

5.5. – 17.5.2003 The Netherlands

Barbora Velčovská Vyšní Lhoty Reception Centre

5.5.

There is a bank holiday in the Netherlands – the Liberation Day. We just visited the De Klencke asylum centre in Amsterdam. In the afternoon there was a boat trip and attendance at the Freedom Festival.

6.5. - 7.5.

Introduction of the Dutch reception system at the COA headquarters in Haag. We were informed about programs available for asylum seekers – education, repatriation, employment, leisure time activities, special programs for unaccompanied minors. Each participant gave his/her short introduction of the national reception system for selected employees of the COA.

8.5.

We visited the De Vonk psychic-social centre for asylum seekers in Noordwijkerhout specialised in care of asylum seekers (60% of clients) and recognised refugees who are handicapped with post-traumatic syndromes. The centre is comprised of an emergency clinic, a daily clinic for 8 patients and a bed ward for 24 patients. 10 surgeons work there. The centre is designated for patients over 16 and a similar centre is operated in Amsterdam. In the afternoon we were taken to an asylum centre.

9.5. - 15.5.

The working stay in AZC Zeewolde.

Visitation to the medical centre which is financed by the ZRA state organisation and the COA only pays for tickets needed to get there; it is only open 9.30 – 11.30 am, in the afternoon hours asylum seekers come to collect prescribed medicaments. 1 doctor and 7 nurses work in the centre, if special treatment is needed clients are sent to a hospital or a practitioner.

I met Mr Ben van Tongeren who provided asylum seekers with information. During an interview he informs them about operation of the asylum centre and gives them information materials in writing.

Another way how to inform clients is by means of the system known as cable news which is an internal TV channel available in rooms.

12.5.

I gave my Dutch colleague a short presentation of the reception system in the Czech Republic.

The visitation to AZC ALMERE and AZC LUTTELGEEST, cluster Flevoland, followed.

AZC ALMERE – the facility has capacity of 800 beds, some 600 asylum seekers were lodged there during my stay. The centre has been open 3 years ago and hence it is a new, modern and well-maintained centre. Asylum seekers are accommodated in lodging houses composed of several residential units with capacity of 8 beds. Each unit is furnished with a kitchen, wardrobes, beds, a lavatory, a washing machine, a dryer, a refrigerator, an electric cooker; an iron and an ironing board are available too. If asylum seekers want to acquire other furnishing or equipment they have to buy it for themselves. There is a lack of activities in the centre due to shortage of money!

13.5.

I met some other employees of AZC Zeewolde:

- Mr Tymen Pap, department of work – he provides asylum seekers with information on work opportunities.
- Service Unit – similar to our non-stop service, it, however, works just from Monday to Friday during midday except Tuesday when it works from 1 to 3 pm. Employees of the unit provide asylum seekers with ID cards including photos, banking cards and pay for them travel tickets, offer cheap tickets for a local swimming pool.
- The Foreigners' Police (The Ministry of Justice) – each asylum seeker above 15 years of age is obliged to register at its office each Tuesday. If he/she doesn't meet this requirement two times he/she has to pay a fine amounts to EUR 14. Asylum seeker's official ID document is W-document of which validity is limited and which is issued by employees of the Foreigners' Police. They also issue a new W-document if it is lost, abstracted or expired.

14.5.

I met employees of the Diensten team, Trajectbegeiger, who inform asylum seekers on repatriation issues, training and educational courses. Information is provided through individual interviews or leaflets and other printed materials.

I took part in an interview with Mongolian spouses who applied for asylum in 1998 and at the moment were given the first negative decision.

One policeman is present at AZC Zeewolde. He solves conflicts, thefts and other offences.

15.5.

I visited working place of the private Security Service. The service is provided by four employees of whom one is a receptionist (gives out keys, walkie-talkies, etc.) and others alternate at the service in regular intervals. They report on events, which occurred in the centre and this report is sent to the COA. A company providing the security service is not the same in all centres.

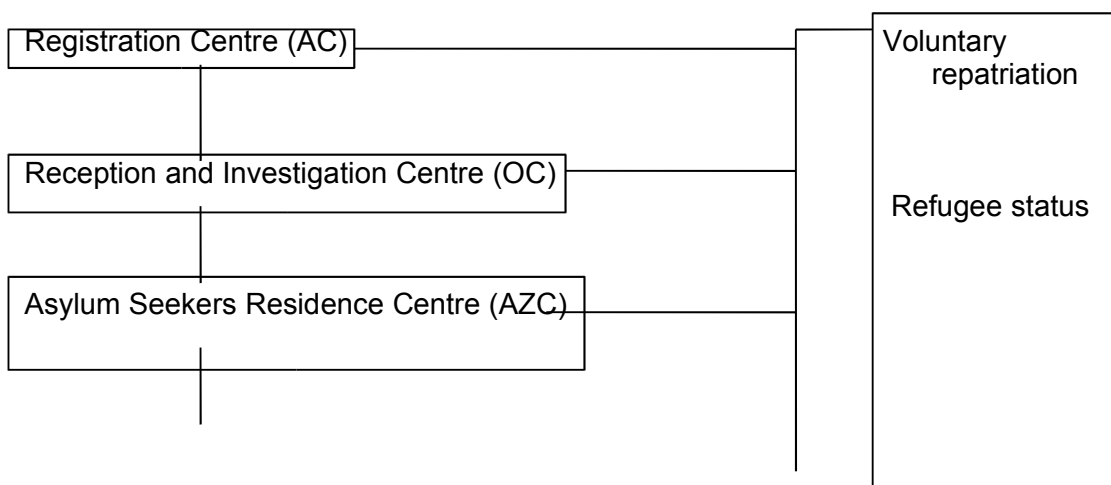
I visited a library in the centre. The library is run by a volunteer from among asylum seekers and she is paid EUR 11.30 a week. Books are lent for one week and if an asylum seeker doesn't return a book in time he/she is warned in writing and is fined with EUR 0.10 a day. Paid internet is also available there. I took a view of a computer class, a sewing room and a school for children from 13 to 18 years of age.

I visited the AMA team, which work with unaccompanied minors. Such a team is not present at each centre.

16.5.

Official conclusion of my exchange stay at the COA headquarters in Haag.

Reception system in the Netherlands



AC - in this type of asylum centres a decision is taken on if an application for asylum is well-founded or not. An asylum seeker spends here short time, approximately 48 hours. If his/her application is well-founded he/she proceeds to **OC** where medical examinations and more detailed interviews are carried out. After a certain time an asylum seeker is transferred to **AZC** where he/she waits for a legal decision. When a second negative decision is delivered an asylum seeker can only return home or stay in the Netherlands illegally.

Current stay

In my opinion, the current Dutch political and economical situation is also reflected in the asylum issues. Amendments on related laws and change of immigration policy have caused a significant decrease asylum applications. There are 3 regions now instead of previous 5 ones, 36 clusters have been reduced to 12 and the number of the COA employees is permanently declining. The AZC employees with whom I met mostly complained of their unsure future and a lack of information from the COA. At time when many of asylum centres is being closed and wound up the employees are confused and many times they don't know which centre is in operation yet. They have to work there they are needed and they often rotate in several asylum centres and commute more than one hour but they are glad they have got a job.

Comparison

It is difficult to say which system is better or worst. There are some things which are worth of thinking:

- Very well developed information system for asylum seekers; information is distributed in writing as well as by means of data distribution on internal TV channel
- Use of official interpreters through a telephone which is adjusted so everyone present can hear the translation and can also speak
- Easy availability of Internet services and provision of computer courses (well equipped computer classrooms)
- Emphasis on self- responsibility

