, and other vocational trainings. The aim of these activities is to keep people active and let them learn something that may help them in the future.

## **8. Want2work project**

'*want2work*' is a project within the Danish Red Cross Asylum Department, partly financed by the EU EQUAL-programme. In Denmark, asylum seekers do not have access to the labour market and have only limited access to educational institutions. This complicates maintaining professional skills and the basis for establishing a social and professional network is almost non-existent. Many skills and resources thus risk being lost in an often passive and year-long waiting time. Many asylum seekers are also becoming deprived of their initiative and energy. Based on the recognition of these barriers for future labour market integration, want2work develops vocational training focusing on a process-oriented and individual skills auditing incorporated in all activities. The initiative prepares for re-entering the labour market, be it in Denmark or elsewhere.

'*want2work*' develops and offers courses comprising of language and vocational training and voluntary work placement. The individual auditing of professional as well as personal skills and competencies is at the core of every activity. The skills auditing is a process taking place before, during and after the courses.

A full course typically consists of 20 weekly lessons, built up by modules each lasting 4-8 weeks. The courses can be combined with voluntary work placement, either within the Danish Red Cross Asylum Department or in local companies. They also cooperate with educational institutions like the IT-University and Technical University of Denmark on offering courses for highly trained asylum seekers with high-level Danish or English skills.

Courses developed by '*want2work*' include;

- PC-driving license

- Start your own business
- Media and journalism
- Sewing
- Social- and healthcare

### **9. Asylum seekers Information Group (ASIG)**

ASIG is a group of asylum seekers giving presentations on the issue of being an asylum seeker in Denmark. This group is also organized and developed by ‘*want2work*’ project. ASIG makes it possible to understand and know the background and situation of asylum seekers life in Denmark for the normal Danish people, schools and other interested parties.

### **10. Information about the host reception centre for the ENARO Exchange programme, Jelling and Thyregod**

It is an ordinary centre managed by the Danish Red Cross, located in Jylland. It is a beautiful small village with all necessary facilities. This village has a historical background and also called “The King’s place” by the Danish.

The centre is located in a very calm and beautiful area, and contains several residential blocks. 25 family (6 beds) apartments and three blocks with (2,3 &4 beds) rooms.

There are 4 administration staff, 4 social workers and 21 other staffs. Centre is inhabited by 377 asylum seekers and 3 unaccompanied minors (They are not living at the centre but connected to the centre.60 people are living private at their relatives or friends and 40 people are living in the private houses or apartments which are hired and administrated by the centre.)

The centre has its own school, kinder garden, clinic and an activity centre.

#### **Employees**

Number of employees: 30

Number of administration staff: 4

Number of social workers: 5

Others: 21 (Teachers, Nurses and technical staffs)

**Administration team** is responsible for economy and budget, payments to the residents, plans, annual report, cooperation with local community, Police and other organizations environment and security.

**Tasks of a social worker** vary with their area of responsibility, such as:

- Coordination of social workers
- Coordination of the volunteers

- Coordination of booking rooms and appointments
- Coordination of the activities

**Technical staffs** are responsible for maintenance of the buildings, technical reparations and informing residents how to save energy.

**Health care staffs (nurses)** are responsible for nursing and giving information about the health care system in Denmark and coordination of appointments with the doctors and specialists. Two nurses are available four days a week. One doctor visits twice a week. Psychiatrist visits once a week. A nurse who is specialized for child care is available whole week. Open consultancy is available on Wednesdays.

**School and kinder garden staff** are teaching the residents Danish language and about the life in Denmark by using a in-house developed method of teaching.

**Activity centre** is driven by one staff in cooperation with 20 volunteers (Local residents of Jelling) Activity centers are opened twice a week, the activities conducted are workshop, computer literacy, cooking and sewing. Participation in these activities is compulsory and paid. All residents should choose an activity and sign a contract when they arrive at Sandholm. The workshop takes care of the small repairs of the furniture and making things like stools and tables etc. The kitchen teaches the residents cooking and making food for everyday needs, which can also be bought by the residents and the staffs (20kr.). Sewing room takes care of small sewing jobs like bed linen, beds, cloths etc. Most of these activities are taught by the volunteers. The computer room is managed by the residents.

**When an asylum seeker arrives at Jelling centre:**

A staff from the centre goes to the bus/train station and picks him or her and will give an introduction about the centre and town etc. During the following day he or she has to fill out the “action plan” form which concerns their education, training and activation. Participation in activities is compulsory and paid, as mentioned earlier.

**Residents are divided into three phases:**

**Phase 1:** The time between arrival and the authorities accept and register their application for asylum. No activities for those in phase 1.

**Phase 2:** When the application is accepted and registered.

**Phase 3:** Rejected cases.

**Allowances**

The basic allowance is 47,50 DKK pr.day (maximum)

Additional allowance is 24,93 DKK pr.day (maximum)

(Additional allowance only paid if the resident participates in the activities specified in the contract)

### **Resident council**

The residents themselves choose a leader for the council and leader for the houses. Council meetings are held every month, where also a staff of the centre participates. Resident council leaders from all the centres meet once in every three months at the head office in Copenhagen where also the president of the Danish Red Cross participates.

The residents are allowed to move freely anywhere. If a resident does not show up to receive his post for three days then the centre should report to the authorities and the Police.

### **11. Lessons learned and experiences gained**

The main goal of this exchange programme, is to learn about the facilities, rules and regulation of the host centre and how they organize the reception of the asylum seekers. When we arrived in Jelling, during the introduction we had decided to accompany a social worker named Henny Jørgensen and assist her in her daily routines. Henny introduced us to all the staff members and explained what they are responsible for. We were also introduced to most of the residents. The staffs and residents were very friendly and explained about their duties/problems whenever we asked them. We also visited Thyregod centre twice with the local social worker and saw the procedures when they received a new resident. Most of the residents at Thyregod are singles. Families are placed in Jelling. Communication between the staffs and the residents seems to be good. The resident feels free to talk about their problems with the staff and follow the suggestions given by the staffs. The activities arranged by the centre staff and volunteers are very good. The vocational training like bicycle workshops, canteen and sewing are very useful activities. I could see some of the residents obtained a hygiene certificate

from the local municipality which may help them in future if they want to work or operate restaurants. The residents feel responsible for the operation of the centre and they participate in the activities with good involvement. They are also involved in budgeting

for the activities. Besides that the staff are very friendly with the residents and use their skills and competences effectively thus motivating the residents to have a larger involvement in their duties. The staff spends also good time with the residents, especially when they need someone to talk about their problems. Organizing of volunteers was noteworthy and well planned.

### **12. Visits and activities we participated**

Henny had planned some visits to the former residents who got resident permit and moved to other districts. She also planned a few visits to the important places in Denmark with the volunteers and the residents.

**Vollsmose:** Henny took us to Vollsmose where one of the former resident (a family from Iraq) of Jelling, is residing. They were very happy for our visit and made a lot of food. The

way they respect Henny and their hospitality showed that quality and service at Jelling center.

Vollsmose is a place where most of the residents are with foreigner background, so Henny was concerned about their integration.

**Odense (H.C Andersen's birth place):** Henny took us to Odense and proudly showed us the places where H.C Andersen was born and the local museum. It was an interesting and insightful visit.

**Lego land:** A volunteer took some residents to the Lego land, and we joined with them. I do not have to tell about the Lego Land as everyone heard about it . We came to know about a volunteer group, a group of pensioners, self financed and do a lot of services to the centre and to the local community. They used to visit twice in a month and organized some activity in cooperation with the staff of Jelling.

**Blåvand:** Henny and activity leader Jasna took four residents and us to a place called Blåvand, Denmark's popular white beach. We had a good time there and constructive discussions about their life in the centre.

**Annex:** We also visited two families staying at so called annexes, one with Ole, technical worker to repair a pipeline and other one with Henny, to show us the life and conditions in the annexes. Normally families with special needs will be placed in annexes to avoid unwanted attention from the other residents.

During these visits we learned a lot about the life of an asylum seeker in an asylum centre and their opinion on the Danish asylum system.

### **13. Problem areas and challenges**

During this visit, every evening I used to summarize what we went through the day with my co-participant, Raquel and we discussed the problem areas by comparing to our own in Norway as well as in Spain. We had many discussions in which many interesting questions have emerged. These discussions made us to focus at an important problem area, tackling the asylum seekers who are traumatized because of long waiting time for decision or deportation, which we assume, is going to be a common problem in all asylum reception centers.

Hundreds of asylum seekers are living at the centers around Denmark for more than four years, with pending cases or on the waiting list for deportation. Many of them are

severely traumatized by the experiences they have from their homeland. Living in asylum centers for a long time has accumulative psychological effects. We could hear about many suicide attempts. In recent year the Danish authorities have put lot of pressure on the rejected asylum seekers in order to motivate them to return to their home countries. The method is called “motivating measures”. Reduced allowances and access to the medical help makes this group of asylum seekers vulnerable and may affect them psychologically. The Red Cross staffs are spending adequate time to take care of this group and slowly motivating them for returning home, by professional counseling methods.

## 16. Areas of improvement

As I mentioned previously, there are many things which could be beneficially learned and applied in other partner organizations.

During my stay in Jelling, I have got an image about the way the reception centre in Denmark functioning in general and compared with the system in Norway. Comparing my work situation in Norway, I found that most of the routines are more or less similar. However there are few minor areas for potential improvement as I witnessed during my short sojourn in Jelling.

- Such a big centre like Jelling and Thyregod should invest more in security both for the area and residents. This is in stark contrast to the major centers in Norway with high security during evening and night times.
- Availability of the staffs is quite good during the day time but it is not the same during evening and night time, where statistics indicates a larger number of problems.



Centre Thyregod



Centre Jelling



Residential blocks for accommodating the war refugees. Thyregod 17-18 people accommodate the war refugees.



Kitchen for the war refugees during our stay in centre Jelling.