

Project SafeCom Inc. - Information Sheet 1

Refugees and detention - countries compared

Sweden

- Annual refugee resettlement quota of 1800.
- In 1999 34% of 11,231 asylum claims were approved for refugee status.
- No skilled migration or family reunion program.
- Asylum seekers spend at least two weeks in Carlslund Refugee Reception Centre to apply for refugee status and undergo health, identity and character checks.
- Following initial checks, an asylum seeker is moved to a regional centre — accommodation blocks with child-care and recreational facilities — and is required to visit officials once a month. Alternatively, asylum seekers can stay with family or close friends, which more than 50% of applicants do.
- An asylum seeker with false or no documents may be detained in one of four detention centres, or be required to report regularly to authorities. The average time spent in detention is 47 days. The media and non-government organisations are given access. The use of anti-depressants is common.
- A child (under 18) cannot be detained for more than three days. Families without documentation are often housed in an open reception centre with reporting requirements.
- Asylum seekers whose claim will take more than four months (and most do) have the right to work.
- Asylum seeker children get the same medical coverage as Swedish children, parents get emergency medical treatment cheaply. Unaccompanied minors are placed in supervised group homes.
- Each asylum seeker is assigned a caseworker who discusses the process with them and prepares them for the range of possible outcomes.
- All accepted refugees are granted permanent residence.
- Those who don't fit the UN definition of a refugee may qualify for asylum under a category known as "persons in need of protection". This includes those fleeing due to war or environmental disaster. Other humanitarian considerations, such as extreme illness, are also considered. Those granted asylum in this category, are required to pay back a \$4000 loan.
- Appeals of negative decisions can be made to an independent tribunal, and can take up to two years.
- Failed asylum seekers have the choice of leaving voluntarily or being deported. Very few abscond.

*[From Asylum Seekers in Sweden by Grant Mitchell, 2001. See also:
<http://www.safecom.org/mitchell.htm> and <http://www.safecom.org/sweden.htm>]*

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Britain

- No refugee resettlement quota.
- In 1999 20,400 asylum seekers were accepted as refugees out of 71,145 claims.
- The approval rate has dropped from 65% in 1993 to 21% in 2001. One in four of those are granted full rights as recognised refugees, the rest are granted “exceptional leave to remain”, which provides them with a temporary visa. After four years, they can apply for indefinite leave to remain, but the government may decide to send them home.
- The “dispersal policy” often allocates housing to asylum seekers in remote, small towns where there is vacant housing, high unemployment and poverty. Many asylum seekers suffer racially motivated violence. Those who choose to live with friends or family, or move to another area, have all government support withheld.
- Detention, used selectively since the 1980s, is being expanded to house up to 4000 people in the next two years.
- New laws will see asylum seekers issued with ID cards and monitored more closely while their applications are processed.
- The right to appeal a negative decision is being restricted.

United States

- Refugee resettlement quota of 85,000
- In 1999 there 6589 asylum seekers were accepted from 49,908 claims.
- Since 1996, a law requires mandatory detention of undocumented or falsely documented asylum seekers — those who haven't been summarily deported — until it is established that they have a “credible fear of persecution”. Those who can establish a “credible fear” are eligible for parole. Officers of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) have the power to grant release following interview, but many officers ignore or resist this power.
- Upon arriving in the US, undocumented asylum seekers are routinely fingerprinted, handcuffed and shackled and transported to a detention centre or prison. Their clothes and belongings are taken from them and they have to wear a prison uniform. There have been allegations of sexual misconduct, beatings, stun-gun use and the unwarranted use of solitary confinement in the detention centres. Hunger strikes have been common in detention centres during the late 1990s.
- Since 1996, there has been a sharp rise in the number detained in INS facilities, numbering 14,700 in 1988, and expected to number 24,000 in 2001. It is unknown how many of these are asylum seekers, because there are no records.
- In 2000, the INS detained close to 4700 unaccompanied children who arrived in the US without documents.
- In 1981, the average length of detention was four days. By 1990 it was 23 days, with many detained for more than a year. In 1992 it was an average of 54 days. The INS detention budget grew from \$15.7 million in 1981 to \$149 million in 1992.

*[Information from Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1999.]
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