

Nordic Headlines 7 October 2004

Danish press

Germany beats Denmark in integration

According to a new joint survey by the Danish Rockwell Foundation Research Institute (RFF) and the German Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA) the integration of immigrants into German society is progressing far better than in Denmark due to financial incentives which encourage immigrants in Germany to take a job. Whilst over 8 out of ten immigrants in Germany can earn over 100 Euros more every month by working instead of living off state benefits, the figures in this country are less than six out of every ten. In addition, starting salaries are generally lower in Germany. The survey also reveals that a self-employed immigrant in this country generally earns less than an average wage earner, whilst in Germany he or she earns twice as much.

(Jyllands Posten, 5 October 2004, p. 3, NE translations)

Majority of Danes rejected in marriage bids

A new report from the Danish Immigration Service reveals that the majority of those who are rejected by the immigration authorities in their attempts to gain residency for a foreign-born spouse are actually Danish citizens – either ethnic Danes, or immigrants who have lived in this country long enough to achieve Danish citizenship. Sükrü Ertosun, chairman of the Council for Ethnic Minorities (REM) said that the strict interpretation of the rules is a hindrance to integration. “If you have lived here all your life, have a Danish passport, but are refused permission to bring your wife to this country, then you are made to feel like a second-class citizen and build up hate towards the system,” he said. However, at the same time the Danish People’s Party is now pushing for even stricter interpretation of the rules concerning family reunification which it claims are far too lenient. The party is demanding that alongside the requirement for a DKK 53,096 bank guarantee, applicants wanting to bring a foreign-born spouse into Denmark should also have to provide a financial statement showing that they have no debt to the state or local authorities. In addition they will also have to prove that they can provide suitable living accommodation for their intended spouse and haven’t received any social benefits for three years.

(Politiken, 4 October 2004, front, p. 6, NE translations)

Danish UN boss rejects Israeli attack

Peter Hansen, the Danish head of UNRWA, the UN’s organisation to aid Palestinian refugees, who has been accused by Israel of providing Palestinians with UN ambulances to transport rockets, claims to have the full support of UN General Secretary Kofi Annan. Danny Gillermann, Israel’s UN ambassador, stated categorically on Israeli radio, Saturday, that Hansen was directly involved in the rocket affair, in which an Israeli army video purportedly shows Palestinian militants in Gaza loading rockets into a vehicle clearly marked with the UN’s logo.

“Peter Hansen is no friend of Israel. In fact quite the opposite. He hates Israel,” Gillerman said. Hansen has rejected that the objects seen on the video are rockets. “A Qassam rocket weighs around 40 kilos and can’t be carried in one hand as the video shows,” he said.

(Jyllands Posten, 4 October 2004, p. 5 & Politiken, NE translations)

Legal experts slam Denmark’s human rights record

In a hard-hitting new report lawyers at the Institute of Human Rights accuse the government of discrimination and of violating European human rights conventions. The contentious 24-years of age stipulation for citizens seeking residency via family reunification, which according to the institute’s legal experts “...breaches the right to family life according to article 8 of the European Human Rights Convention” once again comes under fire – as does the Danish immigration authorities’ demand that people requesting family reunification are required to pay a security deposit of DKK 53,096. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder has so far refused to comment on the new report but the Social Democrats’ spokesperson on immigration, Anne-Marie Meldgaard, said she was ‘surprised’ at the harsh tone and language used. A spokesman for the Danish People’s Party, which has consistently criticised the work of the Institute of Human Rights, dismissed the report as “a one-sided bucket of swill.”

(Politiken, 2 October 2004, front & Jyllands Posten, NE translations)

Finnish press

EU starts to control the flow of migrants from Africa

EU is planning to establish a buffer zone in North Africa in co-operation with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to restrain the flow of African asylum-seekers coming to EU. Setting up refugee camps in Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Mauritania was discussed when Ministers of the Interior and Ministers of Justice of the EU member states met in Haag last Friday. Finnish Minister of the Interior, Kari Rajamäki, who participated in the meeting, finds the proposal complicated because EU has not even managed to agree upon a common migration policy. According to Rajamäki, setting up camps should not deteriorate the rights of the asylum-seekers. He also stated that the responsibility for the flow of migration should not be left for the North African states to bear. The project was also criticized by the French Minister of the Interior, Dominique de Villepin.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 2 October 2004, p. A17)

Returned asylum-seekers from Norway and Sweden come to Lapland

The amount of asylum-seekers coming from Sweden and Norway to Finnish Lapland has increased drastically this year. One of the main reasons for this is considered to be a tightening of the refugee policy and an up-speeded asylum procedure in Norway. In Rovaniemi, the amount of asylum-seekers has six-doubled in two years. This year, 120 of a total number of 167 asylum-seekers

came from the former Yugoslavian and 80 per cent of them have already been rejected in Sweden or Norway. If an asylum-seeker is not granted asylum in Finland, he or she will be deported back to the first country of asylum. The Directorate of Immigration uses at least two to four months to process these applications. Interviewing the applicants in order to define their identity, country of origin and travel route, as well as escorting them back to the country of origin, are duties of the local police. Consequently, the police in the city of Rovaniemi has found it necessary to assign three persons working full time on these tasks. According to Marja Pentikäinen, Senior adviser at the Ministry of Labour, the assessment of asylum claims has speeded up in Finland. Yet this change has not had much impact overall because the police lack resources to take care of their duties. According to Pentikäinen, also the appeal process could be decentralized to speed up the process. Now all the appeals are processed in the Helsinki administrative court, which takes approximately 11 months. (Helsingin Sanomat, 2 October 2004, p. A9)

Norwegian press

Ill asylum-seekers get their own units

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg wants to establish special units for the mentally ill at four or five asylum centres. The money for the establishment of these special units has been listed in the national budget, which will be presented on Wednesday. Solberg stated that she estimates that there will be room for about 50 asylum-seekers at these centers. The offer is only for asylum-seekers who today do not receive any help from psychiatry facilities. "The units should have an option for the people who can become better and for the people who must receive treatment over time," Solberg explained. "This means less pressure on the individual centre." Last year there were a total of 23 persons at asylum centers who had to be followed by guards 24-7 because they were a danger to themselves and other persons at the center, and because the centers did not have the skill to treat them. Some of the funds that today are allocated to extra security personnel will be moved to establish these units," Solberg said. Lately Norway has experienced several serious incidents where psychically ill asylum seekers have attacked random persons on busses, streetcars and airplanes.

(Nettavisen, 6 October 2004)

Three out of ten dangerous patients have refugee background

Around 30 per cent of the dangerous patients at the regional mental hospitals at Dikemark in Akershus and Sandviken in Bergen have come to Norway as refugees. The figures, which are obtained by public broadcaster NRK, show that a considerable number of the refugees that arrive in Norway have major mental problems. This is confirmed by Thor Egil Holteskog at the Dikemark regional security section. Many of our patients have gone through war and traumatic experiences in their homeland. They no longer have people around them who

they trust, people who can show them the present reality. In this way fantasies may develop and turn into psychoses, Holteskog says. For persons who have experienced atrocities and harassment in their homeland, even the smallest trifle may push them over the edge, he says.

(NRK, 2 October 2004)

Second generations are not immigrants

"Children and youth who have grown up in Norway should not be deemed as immigrants but as a part of the diversity," said the Norwegian Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg. Solberg made the statement in connection with the government's white paper "diversity thought including and participation". "I think it's wrong to talk about whether or not children and youth who have grown up in Norway as 'integrated' or not," Solberg stated. "The question is whether or not they participate on the same line as other people, and if they feel included and accepted. They should not be described as immigrants, but as part of the population's diversity." In a press release Solberg further explain her position. "The government wants to give all people in Norway the same opportunity to choose how they want to life, independent on cultural or religious background. The respect for the individual is a leitmotif through the government's white paper." "The government do not want a society with large social and economic differences follow ethnical lines. Introduction offers for newly arrived, adult immigrants are important in order to prevent systematic inequality. The government suggest a new measure for immigrants who are dependent on social welfare who have been without work for a longer period of time. At the same time, we have to stimulate the creative power that many immigrants have," Solberg said.

(Nettavisen, 1 October 2004)

Government wants to throw 350 asylum-seekers out on the street

The Norwegian government wants to throw around 350 asylum-seekers out on the street unless they return home voluntarily. The Hålogaland Court of Appeal will soon decide whether the new policy of asylum-seekers losing the right to board and lodge at a reception centre when their application is rejected, is against the European Convention on Human Rights. Since this is an important and principal legal matter it is assumed that the case will go all the way to the Supreme Court. Psychologist Nora Sveaass, who is an expert on refugee trauma, warns the government, saying that "such treatment from the authorities might create aggression and frustration. "Some refugees will rather prefer prison or death than letting themselves being sent back, Sveaass said.

(Aftenposten, 1 October 2004, p. 3)

Swedish press

Builders welcome immigrants

Some 1,000 persons working in the building industry have answered questions concerning their attitudes towards women and persons with a foreign background. A majority would welcome immigrants as colleagues. Only 19 per cent are negative. Krister Stralberg, Ombudsman for the Swedish Union of Clerical and Technical Employees in Industry (SIF), says that the answers show that the picture of the builders as sceptical to people different from themselves is not true. Stralberg is also a member of the Committee of Libra, an EU project that is dealing with discrimination and segregation in the light of the lack of labour force one knows will strike the building industry within 5-10 years.

(Dagens Nyheter, 7 October 2004, Economy – p. 8)

Obligated to participate in Swedish language classes in order to stay

According to a survey made by 'Local.se', 51 per cent of some 500 English speaking persons living in Sweden thought that one should be forced to take part of Swedish language classes in order to obtain a permit of stay. However, 24 per cent of the group thought that learning Swedish is not important, even if living in Sweden. Those asked in the survey were also very critical to the Swedish language education at Swedish for Immigrants (SFI).

(Dagens Nyheter, 7 October 2004, p. 9)

Immigrants live longer in Sweden

According to Statistics Sweden (SCB), immigrants in Sweden live longer than their compatriots in the native countries. The difference is biggest among Asian and East European women. There is also a difference among people from western countries, which could be explained by the fact that those who emigrate have stronger health and economy than the average in the home country.

(Dagens Nyheter, 5 October 2004, p.10)

Aminatu Bello may stay

Aminatu Bello from Nigeria may stay in Sweden until further notice. The European Court has decided not to allow the Aliens Appeal Board to carry out their decision on deportation before the court has decided whether Sweden has gone against the European convention on human rights. It takes the court several years to make such a decision. In her application for asylum Bello says she was abused by her husband when he found out that she was pregnant with another man, and that she now risks being stoned according to the Muslim law used in her home village. Attached to the application is an article published in the Nigerian Observer, saying that she is wanted by Muslim priests. According to the Swedish authorities it is not probable that the law is used in this region of Nigeria and the Board also doubts the credibility of the personal information given by Bello. Madeleine Seidlitz at Amnesty International, says that a single mother is always vulnerable in every part of the country and it is therefore doubtful whether it is possible to deport a woman with a child. Bello's lawyer, Ylva Orrenius, will

now demand a review of the case at the Migration Board. "She can not live several years with this uncertainty", she says.
(Dagens Nyheter, 4 October 2004, p. 6)

Lawyer reports the Migration Board

Leading refugee lawyers accuse the Migration Board for forcing them to break the law. The Board is carrying out new work procedures more based on conversation than questioning and the lawyers are critical of the fact that they now are to perform some of the tasks of the Migration Board. Lawyer Hans Bredberg has reported the Board to the Parliamentary Ombudsman.
(Dagens Nyheter, 4 October 2004, p. 8)

Criticism against new interview methods

Leading refugee lawyers have accused the Migration Board because they are forced to perform tasks that are against the law. The lawyers refuse to put pressure on their clients regarding information about their passports and travel itinerary. The asylum process at the Migration Board has to be as just as possible. To this end, they are introducing a new working method where the process will be more of a discussion than an examination. Several lawyers in Stockholm have criticised the new working method, as in practice they will have to perform tasks from the Board, which is contrary to the law and the rules for lawyers. According to Hans Emanuelsson of the Migration Board, this is a misunderstanding. Lawyers only have to help the asylum-seekers to put forward all positive aspects. Lawyer Hans Bredberg claims however that in several cases lawyers have received lists with questions. The lawyers were requested to ask questions regarding itinerary, passport and other details.
(Svenska Dagbladet, 3 October 2004, p.6)

Rejected asylum-seekers escape

Two men escaped from a detention centre run by the Migration Board. The men were in the centre to await deportation.
(Svenska Dagbladet, 3 October 2004, p.8)

Lower results in classes with many immigrants

A student who attends a class with more than 80 per cent immigrants, perform worse than other students. The Swedish National Agency for Education believes that not only social and economical background play a role with regards to grades, but that segregation is a negative factor in itself. Minister for Education and Science, Thomas Östros, says SEK 225 million has been budgeted to make sure that the best teachers, the best development resources and the most attractive study trends are available in the segregated areas.
(Dagens Nyheter, 2 October 2004, p. 6 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 11)

EU-camps in North Africa

The EU has given the go-ahead for refugee camps in North Africa. The refugees will be given shelter and their asylum claims will be dealt with. Ministers for

Migration have talked about reception centres and help centres in five North African countries: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania. Refugees that are fleeing north to Europe will be received there. Also those who are in international waters in the Mediterranean will be taken to the new camps. This is however not the case for refugees that are within the borders of the EU. The plan is building on a proposal by UN's High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers. The goal is to strengthen the countries own capacity to receive and protect political refugees and others that flee from destitution and poverty. There are still many questions: who will have the legal responsibility? Who will monitor the procedures? And how will the refugees that have founded reasons for asylum get to Europe? Several organizations for human rights have mentioned that the EU is undermining the refugee law. Everyone agrees that something has to be done to solve the problem regarding the Mediterranean, but I am afraid that this is just another attempt to stop people reaching Europe, said Dick Oosting, Head of Amnesty's Office in Brussels.

(Dagens Nyheter, 2 October 2004, p. 10 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 27)

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Danish press

Danish UN head demands apology

Danish head of the UN organisation for Palestinian refugees UNRWA Peter Hansen, wants Israel to issue an official apology to his organisation, after the Israeli army claimed last week that it transported rockets for Hamas in the Gaza strip. The Israeli army admitted Wednesday that it had been too quick off the mark and had made a mistake. "I want an apology, and I would like to see just as much energy used on retracting the allegations as was used in pressing them forward," he says. Spokesman for the Israeli embassy Ophir Kariv does not foresee an apology from Israel. "The case is not a personal attack on Peter Hansen, and I cannot see why he therefore needs an apology. It is a case between the UN and Israel," he says.

(Jyllands Posten, 14 October 2004, p. 8, NE translation)

Less Iraqi repatriation

Although a relatively large number of Iraqis chose to leave Denmark and return home immediately after Saddam Hussein was deposed, the figures have fallen drastically over the past few months. Of the estimated 26,000 Iraqis residing in Denmark, 240 accepted help from the Danish Refugee Council to return home between April 2003 and September of this year. However, repatriation has now ground to a virtual halt, and of those who initially returned home at least 20 have come back to Denmark.

(Jyllands Posten, 13 October 2004, p. 3, NE translation)

Fogh invites the wrong people to integration meeting

Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen is sharply criticised by experts in Islam after the list of guests has been released before a so-called dialogue meeting on better integration at the Prime Minister's residence at Marienborg. The list of 22 people does not include any representatives of Muslim leaders in Denmark, but only hand-picked Danes and immigrants, some of whom have distanced themselves from the religion. This will mean that the country's 180,000 Muslims will think that the prime minister has no wish to enter into a dialogue with any form of Islam, not even a moderate one, the experts warn. "When you do not invite representatives from the Muslim institutions in Denmark, it is not an invitation for dialogue on integration. Then the meeting will be of no use. He will get only half a picture of reality. If the prime minister wants a better dialogue he must reach out to them who have a say in the real world," says Jørgen Bæk Simonsen, lecturer at the Danish Institute at Damascus and Copenhagen University. The Prime Minister has explained previously that the meeting is not a religious meeting, but a meeting with practitioners in the integration effort.

(Jyllands Posten, 8 October 2004, front page, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Young asylum seekers lack rights

Many young asylum seekers who arrive in Norway alone have virtually no support systems around them and live under circumstances that would not be allowed by juvenile authorities. One child welfare group wants responsibility for them taken away from immigration officials. Save the Children Norway claims in a new report that state juvenile authorities should look after the young refugees, and offer them the care any other Norwegian child would receive if left without parents or guardians. Many of the underage refugees have fled war and violence in their homelands, but get little or any comfort or support when they arrive in Norway. Secretary General of Save the Children Norway, Gro Brækken, believes young refugees should immediately be placed under the care of juvenile authorities, adding that many would be better off in foster homes while their cases are being processed, instead of asylum centres. "Simply granting more funds won't solve the problem", she says. "This will demand more staffing, development of competence and it will cost a few million Norwegian kroner," Brækken said. "But the result would be that underage refugees would enjoy the same rights as other children without parents in Norway." Save the Children suggests that Norwegian Directorate of Immigration is relieved from this task and the County Administrator's Office takes over the overall responsibility while social services take over the care of single minors seeking asylum. Minister of Children and family Affairs, Laila Dåvøy, will issue a hearing for a proposed change in the Child Welfare Act that gives social services more responsibility during the process of determining whether or not to issue residency to the single minors seeking asylum.

(Aftenposten, 11 October 2004, p. 3)

Vanunu seeks asylum in Norway

Israeli Mordechai Vanunu, who was jailed for 18 years for allegedly relating the country's atomic secrets to a British newspaper, is seeking asylum in either Norway or four other countries. His movements remain restricted, even though he was released from jail earlier this year. Fredrik Heffermehl of the Norwegian Peace Alliance said he spoke to Vanunu on Friday. "He has received great support from some individuals and authorities in Norway, and therefore wants to come here for protection," Heffermehl said. He added that Vanunu also has sent asylum applications to Sweden, Denmark, Ireland and France. Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik personally took up Vanunu's case when his counterpart, Israeli leader Ariel Sharon, visited Norway last summer.

(Aftenposten, 8 October 2004 & Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter, p. 18)

Swedish press

Committee on Social Insurance takes position on asylum proposal

Minister for Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, says that the Committee on Social Insurance (SfU) will take a position today on a proposal to remove asylum-seekers right to appeal a decision as many times as they want. "The purpose of the proposal is to make the asylum process more effective and clear. The waiting has to be shorter for the asylum-seeker", she says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 14 October 2004, p. 5)

Refugee lawyers' rules will be investigated

The Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO) has decided to investigate the Swedish Migration Board's new working methods, as reported by refugee lawyer Hans Bredberg. The Board, on the other hand, has accused Bredberg for neglecting his clients' interests, an accusation which will be investigated by the Swedish Bar Association.

(Dagens nyheter, 14 October 2004, p.12)

Migration Board deprives lawyer of asylum cases

The Migration Board has deprived refugee lawyer Hans Bredberg four cases because he refuses to follow their new working method. The method will be introduced next summer and means that the asylum process will be more of a discussion than an examination. Bredberg and other lawyers have accused the Board of forcing them to perform tasks that are against the law. Bredberg has also reported the Board to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. Lars-Gunnar Lundh at the Migration Board believes that Bredberg has not acted in a way that serves his clients' interests. "If he is not satisfied with our decision he can appeal to the Aliens Appeals Board", Lundh says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 9 October 2004, p.10; 13 October, p.11 & Svenska Dagbladet, 11 October, p. 9)

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Danish press

Forced repatriation

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder has signed an agreement with the Afghan government and the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) that will enable Denmark to forcibly deport rejected asylum seekers. At least 200 Afghan nationals who are currently in abeyance after having their applications for asylum rejected will now be forced to leave the country. The agreement has taken over 18 months to conclude because of UNHCR concern about the asylum-seekers' safety if they were forced to return to Afghanistan. Haarder said yesterday: "There are already many Afghan nationals who have voluntarily returned home and we now have the Afghan government's assurance that it is OK to use force as a last resort."

(Jyllands Posten, 20 October 2004, NE translation)

Bosnians can be deported

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder yesterday signed an agreement with his Bosnian counterpart Baria Colak which will allow 80 rejected asylum seekers from Bosnia to return home. Haarder said: "This agreement has major significance for the ministry and for Denmark because it's an important principle that all countries agree to repatriate their own citizens whose asylum demands have been rejected." Haarder added that he believed that the majority of the Bosnians will leave voluntarily, but if they don't they will be forcibly deported.

(Politiken, 19 October 2004, p. 4, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Illegal refugees in Norway promised help

Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik says that persons without legal residence in Norway will be provided with the essentials of life in an acute emergency. He said this after social services staff in some municipalities has been uncertain about how to treat refugees whose application for asylum has been turned down. Persons who have been denied asylum in Norway are expected to leave the country immediately, and up to now, their housing and social benefits provided by the municipalities have in many places been withdrawn. This would also include their temporary work permit. Bondevik says that all have the right to a roof over their head and enough to eat, also those who are staying here illegally. However, it would not be right if they were to enjoy the full services of the asylum centres, and the general welfare and social support given asylum seekers waiting to be processed. How they should be provided for, must be decided locally and according to the individual needs, Bondevik says.

(NRK, 16 October 2004)

Swedish press

Proposal on asylum-seekers' right to private accommodation is too weak

Several local politicians in Malmö criticize the government for not fully realizing the problems with the asylum-seekers right to private accommodation, the so called 'Ebo' system. The politicians, who all are members of the Malmö City Council, think that the government's proposal to abolish the housing allowance for asylum-seekers, who choose not to live in apartments given by the Migration Board, is not enough. The government should also investigate the legal conditions for limiting the private accommodations and stop the disproportionate distribution of groups of asylum-seekers between municipalities. "The right to private accommodation during the asylum process should be removed. Those who choose private accommodation should not have any social benefit during this time", the politicians write. They believe that without these measures the consequences will be increased social problems and bad living conditions.

(Dagens Nyheter, 20 October 2004, p.6),

EU not agreed on asylum camps

The Swedish government is very critical of the proposal saying that EU should set up camps for asylum-seekers outside the European Union. Minister for Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, says that today when EU does not even have a common legislation, it is impossible to have a common asylum process outside its area.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 19 October 2004, p.17)

DNA-test reunites family

Mona Mohammed Kadhem from Iraq came to Sweden in 2001 and obtained a permit of stay after a couple of months. After this she immediately tried to get her three children living in Syria to Sweden, but the Migration Board and the Aliens

Appeals Board did not believe that she was the children's mother. The main reason was that they did not have the same filing numbers on their Iranian identity documents, as they should have had if they had belonged to the same nuclear family. According to Kadhem, this is a mistake done by the Iranian national registration and she had her children DNA-tested in Damascus. The result of the tests proved her motherhood but the appeal was rejected anyway. Now, when several sources have given identical information, the Migration Board has changed their opinion. Kadhem's lawyer, Anders Sundquist of the Swedish Refugee Advice Centre, is very critical of how the Swedish authorities treat this kind of evidence in asylum and refugee cases. "In family and penal law DNA-evidence is of high value, but not in these cases", he says.

(Dagens nyheter, 17 October 2004, p.11)

Increased number of escapes by asylum-seekers from custodial centres

Migration Board staff is exposed to increased violence when people escape from the Board's custodial centres. This year some 100 persons have escaped from these centres which means that more than 10 people taken into custody escape every month. Ingvar Belkert, head of security at the Migration Board, says that the centres are not prisons and not meant to be that secure. They are rather to be seen as residential centres with locked doors. The security department at the Migration Board is now commissioned to inspect the security situation in general. Eva Zimmerman, head of the custodial centre in Malmö, says that this summer alone, the working environment has become more brutal. She thinks this could be partly explained by the fact that the clients have changed during the last years. "Now there are many persons seeking asylum who lack real reasons, for example young men from the former Soviet Union or countries in Africa", Zimmerman says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 17 October 2004, p. 8)

The Government wants to change the asylum rules

Thursday next week, the Government will come to a decision whether to introduce a bill on abolished housing allowance for asylum-seekers living in private accommodation ('Ebo'). According to local politicians from the social democratic party in Malmö, Göteborg, Stockholm and Södertälje this subsidy causes cramped housing accommodations and social problems. Minister for Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, says that 'Ebo' leads to isolation and constant moving. Instead, the asylum-seekers should accept to live in apartments in areas where housing shortage is not a problem. The government will also decide whether to introduce a bill on limited possibilities to submit a new application for asylum. Holmberg says that in the future, asylum-seekers will continue to have the possibility to submit a new application if the circumstances have changed, but it will not be sufficient with, for example, merely a new medical certificate. "Both the housing allowance and the present asylum process have very negative consequences for the persons seeking asylum. One has to dare to adjust this kind of misdirected humanity", Holmberg says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 16 October 2004, p. 14)

The Aliens Appeals Board changes decision on deportation

The Aliens Appeals Board has changed its decision to deport a family to Chechnya after the newspaper Dagens Nyheter published an article about the family this week. The family, two adults and three children, fled from the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, in 2001. The Board rejected their claim for asylum, referring to the fact that their passports states they are of 'Ingush' origin and therefore could take up residence in Ingushetia or another part of Russia. The Board has not changed their mind about this particular part, but has nevertheless decided to give the family a permanent residence permit due to humanitarian reasons, referring to the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child.

(Dagens Nyheter, 15 October 2004, p. 12)

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Danish press

88-year old saved from deportation

The sick and frail 88-year old Sardar Begum has been granted permission to remain in Denmark until after Christmas. The elderly woman should have been deported to Pakistan today, but doctors claim that she is suffering from TB and old age and is unable to make food or dress herself. Begum came to Denmark, where she has children, grandchildren and great grandchildren to look after her, in 2002 because she has no relatives in Pakistan. Her lawyer, Jørgen Høgild, characterised the postponement as 'better than nothing.' "I would have preferred that she had been awarded permanent residency in this country which the law allows for in this type of case. I hope the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will make an exception and allow her to remain with her family", said Høgild.

(Jyllands Posten, 27 October 2004, p. 2)

No border corps

Denmark, alongside other EU countries, has rejected an EU proposal to set up a joint military border control corps to halt the flood of illegal immigrants. The proposal has deeply divided the 25 EU members on the issue of how far and how quickly countries should proceed with a joint EU asylum policy. Whilst there is virtual agreement that illegal immigration has to be stopped, there is also widespread disagreement on how to do it. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder said yesterday he was satisfied that the idea of a joint border corps had been rejected. "Denmark would prefer to see a rapid deployment force or a joint network consisting of a team of national experts who will be on alert and ready to assist at the borders", he said.

(Berlingske Tidene, 26 October 2004, p. 8)

Council of Europe slams Danish immigration policies

Human Rights Commissioner for the Council of Europe Alvaro Gil-Robles is not satisfied with the Danish government's recent report justifying tight immigration policies. He has written a new letter to Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration and Minister of Development Bertel Haarder outlining why he, in particular, is dissatisfied with the so-called 24-year rule. The rule states that young people have to be 24 to be married and achieve Danish residency through family reunification regulations. The discriminatory effects of the rule are out of proportion to what the rule is designed to prevent, namely forced marriages, Gil-Robles writes.

(Berlingske Tidene, 22 October 2004, p. 6)

Finnish press

Finland opposes transnational border control

The Finnish Minister of the Interior, Kari Rajamäki, says Finland will not accept transnational EU border control as suggested by the Dutch government. Rajamäki believes that each of the EU member states should take care of their own border control. The Finnish candidate for the post as head of the EU's Border Guard, Ilkka Laitinen, says that the idea of transnational border guards is unrealistic and utopian, because such an arrangement would require changes in each member state's constitution.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 26 October 2004, p. A13)

Europe has closed the door for refugees

Richard Williams, the EU Representative of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), criticizes the European countries for breaking the promises given in the Tampere Summit five years ago. According to Williams, Finland is a positive example for the other EU member states. He appreciates the way Finnish authorities – or UNHCR on behalf of them – visit the refugees' countries of origin in order to make sure that they are safe. He knows that Finland only recognizes a few hundred refugees each year, but he appreciates that asylum is given to the most vulnerable.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 21 October 2004, p. A17)

Norwegian press

Two hunger strikers sent to the hospital

Two of the 13 people on hunger strike inside Oslo Cathedral have been sent to the hospital, while the rest remain on strike, protesting against Norwegian asylum policy. "They were so ill that they needed medical attention", said Mette Sjølli Grimstad, cathedral administrator. "We are not sure what the persons suffered from, but we suspect that their illnesses are connected to the hunger strike." However, Thomas Bøhmer, director of medicine at Aker hospital and professor of clinical nutrition, said that he did not think that these two persons are ill because of hunger strike, because people on hunger strike can survive at least two months if they drink water. The Ethiopians, 13 men and women between the age of 25 and 35, entered Oslo Cathedral Monday afternoon. Grimstad said Wednesday morning that the situation has not changed and nothing has been decided in regards to what is going to happen to the people on hunger strike in the cathedral.

(Nettavisen, 27 October 2004)

Vanunu has not heard from Norway

The world famous Israeli dissident Mordechai Vanunu has waited for an answer from Norway regarding his asylum application for the past six months. Vanunu was released from Israeli jail in April of this year after being imprisoned for 18

years, 11 of them in solitary confinement. In spite of being released, Vanunu is not allowed to leave Israel, and he is not allowed to talk to foreigners. He has therefore called upon Norway for help. However, 6 months later, Vanunu has still not gotten an answer. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg said that Vanunu is not an asylum seeker in Norway as long as he is not on Norwegian soil.

(Nettavisen, 25 October 2004)

Scores homeless after asylum centre fire

Nearly 70 residents of an asylum center at Finnsnes in Troms County, northern Norway, needed shelter after fire swept through the center early Monday. Local police said there were no injuries, but smoke damage meant those evacuated from the center during the night would not be able to return for quite a while. There was no immediate word on what caused the fire.

(Aftenposten, 25 October 2004)

Dismisses new immigration act proposal

Conservative MP Afsan Rafiq dismisses two recent proposals by the Immigration Act Committee. The first proposal is the 21-year rule, saying that one must be at least 21 years old before being eligible for family reunification in Norway. The other proposal is that those to get married abroad need to be interviewed by the Norwegian authorities, in order to detect possible forced or arranged marriages. Rafiq believes these law proposals to be a violation of the international human rights. Signe Øye of the Social Democrats says she will not dismiss the proposals. "Forced marriage is a violation of the human rights. The previous action taken to combat this had very little effect. Therefore, the Social Democrats are willing to consider this again, and a 21-year rule might then be an alternative, Øye says.

(Aftenposten, 23 October 2004, p. 4)

Work permit for rejected Iraqi asylum-seekers

On 22 October 2004, Norway announced new changes in its legislation on work permits. Asylum-seekers from Iraq, who have received a final rejection of their asylum application from the Norwegian authorities, may be granted a temporary work permit, if they fulfill certain criteria. Asylum-seekers from Northern Iraq, who previously have had a temporary work permit not allowing for family reunification or residence permit, could be granted a new temporary work permit. A precondition is that the applicant could verify that there is a job offer for her or him. Further, the asylum-seeker must not have a criminal record and has to pay a fee (NOK 800) when applying for the permit. There must not be any demand to sign up for voluntary return in order to obtain the permit. These work permits will be valid until the asylum-seeker returns, but in any event not for more than one year. Other Iraqi asylum-seekers could be granted temporary work permits only if they will be enrolled in a voluntary return program with IOM (International Organization for Migration). In addition to a confirmation from the IOM the asylum-seeker must show that he or she has a job offer. The permit will be valid

until the applicant returns. The permit will be withdrawn if the asylum-seekers should not return at the set date of departure.

(Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, www.UDI.no, 22 October 2004)

No Rwandan requests for extradition

Norwegian authorities say they have had no inquiries about handing over persons who may have taken part in the genocide of 1994. Police know nothing about the 15-20 possible war criminals that Rwandan prosecutor Jean Basco told Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) on Friday may be in Norway. Oslo police superintendent Finn Abrahamsen said that police are working on 32 cases connected to war crimes and genocide, cases regularly sent over from the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). These cases concern offenses in the Balkans and to some measure in Africa. But among these there is only one connected to war crimes in Rwanda," Abrahamsen said. Rwanda's Attorney General Jean Basco told NRK that there are likely between 15 and 20 war criminals associated with the genocide of 1994 - where over 500,000 Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus were killed - living in Norway since the autumn of 2002. The Ministry of Justice, the UDI and the police cannot confirm Basco's claims. Abrahamsen said that he could not reject them either, but if there are Rwandan war criminals in numbers in Norway, they have not been detected by relevant authorities here. Norway has agreed to assist Rwanda in tracking down war criminals but used about a year and a half before clarifying all standpoints - such as their policy of refusing to extradite persons to countries with the death penalty - and issuing a formal reply in April of this year. Assistant division director Frode Mortensen at the UDI said that they have no information about who these 15-20 people might be and that they check all arriving Rwandan asylum seekers against a list from the Rwandan authorities.

(Aftenposten, 22 October 2004)

Asylum-seekers not more ill than others

A new survey, conducted by psychiatrist Raman Dhawan at Dale asylum centre in Sandnes, reveals that asylum-seekers do not have more psychological problems than the rest of the Norwegian population. According to the survey, 17 per cent of those who received medical treatment at the centre's medical office the last 17 years, suffered from medical illness. The same occurrence can be found at regular medical centres in the country.

(Aftenposten, 22 October 2004, p. 5)

Swedish press

Common border control in the EU

The European Union takes a further step towards a common refugee policy. Last Monday, the responsible ministers discussed the plans for a common asylum policy and common border control. The German proposal to establish camps for asylum-seekers outside EU is now being investigated. Swedish Minister for

Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, says that this is a 'dead proposal' and that Sweden has stated that the United Nation's Refugee Agency should be included in the investigation. In the 'Haag-program', now being developed by the Netherlands, several controversial proposals are presented, for example a common asylum bureau, coordinated assessment of applications for asylum, common responsibility for border control and, in the long run, also a common border police force. Holmberg believes that a common asylum agency would be good, if it is limited to administration tasks, such as coordination of information and practice in the different EU countries. "We need a common asylum policy in Europe, especially for the refugees' sake. Those who come to Europe need to know that they get the same kind of treatment in every country in the European Union", Holmberg says. However, Sweden does not support the proposal to establish a common border police force, but is prepared to share the burden of border control.

(Dagens Nyheter, 26 October 2004, p. 11)

Forced deportation increasingly expensive

The costs concerning deportation of asylum-seekers in Sweden have increased from SEK 42 millions in 2000 to almost SEK 73 million in 2003. This is a very significant increase for the correctional system, which takes care of all the practical details, such as tickets, hotels and special chartered aircrafts. Göran Stenbeck, head of the transportation service, says that there are 30 per cent more deportations this year compared to the previous year, and the forecast for 2005 indicates even higher figures. This could be explained by the increased numbers of asylum-seekers who arrived in the beginning of the 21st century and by the increased numbers of rejections. Today there are also more people that actively oppose deportation. The increased costs could furthermore be explained by longer travel itineraries.

(Dagens Nyheter, 23 October 2004, p. 10)

Refugees in need in the Mediterranean

Since 9 October this year, the German container vessel 'Lydia Oldendorff' is floating around in the Mediterranean with 13 refugees onboard, and both Malta and Italy refuse to receive them. UNHCR spokesperson, Rupert Colville, says that the situation on the ship is very tense and it is getting worse and worse. It is urgent to come to a solution. "To send back asylum-seekers to their native country without a trial goes against fundamental principles in the international refugee law. Italy should take responsibility for evaluation of these cases. It is extremely cramped on the ship, and one of the asylum-seekers has tried to commit suicide", Colville says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 23 October 2004, p. 26)