

Nordic Headlines 7 July 2005

Norwegian Press

Popular asylum-seekers

On the 2 of July, a protest was staged in Nesodden against the planned closure of the Sandvold reception center. Politicians, voluntary organizations and local residents met up outside the refugee reception center to show their support for the 38 asylum-seekers that are currently living there. "Many asylum-seekers are well integrated in the local community, and they are regarded as a valuable resource", says Frode Gjertsen from Estonia Action. Sandvold is one out of 50 reception centers that the Directorate of Immigration has decided to close, due to the declining number of asylum-seekers in Norway.

(Aftenposten, 3 July 2005, p. 8)

Danish Press

Illegal Chinese immigrants charged with bribery and corruption

The Copenhagen Police has drafted formal indictments on 13 Chinese illegal immigrants on bribery and corruption charges. Two employees at the Foreign Ministry are also charged with taking bribes in return for issuing false residence permits to the Chinese men and women who have been remanded in custody. Amounts of between DKK 25,000-50,000 in bribes were involved; both of the employees at the Foreign Ministry claim that they are not guilty of the charges. No date has been set for the court hearing of the cases.

(Jyllandsposten, 5 July 2005, p. 5, NE Translation)

Swedish Press

Fewer seek asylum in Sweden

The number of people seeking asylum in Sweden has dropped by 30 per cent compared to last year. The total number of persons seeking asylum in Sweden during the first six months of this year was 7,988 compared to 11,445 individuals during the same period in 2004. So far this year, 11 per cent of the asylum seekers have been granted residence permits. According to the director general of the Migration Board, Janna Valik, the drop has to do with the fact that some of the nearby trouble spots have been stabilized. "Those who seek [asylum] do not have as strong grounds as they did a few years ago," she remarks. Janna Valik does not believe that the government's more restrictive refugee policy has had a decisive impact on the drop in figures. "No, that is not my interpretation," she says. In August, the Migration Board has planned to lower its estimate for the year – from 19,000 to 16,000 asylum seekers.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 3 July 2005, p. 11, SPR Translation)

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Norwegian News

Somalian being sent back home

The first Somalian has been sent back home. The safety for the transportation, considering safety for both the one being sent back home and for the police that have to go along, has been accepted since a new route has been found. In Norway there are about 400 Somalian who have either got their applications for permit to stay rejected or committed crimes in Norway. They are now about to be sent back home to Somalia. The Norwegian organisation for asylum seekers (NOAS) are very critical that Somalian get their applications for permit to stay rejected. "When Norway rejects the applications, it is against UNHCR regulations for refugees. The situation in Somalia is still alarming, and especially for returning Somalian who are vulnerable for violence from tribes in the home country," says the Secretary-General Morten Tjessem at NOAS. (Aftenposten, 10 July 2005, p. 8)

Danish News

Immigration Agency refutes bribery charge

Immigration Agency officials say they have no plans to investigate allegations that certain employees have received bribes such as wine, free circus or sports tickets, or other gifts in return for a speedy handling of residency applications. Although Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj (The Liberals) has asked for a full report of how residency applications are processed, head of the agency, Inge Bruhn Thomsen, claims there is no correlation between how long it takes to get a permit and gifts to employees. 'I deny media reports that some applicants have been treated more favourably than others, says Ms Thomsen. 'Some football clubs have reportedly handed out free tickets but I've no idea who received them or why. I also don't believe that because somebody has received a free ticket to Brøndby Stadium it means that the whole agency is corrupt.' Despite Ms Thomsen's defiance, the Immigration Agency has already suspended one employee who admitted receiving a complimentary ticket from the Danish Football Association.

(Berlingske Tidende, 14 July 2005, p. 3, NE Translation)

73 cases of bribery at Immigration Agency

Police estimate that the two Immigration Agency case officials already charged with fraud have been involved in at least 73 incidents of bribery connected with residency permits for Chinese immigrants. The two, who were arrested in May, allegedly sold residency permits for between DKK 25-50,000, using a local

Chinese restaurateur as a middleman. Police have until now found and arrested just 13 of the 73 Chinese immigrants, as the majority are believed to have used the permits to gain entry to other Schengen countries.

(Jyllands-Posten, 13 July 2005, p. 3, NE Translation)

The Danish People's Party's warning to minister

The Danish People's Party will not come to the aid of Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj's (The Liberals) if it is proved that she was aware that Immigration Agency officials have received gifts such as tickets and wine for 'fast tracking' residency applications for potential employees of major Danish companies or sporting clubs, whilst 'normal' applicants have to wait months. 'We're monitoring things very closely and the fact that we are the government's parliamentary backers plays no role in our consideration,' says the Danish People's Party's Peter Skaarup who has tabled a long list of questions to Ms Hvilshøj. According to new revelations in tabloid daily *Ekstra Bladet*, foreign circus performers have traditionally been able to 'jump the queue' in return for circus tickets for agency employees and their families.

(Berlingske Tidende, 13 July, p. 7, NE Translation)

Immigration agency under investigation - again

The Immigration Agency is being accused of fast-tracking visa applications from major companies and sports and football clubs who need residency permits for their non-Western employees or athletes. Although the agency has rejected charges of favouritism, parliament's ombudsman, Hans Gammeltoft-Hansen, has now launched an initial inquiry into the allegations. At the same time the political opposition is demanding an independent commission investigation into the working methods of the controversial agency, whose reputation has already been tainted by allegations that some workers have accepted bribes from Chinese immigrants.

(Berlingske Tidende, 12 July, p3, NE Translation)

Refugee to sue Danish state

A Tamil refugee is suing the Ministry of Integration for a breach of human rights, after twice being denied the right to bring his wife to this country under the controversial family reunification legislation. Although his spouse has now been granted permission to enter the country after the ministry reopened the case due to harsh criticism from the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner Alvaro Gil-Robles, the man is still seeking compensation. It will be the first time that a

court of law will test whether Denmark's immigration restrictions are in breach of international conventions.

(Politiken, 11 July 2005, front page, NE Translation)

Social Democrats demand integration action

The Social Democrats are demanding that the government addresses the problem of poor integration in the public sector in order to live up to its target that four per cent of all state employees should be of immigrant extraction. This demand comes after the release of new figures showing that only two per cent of all state employees are currently immigrants or descendants of immigrants from a non-western country.

(Jyllands-Posten, 8 July 2005, p. 3, NE Translation)

Swedish News

Deportation costs rocket

The number of officials taking part in escorted deportations has steadily increased in the past decade. At least two escorts, sometimes more, are needed to deport one person, reports DN as it looks at how deportation costs have rocketed in recent years. Last year alone Sweden carried out 2,026 escorted deportations at a cost of MSEK 148.3. Tina Henriksson, an inspector with Transporttjänsten – the body that carries out many of the deportations – says that the number of escorting officers has risen as many of those who are deported are in a poor state of health, either physically or mentally.

DN also reports that the number of deportations carried out on specifically chartered planes has tripled in the past two years – up to 92 in 2004 from 28 in 2002. Sometimes a plane is chartered to deport just one person and the average cost of chartering a plane is SEK 135,000. "This is mismanagement of taxpayers' money," says Merit Wager, refugee ombudsman, and describes Transporttjänsten as "Sweden's most expensive travel agency."

(Dagens Nyheter, 14 July 2005, p. 12, SPR Translation)

Apathetic children must be "dying" to stay

On Thursday last week the Swedish government ruled that an apathetic boy from Uzbekistan would be allowed to stay in. The decision was seen as a landmark decision and it was hoped that many of the apathetic children would be allowed to stay. Now, however, a number of lawyers and Håkan Sandesjö, chairman of the Aliens' Appeals Board, are interpreting the ruling to mean that an apathetic child must be on the point of dying in order to be allowed to stay in Sweden. "The reference point for us is what the government writes in its decision, and then it is a life-threatening illness which is the criterion," says Håkan Sandesjö to Dagens Nyheter. Doctor Göran Bodgård estimates that around 50 of the 100 children who are now awaiting a decision are so ill that they may be affected by the ruling.

(Dagens Nyheter, 9 July,p. 17, SPR Translation)

Apathetic child allowed to stay

The government yesterday ruled that an apathetic 13-year-old boy from Uzbekistan would be granted residency in Sweden together with his family. The decision, which could set an important precedent, means that the apathetic boy and his family, who have sought asylum, will be granted residency on humanitarian grounds. The government also said yesterday that each asylum application would be treated on its own merits but that those apathetic children who are seriously ill would be granted residency. The Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, said that consideration must be given to how a child experienced fear and persecution. Siri Leithoff, the legal representative of the 13-year-old, said to Dagens Nyheter that she hoped the government ruling would mean that more sick children would be allowed to stay. Yesterday, the government also commissioned the National Board of Health and Welfare to draw up recommendations on the care of apathetic children.

(Dagens Nyheter, 8 July 2005, p. 16, Svenska Dagbladet, 8 July 2005, p. 17 SPR Translation)

A step in the right direction

The government's decision to grant the 13-year-old boy and his family residency has been well received by the other parliamentary parties. However, the Moderates, who together with the Social Democrats have had the most restrictive stance on asylum, say that each case must be tested on its own merits. Other parties are again calling for a general amnesty for apathetic children and their families. "This is an excellent decision, but we are not satisfied. We will continue to push for a general amnesty," says the leader of the Left Party, Lars Ohly, who nevertheless considers the ruling a step in the right direction. Gustav Fridolin, spokesperson for the Green Party on refugee policy, sees the ruling as a critique against the way in which the authorities have treated people. "We are now coming closer to what we consider the law actually says about sick refugee children. This is yet another reason as to why there needs to be a general amnesty," he says. Göran Hägglund, leader of the Christian Democrats, believes that public opinion caused the government to make a U-turn on the matter while the leader of the Liberal Party, Lars Leijonborg, says that the government's stance on this issue has been untenable and that the decision should have been taken ages ago.

(Dagens Nyheter, 8 July 2005, p.17, SPR Translation)

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Danish news

Haarder rejects accusations

Former Minister of Immigration and Integration Affairs, Bertel Haarder, has rejected accusations that he lied to the press when he denied participating in the Danish Immigration Service's annual internal New Years lottery, when gifts such as expensive wine, malt whisky and Persian carpets from grateful companies and sporting organisations were distributed amongst employees. Haarder responded to the accusations by saying: "I never participated in any lottery or received any gifts. According to my former secretary I attended a reception at the ministry on the seventh of January 2003 and gave a short speech, but I wasn't there when any lottery took place". However, Haarder admitted that he had himself brought a present to the reception that could be given away in the lottery; "an extremely ugly green vase" that he had received from a diplomat. "I believed the whole idea of the lottery to be nothing more than a bit of fun", he added. (Jyllandsposten, 20 July 2005, p. 3, NE translation)

'Unacceptable' says Ombudsman

The Parliament Ombudsman, Hans Gammeltoft Hansen, has entered the ongoing immigration agency debate, involving former Minister of Immigration and Integration Affairs, Bertel Haarder, by saying he finds it "completely unacceptable" for a public institution to accept gifts from clients or partners. "In our own institution we have a policy that we don't accept any gifts. We can't give the impression that we can be bought and that's the policy other public authorities should adopt", he says. (Politiken, 20 July 2005, front page)

Fundamentalism growing in Denmark says community leader

Young Muslims today see no prestige in integrating themselves into Danish society or getting an education, preferring to seek an identity in Islamic fundamentalism instead. All this according to immigration consultant, Mehmet Yükksekaya, head of the Danish-Muslim society "A Joint Future". According to Yükksekaya, who has worked with immigrants in this country for 22 years, the Pakistani community is amongst the most conservative, al-Qaeda operates relatively freely in Denmark and there is a strong 'clan mentality' and culture. "For most Muslims it's more important to have a son who's a practising Muslim", claims Yükksekaya. "There's no prestige for fathers to say how well their children have integrated and got themselves an education or a job. Six months ago, I would have said that there is no risk that terrorism will hit Denmark. Now I'm not too sure. It could well happen if some of the most rabid youths are given the opportunity."

(Berlingske Tidene, 15 July 2005, p. 9, NE translation)

Police remain quiet on assassination attempt

One month after an unknown assailant set fire to the Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration, Rikke Hvilshøj's car the police are reluctant to say how close they are to finding the perpetrator. A Roskilde Police spokesperson said that investigations are being carried out every day and police officers are working "at full speed", but he refused to comment on whether any actual suspects have been pinpointed.

(Politiken, 15 July 2005, p. 6, NE translation)

Norwegian news

Politicians played "shooting at Muslims game"

Politicians from one of Norway's small parties played a "shooting at Muslims game" when they gathered for a summer meeting. The Democrat Party members held a paintball competition at what they called an 'informal' summer meeting. The politicians divided themselves into two groups and one group dressed up like Muslim terrorists. When asked why he thinks the Democrats of Hurum chose to let their terrorist team be Muslims, deputy leader of the Party, Svein Otto Nilsen said: "Most terrorists are Muslims today." The Hurum chapter of the Party also have a note on its web site that it is a 'Muslim-free zone.' Reaction was swift to news of the paintball shooting. Nadeem Butt, leader of Oslo's Anti-Racist Center, said he was 'shocked' by the Democrats' paintball war. He thinks Norway's national security police should keep an eye on the party members.

(Aftenposten, 20 July 2005)

Desperate refugee married his mother

An Iraqi refugee with residence permission in Norway married his own mother in a desperate attempt to bring the rest of his family to the country. The bizarre story started to unfold last winter when local police began investigating the case, several years after the man first came to Norway as an asylum seeker. The man in question initially had been granted permanent residence permission in Norway on humanitarian reasons. He settled in Lillestrøm, northeast of Oslo, and then quickly filed an application with the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) to bring the rest of his family to Norway under terms of the country's family reunification policy. He told the authorities that he had a wife in Iraq, and that she had two children from an earlier marriage. The authorities accepted the man's claims and the documentation he provided, and granted all three permanent residence permission as well. They came to Norway, and all four lived in a flat in Lillestrøm for several years before local police began to be suspicious, mostly because of the apparent age difference between the man and woman. "It just didn't seem right," inspector Jan Eirik Thomassen of the Romerike Police District told said. The man had said he was 33, and his wife was 44. Police went to court to get permission for DNA testing. Results showed that the couple actually were mother and son. Her two other children were the man's siblings. The man ended up making a full confession when confronted with the DNA results. Both he and his

mother have now been charged with giving false information to the authorities, which can result in two years in prison and deportation.
(Aftenposten, 19 July 2005)

Majority of refugees lack ID

Fully 94 per cent of would-be refugees arriving in Norway lack valid identification papers. The acting chief of the Norwegian police unit in charge of national security (PST) calls that a threat. Signe Kathrine Aaling, who heads PST thinks that foreigners whose identities can not be confirmed constitute "a considerable security risk for our entire society." That is because asylum seekers without identification can be granted temporary residence and working permission in Norway while their case is being processed. That in turn gives them Norwegian identification papers. Aaling worries that those papers, and the system itself, can be exploited by terrorists. PST has sent a report to the government department responsible for immigration issues, warning of potential abuse and exploitation of the system. Aaling notes that the relatively easy process of obtaining work permission, and thereby a Norwegian bank account and credit card, also can be exploited by organized crime. "We don't know how widespread this may be, but want to point out that it's cause for unease," she said. PST officials are urging more comprehensive means of trying to confirm an asylum seeker's identity as soon as they arrive in Norway. Terrorism researcher Brynjar Lia at the military research Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) notes that most active terror cells in Europe are multi-national, and that the need for identification papers is huge. Both false and legitimate identification papers are important resources for international terrorist groups, so their members can get past border controls, Lia said.

(Aftenposten, 18 July 2005)

Assistance to victims of forced marriages

So far this year, seven girls who have been married abroad against their own will have been helped to return to Norway by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Young people who have been married off against their own will during vacations is clearly an increasing problem, according to newspaper Dagsavisen. "So far this July we have received five new cases concerning forced marriages abroad", says Terje Bjoeranger, head of the UDI section dealing with forced marriages.
(NRK/The Norway Post, 15 July 2005)

Asylum seekers vanish

More than 19,000 persons who came to Norway to seek asylum have disappeared over the past six years. It is unclear whether they left the country or remain in Norway as illegal aliens. New figures from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) indicate that nearly 7,000 would-be refugees disappeared from asylum centers in 2003 alone. Another 1,136 have disappeared so far this year, reports newspaper Stavanger Aftenblad. Around 60 per cent of those who left the asylum centers, which are not run as locked institutions, are between 18 and 34 years of age. Around 20 per cent are younger than 18. No one can say what has happened to those who applied for asylum but left with no forwarding address

while their cases were being processed. Roar Hanssen of the police chapter at UDI said the majority likely move on to try their luck in another country, or they attempt to live 'underground' in Norway. "Experience shows that people disappear just before they receive formal adjudication of their case," Hanssen said.

(Aftenposten, 13 July 2005)

Majority favours new ID cards

A majority in the Norwegian Parliament favours the introduction of new ID cards which would make it easier to expose terrorism. The cards could contain information on DNA and fingerprints. The cards could become an important contribution towards the fight against terrorism, says head of the Justice Committee, Trond Helleland to Aftenposten. The advanced ID cards could contain a lot of biometric information. They would also become important in uncovering the misuse of social security benefits and illegal residence. Some EU member nations have already voted to make such cards mandatory for their citizens.

(NRK/Aftenposten, 13 July 2005)

Swedish News

Anti-racism investment 'a fiasco'

The government's investment to tackle racism has turned out to be an expensive fiasco. Center Against Racism (CMR), was established two years ago and has received several million kronor in state funding. But according to newspaper SvD's investigation, the institution appears to have limited influence and is plagued by internal squabbling. CMR was to serve as the spearhead for the government's efforts to tackle racism and discrimination. It was to act as an umbrella organisation to co-ordinate all voluntary groups, investigate cases of racism and raise awareness. In total the government has pumped over SEK 14 million of taxpayers' money into CMR, which is over half of the state budget for investments to combat racism. But only half of the money has been used and it has mostly been spent on trips, overnight stays, restaurant visits, salaries, remuneration and rents. "There aren't any concrete ideas as to what they want to achieve," says one former board member. A former employee expresses their frustration. "Serious ideas as to what activities to focus on were never discussed at the secretariat meetings." Despite this the government continues to pour money into the organisation.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 17 July 2005, pp. 6-7 & Dagens Nyheter 18 July, p. 8)

Decision on apathetic children delayed

The apathetic children and families from Uzbekistan will receive the decision on whether they can stay from the Migration Board next week. No further rejections have been made after 7 July when the government granted a residency permit to a sick 13-year-old boy from Uzbekistan. "We are still analyzing how the decision

impacts our treatment of similar cases. Each case is treated individually”, says Marie Andersson, head of public information at the Migration Board.
(Svenska Dagbladet, 17 July 2005)

Rejected asylum seekers disappear

Over the past few years, only half of all those who have had their application for asylum in Sweden rejected have actually left the country. Those remaining are beyond the reach of the Migration Board. The figure amounts to about 8,000 people. “We have no idea how many of them choose to live illegally in Sweden, seek asylum elsewhere or simply go back,” says Anna Wessel, head of the asylum unit at the Migration Board.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 16 July, p. 10, SPR translation)

Applications lying around

Thousands of applications for Swedish citizenship have been lying around at the Migration Board’s offices in Norrköping for more than two years. However, applications made after 1 April 2005 have taken less than two months to process. The situation has come about following a reorganization of the application system, which has been designed to eliminate long waiting times. “Unfortunately we cannot deal with the old applications at the speed we would like, but the idea is that everyone will benefit in the end”, says Birgitta Stenborg, head of the citizenship unit at the Migration Board. She hopes that all the applications that are still pending from 2003 will have been processed by the end of this year.

(Dagens Nyheter, 15 July 2005, p. 8, SPR translation)

Extradited Iraqi sentenced

An Australian court yesterday sentenced an Iraqi who was extradited from Sweden to nine years in prison for his part in the ‘Siev X disaster’. The Siev X boat sank off the Indonesian coast on its way to Australia in 2001 and 353 people drowned. Most of 400 people on board the boat were Iraqi and Afghan refugees who had paid 1,000 dollars to be taken illegally to Australia. An Egyptian was held to be responsible for organising the crime and was sentenced to seven years in an Egyptian prison back in 2003. The Iraqi was extradited from Sweden the same year, charged with people smuggling and money laundering. The prosecutor claimed that the Iraqi had actually carried out the crime while the man in question claimed that he had acted as an interpreter.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 15 July 2005, p. 10, SPR translation)

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Danish press

Fewer rejections for asylum-seekers

The number of asylum-seekers being granted residency in Denmark has risen for the first time in five years. According to the latest figures from the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, 14 per cent of all asylum applications were approved during the first six months of this year, compared to ten per cent last year. However, the numbers are still much lower than the 53 per cent who were granted residency in 2001, before the government passed strict legislation on immigration. At the same time, the number of people applying for asylum in Denmark has fallen dramatically – from 12,512 in 2001, to 3,235 in 2004.

(Politiken, 22 July 2005, p. 6, NE translation)

Finnish press

Asylum-seekers arrive to Finland through other Schengen countries

The extraordinary boarder control in relation to the World Championships in Athletics in Helsinki seems to prove what the Finnish Frontier Guard and the immigration authorities suspected. A majority of asylum-seekers arrive to Finland through other Schengen countries. “During the two first days of the special control, four people have been caught with false identification, all of them coming with ferries from Sweden”, says Major Janne Piironen of the Helsinki section of the Frontier Guard. “Three of them have applied for asylum and the fourth might also do so. At the same time, no asylum applications have been lodged for one and a half weeks at the outer boarders of EU, which are normally constantly under controll”, Piironen said. The Frontier Guard has made a risk analysis which assumes that at least 60-70 per cent of the asylum-seekers arrive to Finland through other Schengen countries. Piironen believes that the increased boarder control, that will continue until the end of the Championships 14 August, will prove their estimates to be correct. Also Director Esko Repo from the Finnish Directorate of Immigration believes that the three-week-long special boarder control will confirm that the Schengen boarders are leaking. “It is good that evidence is gathered directly at the boarders”, he says. According to Piironen and Repo, changing country within the Schengen area is usually either an attempt to manipulate the asylum system or due to different humanitarian reason. “The applicant might already have relatives or acquaintances in Finland, and therefore he or she would rather wait for the asylum decision here than somewhere else”, Repo said. The applicants have in common that they often try to cover their tracks. They do not apply for asylum upon arrival – for example when reaching a harbour or at the airport – but rather somewhere on the inland and perhaps after residing for a while in the country.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 26 July 2005, p. A6)

Norwegian press

Several Iraqi torturers live in Norway

Several torturers who were active under Saddam Hussein's regime are living legally in Norway. According to NRK several of them have reportedly admitted to acts of torture in interviews with the immigration authorities. Norwegian spokesman for the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Abuzzed Razwan, says it is wrong of the Norwegian authorities to grant torturers residence in Norway. The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) does not want to comment on the reports. However, UDI communications director Geir Loendal says that in general terms also torturers may be granted temporary residence in Norway. He says that according to treaties signed by Norway, even torturers may not be returned to a country where they may face torture or a death sentence. However, should conditions in that country change, they will be returned, Loendal says.

(NRK/The Norway Post, 25 July 2005)

Immigrants scoff at UDI plan

A call for more immigration by the agency in charge of it, to meet future labour demands, has puzzled and angered many immigrants who already are in Norway, and who can not find decent jobs. Trygve G. Nordby, head of the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) issued a call last week for more immigrants, both highly educated and unskilled. Nordby claimed Norway needs to usher in less restrictive and more proactive immigration rules to meet the country's labour needs in coming years. "First they'd better manage to find jobs for all the immigrants who already are here," claims Luca Usai, age 32, from Italy. He is not at all impressed by the prospect of immigrant recruitment. That is because Usai, who holds a masters degree in economics and is fluent in Norwegian, is among the thousands of immigrants in Norway who has met a brick wall when trying to find a job. He followed his girlfriend to Norway in 2003 and never imagined it would be so difficult to find work, especially since he had specialized on the economics of the Norwegian social welfare state. Two years and hundreds of applications later, the best work he has been able to find is as an assistant at an after-school program for children. "I've never even been called in for a job interview," he said. "Many times I've called and asked why, but I most often don't get an answer. Some have told me, though, that they had orders to put all foreign applicants at the bottom of the pile." Usai's story is familiar. Hundreds of highly educated foreigners with solid working experience either have trouble obtaining residence- and work permission in Norway, or jobs once they do. Lawyers, nurses, doctors and business owners are among those who encounter employment trouble in Norway, even when they are fluent in Norwegian both oral and written. Whether it is a general "fear of foreigners" or concerns that hiring foreign workers can cause trouble with the bureaucracy is hard to tell. "The reason that many immigrants today are out of work is very complicated," claims Kåre Verpe of Norway's major employers' group Confederation of Norwegian

Enterprise (NHO). He notes, however, that it is clear Norway will need more workers in the years to come.
(Aftenposten, 25 July 2005)

UDI calls for more immigrants

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) thinks the country must make it more attractive for both skilled and unskilled workers to move to Norway. "We need more immigrants," claims Head of UDI Trygve G. Nordby. That may come as a surprise to all those who have been through the immigration process in Norway, and learned first-hand that it is tough to gain residence and work permission in the country. It takes at least three years to gain permanent documents, and the rules are strict. Nordby admits that current laws have left UDI enforcing restrictive policies. He told newspaper Aftenposten that he wants to move away from the debate between 'restrictive' and 'liberal' policies, and instead focus on pro-active immigration rules that clearly address the country's labour needs. "We need to tailor immigration in the future to suit our needs, even though we also must take care of our obligation to protect refugees," Nordby said. Drafts of new immigration regulations are currently under evaluation, and Nordby wants a new 'more dynamic' law that will address future labour market needs, especially given the immigration pressure on Europe. Today's rules aim at protecting Norwegian workers and contain largely negative criteria. "We need to change that way of thinking," Nordby said, claiming that Norway should invite "exactly the sort of competence we need." That can involve everyone from highly skilled and highly educated high-tech workers, to unskilled labourers. "Too few dare to say that we have a large need for non-professional workers as well," he said. UDI, in turn, should be able to have more flexibility in deciding cases, and process cases more quickly and efficiently. "Even though we don't face as large a population reduction as some other European countries, we need more immigrants to maintain population levels and competence," he said.

(Aftenposten, 22 July 2005)

Swedish press

HIV positive refugees sent back

HIV positive asylum seekers are being sent back despite a pressing need for treatment. "We're sending people to their deaths without batting an eyelid," says Åsa Kronberg, a lawyer at the Swedish Association for HIV-Positive People (RFHP). The government has said that people who have life-threatening conditions and cannot get treatment in their home country should be granted residency in Sweden. However, the Swedish Migration Board does not take into consideration a person's financial situation. "The crux of it is that there only needs to be one tablet in the country for them to say that treatment is available. And then it makes no difference if it costs a million kronor," says Inger Lindgren, curator at the HIV clinic at Karolinska University Hospital in Huddinge. However, Emilie Welam of the Aliens Appeals Board says that the board follows the

government's decision. "They say that it would be too great a financial commitment for Sweden to offer everyone treatment," she explains. In France protests from human rights organisations have led to a change in legislation, offering temporary residency to people with life-threatening illnesses if they cannot be guaranteed treatment in their home country. According to Åsa Kronberg there could be at least 100 people in this situation in Sweden. "If we've begun life-sustaining treatment then we have an ethical and moral obligation to continue that treatment," she says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 25 July 2005, p. 10, SPR translation)

New rules for apathetic children under critique

The Migration Board presented new guidelines regarding the handling of apathetic children 22 July. According to the new guidelines, the child's own criteria for asylum will be emphasized. It will become a decisive factor if a child's psycho-social development may be damaged due to a rejected asylum application. Moreover, apathetic children will be prioritised in the asylum process. However, the Board's new guidelines have met critique for being unclear by doctors and lawyers who are engaged in cases with apathetic children. "It is impossible to determine when to grant asylum", says Siri Leithoff, lawyer and representative for the 13-year-old boy from Uzbekistan, who's case became a guideline for the governmental decision two weeks ago. "It is positive that the psycho-social risks are being emphasized, but it also increases the demand for documents and inquiries", says Göran Bondegård, a doctor who has treated several apathetic children. Olof Carlstedt, deputy at the Aliens Appeals Board, agrees, "In order to follow the new guidelines, the Migration Board must do further research on the psycho-social aspect", he says. According to Anna Wessel, head of the Asylum Unit at the Migration Board, no extension of the routines is being planned.

(Dagens Nyheter, 23 July, p. 15)

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Finnish press

Finland violates the Human Rights Convention

In decision made on Tuesday, the European Court of Human Rights found that the refusal of entry of a Congolese man who had applied for asylum in Finland is violating the European Convention on Human Rights. The Congolese man applied for asylum in Finland in 1998. He told that he had belonged to the troops of the President Mobutu Sese Seko and while being an asylum-seeker in the Netherlands he had spied on the asylum-seekers coming from his country. When Laurent Kabila overthrew Mobutu in 1997 the man had to leave his country. The Finnish Directorate of Immigration rejected his asylum application. The man appealed to the European Court of Human Rights after having been rejected also by the Administrative Court and the Supreme Administrative Court. The Finnish Government denied his claims. The European Court of Human Rights found that if the man were to be returned to the Democratic Republic of Congo he might face inhumane treatment as long as the current situation exists.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 27 July 2005, p. A8)

Norwegian press

Three units for unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers being closed

The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) close three units for unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers. The municipalities are Asker, Engerdal and Nome. The reason is that the number of unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers coming to Norway has rapidly decreased. UDI will still have left six reception centres with special units for unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers around the country.

(Aftenposten, 30 July 2005, p. 4)

Increased immigration to Norway – less asylum-seekers

An increasing number of people arrive in Norway to obtain work, while at the same time the number of asylum-seekers is decreasing. This is shown by figures from the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) for the first half of the year. The total number of labour permits issued to persons outside the Nordic countries increased by 35 per cent from June 2004 till June this year. At the same time the number of asylum-seekers dropped by 40 per cent from the first half of 2004 to the same period this year. "We see no signs that the number of asylum-seekers will increase again in the coming months," says UDI Director General Trygve G. Nordby.

(NRK/The Norway Post, 29 July 2005)

Swedish press

Shekarabi on refugee amnesty

On Sunday's DN debate page current Social Democratic Youth (SSU) Chairman Ardalan Shekarabi writes about refugee policy and the need to change legislation to allow more asylum-seekers to stay in Sweden. He writes that as a Social Democrat for him the issue is solely about humanity and solidarity. 14 September the Swedish Parliament is due to vote on whether or not to offer an amnesty to refugees who are in hiding in Sweden. Shekarabi writes that there is some opposition to an amnesty amongst the Social Democrats, Minister for Migration Barbro Holmgren being one of those against the idea. In a last effort before he steps down as SSU Chairman Shekarabi wants to try and convince Holmgren otherwise. Shekarabi writes that there are roughly 10,000 people in Sweden who are in hiding from the authorities to avoid being sent back to the country they fled from. Around 3,000 of them are children. All had their applications rejected but the decisions were made within a system that a Parliament majority has deemed so bad that it has since been scrapped. The Aliens Appeals Board is shutting down as of 31 March next year and the question is what to do with these people. Transferring all the cases to the new system would put enormous pressure on the courts and only lengthen the time for them to get a decision. Shekarabi says the new system should be given a chance to work so these people can stay. (Dagens Nyheter, 31 July 2005, p. 6, SPR translation)