

Report on Migration and Asylum 2010 : Sweden

Current situation for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants

Sweden has been quite successful in portraying itself as a humanist and just country, whereas at the same time pursuing tough and inhumane Migration- and Asylum politics. A good example of this hypocrisy is how Iraqi refugees are handled by the Swedish migration authorities. As early as 2006 Sweden claimed that Iraq was a "safe country" and signed a repatriation agreement on asylum seekers with Iraq. Sweden has also been leading the way in implementing the common European asylum policy. During the Swedish Presidency in 2009 the Stockholm program was adopted. Sweden has also been working a lot with changing labor directives and visa regulations to facilitate Circular migration.

Sweden and other Nordic countries have benefited considerably from the Dublin convention. Sweden rarely makes exceptions to the convention, and this leads to many adult and minor refugees eventually being sent back to the country of their first asylum application. The only exception to this rule has been for Greece. In the summer of 2010, Sweden stopped sending refugees back to Greece on the grounds of the inhumane conditions in detention centres there. This however has been the only exception.

– Deportations

The Swedish government made 2009 the "year of repatriation". Since then the deportation of asylum seekers has intensified. Border police are working hard to arrest and deport asylum seekers who have been denied asylum or are in the final part of the asylum process. The largest deportation project has been for Iraqi refugees. In the last year Swedish border police have organized, with the support of Frontex, monthly mass deportations of Iraqi refugees alternately from Stockholm and Gothenburg.

According to a police report on deportations dated September 1st 2010, Sweden is the EU country responsible for planning and leading deportations. Other countries participating in these deportations are Norway and the UK. During operations 32 persons from Sweden, 12 persons from Norway and 12 persons from the UK were deported.

In the autumn of 2010 the European Court of human rights produced a directive against the return of Iraqi asylum seekers to Iraq. Those who had been denied asylum could apply for suspension of their repatriation orders at the European Court. This ruling was first ignored by the Swedish Migration Board, but after hard work by the asylum movement (and further representations to the ECHR) some deportations were cancelled.

Sweden has also been very active in repatriating large numbers of Roma people. Roma people coming from Serbia formed the largest group of asylum seekers in Sweden in 2010. Most of them have been living in temporary refugee centres in Sweden, such as campsites. They have received deportation decisions quickly and without the possibility of appeal, even though some of them may well have grounds for asylum.

Sweden also deports Roma people coming from Romania. The numbers being deported have not been very big, but this has created much discussion because they are EU citizens and thus have the right to be in Sweden without a residence permit. This is a new departure that the police deports EU citizens because they are undesirable.

– **Unaccompanied minors**

Unaccompanied minors have generated much debate and lot of Swedish people have begun working with them professionally, such as social workers in working in shelters for unaccompanied minors. Sweden has taken a hardline approach in its application of the Dublin convention to both adults and minors. As a result of this Sweden has sent minors back to countries such as Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria and Malta. Minors in these situations have not been entitled to legal representation. Sometimes legal representatives working voluntary have managed to stop repatriations to "first countries" by appealing to the European Court. Currently minors are not sent back to Greece.

– **Labour**

In 2010, the effects of the new labour law introduced in 2008 have received some attention. The rules introduced two years ago make it easier employers to hire cheap labor from outside the EU, and so create slave-like working conditions for those coming to work in Sweden. Workers with temporary work permits are entirely dependent on their employers and can be deported any time they are surplus to the employers requirements.

– **Family connection**

In July 2010 new regulations concerning parents who have children in Sweden came into force. Persons applying for affiliation and having children are exempted from having to go to their countries of origin to apply for a residence permit. Despite this change in the law families can still be split up during the applying process. Requirements for passports or other identity documents are very stringent. One of the groups most affected by these requirements is Somalis. Since the civil war some 20 years ago Somalia has been one of the world's most dangerous countries to be in and , s now has reoccurring problems with lawlessness and violence. One result of this is that it is very hard if not impossible for parents to get hold of the documents that the Swedish Migration Board requires. This means that hundreds of Somali parents who have received residence permits in Sweden are not allowed to bring their children. Somali refugee children are then refused residence permits to be reunited with their parents who have a residence permit in Sweden. Minors of all ages are rejected, even when DNA evidence of family ties exist and the children will be left with no other parent.

A Facebook group has been set up to draw attention to this.

– **Applicants for asylum and residence permits**

According to the Swedish Migration Board 29 602 persons applied for asylum in Sweden in 2010. Most of these came from Serbia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq and Iran.

The following is a list of the proportions of successful applicants from each country: Asylum was granted to people from the following countries in total:

Afghanistan 55%, Eritrea 67%, Georgia 3%, Iraq 39% Iran 21%, Kazakh 3%, Kyrgyzstan 1%, 4%, Kosovo, Libya, 2%, 1% of Macedonia, Mongolia, 1%, Nigeria 8%, Russia 9 %, Serbian 1%, Somalia 92%, 39% stateless, Syria 2%, Uzbekistan 8%, Belarus 3%.

Campaigns and related struggles

In 2010, various campaigns were initiated or continued by different groups working with asylum and migration in different ways. An extensive campaign for the right to reside for all asylum seekers has not been active during the year. Self-organized groups of Iraqi asylum seekers were formed

when the deportations of Iraqis intensified.

– **Union organizing of undocumented workers**

Since 2007 the SAC (syndicalist) union, which is almost the only trade union organizing undocumented workers, have continued this work by using a method called "the index/register". The index method is a classic/old syndicalist struggle putting workers in charge of wage setting. The basic principle of this method involves setting a minimum acceptable wage for a particular job, below which no one will accept jobs. If an employer still offers a lower salary they will be subjected to a blockade. During 2010 the SAC has managed to highlight undocumented workers' conditions in sectors such as hotel and restaurants by strikes, blockades and advocacy work.

– **Health care for all**

Access to health care for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants is different in different parts of Sweden. According to the law, adult asylum seekers are only entitled to free emergency care. Undocumented minors and adults have to pay for all their own health care requirements. Since 2008, NGOs, churches, trade unions and professional health care associations have been working to get subsidized health care for all asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. There are several voluntary health clinics providing free health care to undocumented migrants.

– **Campaign: "Child's best first"**

"Child's best first" is a campaign initiated in Malmö by asylum rights activists and others as a reaction to the brutality of sending minors back to countries where they risk being jailed or not to having their basic needs met.

The campaign's goal is for the Children's Right Convention and the principle of the child's best interests to prevail over the Dublin Convention. The campaign collects and disseminates information on unaccompanied minors first asylum country, produce guidelines for those working with these children and attempt to form public opinion about unaccompanied minors' rights. The campaign has received national attention and highlighted the issue in the media.

– **Social workers' struggle for unaccompanied minors**

Social workers working with unaccompanied minors have formed a network to raise the issue of unaccompanied minors. The network also wants to initiate discussions about private companies and local authorities making large profits from accommodation and activities for unaccompanied minors. In the autumn of 2009 the network of social workers took part in organizing the campaign "Child's best first".

– **Campaign: "Ain't I a Woman" – undocumented women's right to protection**

"Ain't I a Woman" is an anti-racist feminist campaign that was launched on March 8th by the No one is illegal network. In the struggle to maintain all women's rights - without distinguishing between race, nationality or citizenship - undocumented women's situation is often forgotten or made invisible as a result of racist and patriarchal structures. The campaign demand that the foreign national law be clarified so that women affected by violence are considered to be legitimate candidates for asylum. The campaign calls for the Violence Against Women Act to have precedence over foreign law, so that all women's rights to protection prevails over the threat of deportation. Another demand is that undocumented women who take part in a juridical process should be granted temporary residence while the process is underway.

– **Stop deportations to Iraq**

The European Court of human rights has consistently criticized Sweden's deportation to Iraq, but has not yet decided upon the security situation in Iraq and whether Iraqi refugees should be sent back. This decision may not be made for another year, and in the meantime the Migration authorities here will continue deporting Iraqi refugees. There is a possibility that the asylum seekers who are now forcibly rejected by the Swedish government will have their deportation orders suspended by the ECHR, but despite this they can very well be deported before such orders are made or communicated to them. Many Iraqi asylum seekers and asylum rights activists are working to halt such expulsions through advocacy work and protests.