

Asylum Theme



Equal

Svenska ESF-Rådet

New ways of tackling
discrimination and inequality in
the field of employment



A medium sized city in Sweden...

More than 31,000 asylum seekers came to Sweden in 2003. For most of these people, a long wait, maybe lasting years, lies ahead of them.

On December 2003, 43,400 asylum seekers across Sweden were waiting for their fate to be decided by the National Migration Board or the Alien Appeals Board. According to figures released by the Migration Board, this figure can increase to 65,000 by 2006. This equals the population of a medium sized city in Sweden.

...Waiting, and uncertainty...

The average time which an asylum seeker has to wait for the Migration Board to decide whether or not he or she will be granted asylum in Sweden was, last year, 404 days. That is more than one year. Many have to wait two or three years. During this time, the life of the asylum seeker is marked by worry, anxiety, uncertainty what will happen and very little opportunity to exercise influence over his or her own future.

Though the Government's own guidelines dictate that asylum reception should promote the asylum seeker's future, irrespective of the final decision, and to show special consideration for children, war wounded and others with special needs, reality can often be quite different.

Asylum seekers come primarily from Iraq, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iran, Russia, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan and Turkey. Some are stateless. The number of nationalities represented by asylum seekers is increasing. In 2002, asylum seekers arriving in Sweden represented 124 countries.

Inactivity leads to poor health

The long time it takes to process an asylum application affects the asylum seeker's psychological, physical and social health. The way this time is used has large bearing on the asylum seeker's future ability to function at work and school. The alienation which being an asylum seeker entails—living

in society but by definition not being a part of it—limits the individual's possibilities for action.

Only very few asylum seeker's have an ordinary job. It is unknown exactly how many are working in the informal sector but the number is probably increasing, especially in large cities. Organised activities under the auspices of the Migration Board are intended to give asylum seekers a meaningful existence during their waiting period, while at the same time helping them to prepare for their future integration or return back to their home country. However, according to a survey by the National Audit Office, only half of all asylum seekers participate in the activities. The same survey points to a lack of clear objectives, guidelines and follow-up of these activities.

A long, unsure waiting period, often marked by inactivity and isolation, aggravates poor health. Everything indicates that many asylum seekers become victims in today's asylum reception system.

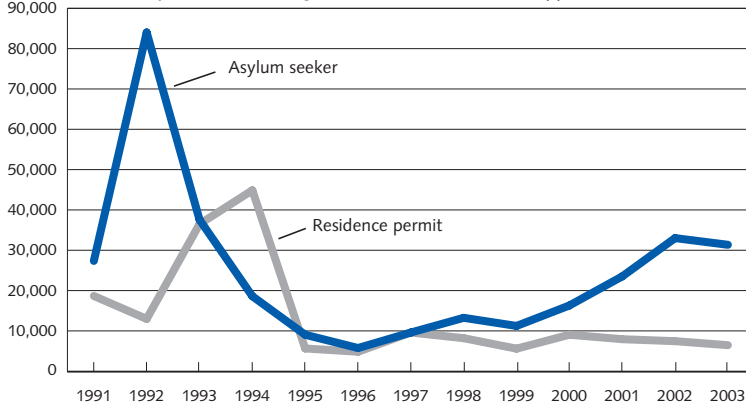
The number of asylum seekers has increased by 40% between 2000 and 2002.

33,000 asylum seekers arrived in Sweden in 2002. This marks a tripling compared to 1999.

In 2003, the number of new asylum seekers declined somewhat. According to the National Migration Board, 29,000 asylum seekers are expected to arrive in Sweden in 2004.

In 2003, approximately 15% of all decisions taken by the National Migration Board were approvals. Eight percent of decisions taken by the Alien Appeals Board (the appeal level) were approvals. Twelve percent of the so-called new applications to the Alien Appeals Board were approvals during the same year. The proportion of approvals has successively declined. An increasing share of asylum seekers is turned away from Sweden. According to the National Police Board a large proportion of those 8-9,000 asylum seekers that were not granted asylum are probably still in Sweden. This number may can reach 30,000 in 2006.

Number of asylum seekers and granted residence permits 1991-2003
Decisions by the National Migration Board and the Alien Appeals Board



Source: National Migration Board

More rejections lead to longer waiting times

An increasing share of asylum seekers has their applications rejected by the Migration Board. At the same time, more and more are appealing their rulings to the Alien Appeals Board. Currently, it is also possible to submit what is known as a new application for residence permit to the Alien Appeals Board. The number of asylum seekers taking advantage of this opportunity is increasing. The number of asylum seekers granted approval due to humanitarian grounds, these often being poor health having arisen during their waiting period, has sharply increased over the past few years.

Authorities are in agreement...

Recently, a number of studies and reports have concluded that there are shortcomings and obvious systemic faults in today's asylum and refugee policy.

An important policy document when it comes to reception of asylum seekers and refugees is the *Agreement on Developing Introduction for Refugees and Other Migrants* (*Överenskommelsen om utveckling av introduktionen för flyktingar och andra invandrare*). The purpose of the Agreement is for four government authorities—the Swedish National Labour Market Board, the National Integration Board, the National Migration Board and the National Education Board, as well as the Swedish Association of Local

Authorities to develop a joint platform for a co-ordinated reform strategy and to strengthen co-operation between concerned parties in the area of asylum and refugee reception.

The Government's recently concluded study—*Getting established in Sweden (Etablering i Sverige)*—just like the Agreement, emphasises the need to co-ordinate the process of asylum reception and introduction of refugees. Early and co-ordinated measures are necessary, according to the study, in order to achieve integration and self-sufficiency.

...and the EU Member States are in agreement

Since 1999, an intensive effort is taking place in the European Union to create a common European asylum system. The legal basis for EU's measures in the area of asylum and refugee policy is the Amsterdam Treaty. At the European Council's meeting in Tampere, Finland in 1999, a number of important principal decisions were taken towards harmonising Member States' asylum systems. The objective is to create a common asylum system—*Common European Asylum System*. The Member States have also adopted a number of directives specifying a minimum standards for asylum reception, among else when it comes to health care, support for disadvantaged groups, education, employment and special measures for unaccompanied minors.

Asylum seekers to Sweden 2003

Serbia and Montenegro	5,305
Somalia	3,069
Iraq	2,700
Stateless	1,787
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1,397
Russia	1,360
Azerbaijan	1,032
Belarus'	901
Afghanistan	811
Iran	787
Other countries	12,206

Total 31,355

Source: National Migration Board

Asylum seekers to the EU 2003

Iraq	20,100
Turkey	19,900
Serbia and Montenegro	18,700
Russia	16,600
China	12,300
Nigeria	11,400
Somalia	10,500
Iran	9,500
Afghanistan	9,400
Democratic Republic of Congo	9,000
Other countries	139,500

Total 277,000

Source: UNHCR

The EQUAL Community Initiative

EQUAL, a development programme under the European Social Fund, provides support to activities aiming to develop new methods and pathways to counter discrimination in, and exclusion from, the labour market.

EQUAL encompasses a number of priority themes. One of these focuses specifically on asylum seekers. The overarching goals of the EQUAL Initiative for the Asylum theme are:

- facilitate the integration of asylum seekers in society and work life;
- develop measures to facilitate a possible return to their home countries;
- develop measures for meaningful activities during the asylum seeking period.

European Refugee Fund

The European Refugee Fund (ERF) supports, among else, projects designed to develop the asylum seeker reception system, integration measures and efforts in connection with voluntary or involuntary repatriation.

The hundred or so projects in Sweden currently or formerly financed with ERF funds focus on a number of areas. These include co-operation between authorities and voluntary organisations, developing methods to help the target group choose where they want to live in Sweden, increasing the efficiency of health care and rehabilitation programmes and improved introduction for especially disadvantaged groups of refugees.

New actors

EQUAL's Asylum Theme concerns many different policy areas, all requiring integrated efforts from various actors in society. Activities in EQUAL are carried out within the frame of *Development Partnerships*, wherein actors from various sectors in society co-operate in finding solutions to related problems. Each Development Partnership also co-operates within a trans-national partnership that includes actors and activities in other Member States. A desirable development is to see increased involvement by NGOs, both within EQUAL and the ERF.

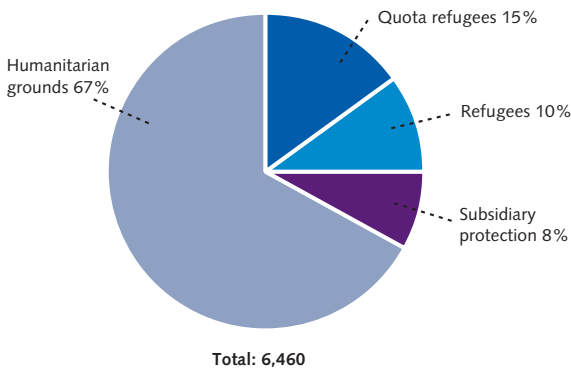
Asylum Theme in EQUAL

There are three EQUAL Development Partnerships, and one Objective 3 project, in Sweden under the umbrella of the Asylum Theme. They all work

to develop activities in various priority areas and co-operate in the Thematic Network at national level where ERF projects also play a role. The four project activities share the following common reference points.

- Reception of asylum seekers is considered as part of a coherent process comprising, in addition to asylum reception, refugee introduction, integration and reintegration/repatriation.
- The situation of asylum seekers is assessed from a health perspective. An important reference point for activities is the key role of the individual's physical and psychological health situation for their ability to take advantage of education, training and other measures.
- Priority is given especially to disadvantaged groups. This includes educational support, social support for unaccompanied minors and adapted measures for low-educated women.
- Effective co-operation requires high competence among concerned actors. Common competence development of staff and decision-makers from all organisations and authorities is an important element in achieving this goal.

Share of residence permits in Sweden 2003
Refugees, subsidiary protection and humanitarian grounds



Source: National Migration Board

Reintegration and repatriation perspective is necessary

The large majority of asylum seekers are denied asylum. Activities focusing on asylum seekers and asylum reception must, therefore, be realistic and proceed from the fact that the asylum seeker's application will most probably be rejected. The asylum seeker's waiting time needs to be used in a constructive way in preparing him or her both for a continued life in Sweden or, if not granted asylum, a return home.

Regardless of the result of the application for asylum, the individual must be fortified to deal with her or his future life.

Asylum application decisions 2003 (by the National Migration Board)

Citizenship	Decided	Approved	% approved	Denied/ Other	Written off
Serbia and Montenegro	6,738	521	8	5,474	743
Iraq	2,435	1,179	48	792	464
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1,995	73	4	1,738	184
Somalia	1,812	1,223	67	505	84
Russia	1,475	88	6	1,095	292
Stateless	1,036	480	46	461	95
Turkey	953	85	9	809	59
Bulgaria	835	0	0	636	199
Belarus'	799	6	1	646	147
Other	13,256	976	7	10,500	1,780
Total	31,334	4,631	15	22,656	4,047

Source: National Migration Board

A national forum—National Thematic Network

Since 2002, there is a National Thematic Network (NTN) on Asylum within the EQUAL Initiative in Sweden. The Network includes representatives from concerned authorities, the European Refugee Fund and the Development Partnerships and the project within the Asylum Theme.

The aim of the Asylum NTN is to act as a collective resource at national level to strengthen efforts to disseminate positive experiences and influence systems and policies. The national thematic group analyses, monitors and evaluates project experiences and results from EQUAL and European Refugee Fund financed activities. The group initiates, and contributes with, relevant research and development activities.

Asylum NTN provides information to, and seeks to influence, concerned

Ministries, authorities, organisations and relevant studies. An important task is to establish contacts with concerned individuals and decision-makers, contribute towards raising understanding, influencing public opinion and to improving existing systems. Asylum NTN organises seminars and conferences, compiles experiences and results from projects and research, acts as a conveyor of long-term development thinking and a holder of new competence.

Asylum NTN has its own website—www.temaasyl.se. It is a joint forum for information, learning and communication where one can find facts, documents and information on asylum and refugee issues both at national and EU level. Current research and debates, good examples and experiences, project activities and a calendar of relevant activities can also be found on the website.

RESEARCH FOR INCREASED KNOWLEDGE

Within the frame of Asylum NTN, three research projects are managed. These aim to increase our understanding of asylum seekers and the asylum reception system.

- **The borders of welfare—from asylum reception to settlement**

Asylum reception entails, according to the Agreement—efforts in various policy fields and requires cross sector co-operation between authorities and organisations. What are the limits of the welfare state's inclusion of asylum seekers? Is there a discrepancy between asylum reception rhetoric and practice? What regulations and incentives exist for authorities' to act?

- **While we are waiting**

How does an individual manage in a situation marked by waiting, uncertainty and limited opportunities to do something about their own future? What coping strategies must the individual choose/accept under such circumstances? How can the empowerment perspective central to the EQUAL Initiative be realised?

- **Waiting under influence**

How is the asylum seeker's health affected during the waiting phase? Are there any recurring patterns? The study aims to increase our understanding of what are the negative and positive affects on the asylum seeker during the reception period.

A European Forum—Asylum Seekers ETG

Within the frame of the EQUAL Initiative, there are equivalent thematic groups at EU level. Sweden and the Netherlands co-chair the Asylum Seekers European Thematic Group—Asylum Seekers ETG. The group works to foster dissemination of best practice and influence policy at EU level.

An important means for the group to reach, among others, decision-makers, is its organisation of the first European conference on asylum issues in Dublin in the spring of 2004. The conference includes participants from both the EU 15 and the 10 New Member States. A series of smaller conferences and seminars are also organised throughout the programme period.

Further information on the Asylum Seekers ETG's activities can be found on the EU Commission's website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/EQUAL.

Swedish project activities in the Asylum Theme:

ARRIVAL GÖTEBORG

The target group is asylum seekers living in own accommodation. In the Development Partnership there are a number of sub-projects and activities aiming to strengthen people's health and provide asylum seekers with a sense of meaning during their waiting period. All activities have a dual purpose: preparation for integration and, in case of them being denied asylum, reintegration.

Arrival Göteborg participates in the transnational partnership ASPIRE! (*Asylum Seekers Participation is the Result!*). Development Partnerships from Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland and Portugal, as well as a voluntary organisation in the Czech Republic, co-operate towards improving the situation, including health, of asylum seekers in Europe.

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RE-COMP (REHABILITATION AND RE-ORIENTATION THROUGH COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT)

The Development Partnership carries out a number of different activities in the Swedish cities of Uppsala and Malmö. These activities proceed from newly arriving asylum seekers' rehabilitation needs and their ability to engage in competence development and occupational re-orientation. Large emphasis is placed on their health situation, strengthening empowerment and exploiting their inherent competencies and resources.

RE-COMP is also part of the transnational partnership ASPIRE! Development Partnerships from Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland and Portugal, as well as a voluntary organisation in the Czech Republic,

co-operate towards improving the situation, including health, of asylum seekers in Europe.

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REHABILITATION OF TRAUMATISED REFUGEES IN SPARSELY POPULATED REGIONS

The target group of the Development Partnership is traumatised quota refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia placed in the northern Swedish municipalities of Dorotea and Lycksele. Their objective is to facilitate their integration into society and on the labour market, basing efforts on their own resources and limitations. The individual's physical and social health are core to all activities.

Rehabilitation of traumatised refugees in sparsely populated regions is part of the transnational partnership NEAR (New European Action for Asylum Seekers and Refugees). Working together with Development Partnerships in Germany and Greece, their objective is to develop methods for facilitating integration of asylum seekers and refugees in society and on the labour market.

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STRAIGHT INTO SWEDEN

The target group of the project is asylum seekers and those living in the Reception centre in Gimo (Östhammar municipality). One objective is to improve the employability and integration of asylum seekers by putting them in trainee positions in local businesses.

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The EQUAL National Asylum Thematic Network includes:

EQUAL—an European Social Fund development programme, the European Refugee Fund, the National Migration Board, the National Integration Board, and the Swedish ESF Council.

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This brochure is produced by the Umbrella Project.



*European
Refugee Fund*



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