

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

A press review with summaries of asylum and refugee-related articles in regional media.

Saturday 28 to Monday 30 April 2007

Denmark

Yemen the destination for human traffickers

Large amounts of Somalis and Ethiopians are being trafficked to Yemen. Many of them, however, never reach Yemen, even if they would survive from the trip. The tragedies have become daily; for example last week UNHCR announced 18 persons having been killed after being thrown overboard by the smugglers or due to choking and thirst. (Berlingske Tidende 29 April 2007 <http://www.berlingske.dk/udland/artikel:aid=890074>)

Doctors want more knowledge on conditions in reception centres

The Danish Medical Association calls for more knowledge of the conditions in reception centres in order to avoid criticism afterwards. During the last years the association has been criticized for letting down the German refugee children who led a miserable life in Denmark after the Second World War. Senior physician Kirsten Lyloff says Denmark turned its back on the German refugee children and is happy over Medical Association's activeness and initiative on the issue now.

(Politiken 30 April <http://politiken.dk/indland/article294672.ece>)

Finland

Finland needs thousands of immigrants

Finland's Minister of European and Immigration Affairs Astrid Thors says Finland needs at least 10,000 foreign employees yearly. According to Thors the most urgent legislative reforms must concentrate in the right to work for those who have been denied asylum but have a job. Thors also expresses her worry over the consequences of the war in Iraq saying the help should be targeted directly to Iraq instead of granting asylums more generously. Finland intends to give aid to Iraq's neighboring countries hosting lots of Iraqi refugees.

(YLE 28 April 2007

Norway

Over 80,000 got a residence permit

Last year almost 82,000 persons were granted a residence permit for more than three months in Norway. Some 14,000 residence permits were granted to people due to family reunification or setting up a family. The biggest groups were from Poland, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. 3,200 foreigners were granted permanent residence permits after applying for asylum or having arrived in the country as UN refugees.

(NRK 29 April 2007 <http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/innenriks/1.2334205>)

Sweden

Social Democrats change their stance on refugee reception

Swedish Social Democrats could accept restricting asylum-seekers' possibility to choose their home municipality freely. Party's spokesperson on integration Luciano Astudillo refers to the poor accommodation conditions in municipalities with a big amount of asylum-seekers. The Social Democrats also express their support to legislative reform to force all municipalities to receive refugees.

(SR 30 April 2007 <http://www.sr.se/ekot/arkiv.asp?DagensDatum=2007-04-30&Artikel=1339717>)

Iraqis paid to return

The Swedish Migration Board will offer both money and work to Iraqis returning home. Sweden will pay some 3,400 USD per person to a German aid organization Agef for finding work for the returnees. Agef will pay the returnees' salary for one year. The Migration Board ruled recently that asylum-seekers can be returned to Northern Iraq.

(SVT 28 April 2007

http://svt.se/svt/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=22577&a=816485&lid=is_search549588&lpos=0&queryArt549588=asyl*&doneSearch=true&sd=22634&from=siteSearch&pageArt549588=0)

Police investigation on sending back a sick man

Ten days ago Sweden sent back a sick asylum-seeker who is in need of dialysis treatment three times a week and who is not treated properly in Syria. The man also has hepatitis B, which according to his lawyer Tryggve Ernstedt means that many Syrian hospitals would refuse to give dialysis treatment to him. The Syrian man is a member of PLO, whose relations to Syria are bad. However, the Higher Migration Court did not consider this as a sufficient ground to grant him asylum. Ernstedt says even if there were not enough grounds to grant the man asylum he should not have been deported due to medical reasons.

(SR 27 April 2007

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Thursday 26 to Friday 27 April 2007

Latvia

Parliament not to grant voting rights to non-citizens

The Latvian parliament decided not to grant non-citizens the right to vote in municipal elections. The proposal on granting voting rights was made by the leftist alliance For Human Rights in United Latvia, but it was rejected with the result of 51 votes against and 17 in support of the proposal.

(Baltic News Service 26 April 2007)

Norway

Reunification of unaccompanied children with their families difficult

In 2006, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) succeeded to trace families for only six unaccompanied asylum-seeking children of the total of 350 unaccompanied minors. Tracing and reunification is complicated because the authorities are dependent on the information given by the child. If UDI does not succeed in tracing in two years the child is granted a temporary residence permit for one year at a time. After three years the permit becomes permanent.

(Aftenposten 26 April 2007 <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/article1755127.ece>)

Sweden

More suspected human traffickers arrested

On Wednesday, eight more people were detained in connection with the extensive investigations on human trafficking in Halland, Sweden. On Tuesday police arrested five people. The persons arrested are suspected of organized trafficking of some 100 people from Vietnam during the years 2003 to 2006.

(SVT 25 April 2007 <http://www.sr.se/ekot/arkiv.asp?DagensDatum=2007-04-25&Artikel=1332735>)

Swedish authorities criticized for refugee reception

A new report by the Swedish Integration Board reveals that half of the newcomers had no contact with the labour market during the first year after receiving permission to stay in Sweden. Furthermore, only eleven percent of those who participated in local introductory schemes managed to get jobs. The report is based on interviews with 2,803 refugees and their case workers in 255 municipalities, as well as on information from databases.

(Svenska Dagbladet, The Local 26 April 2007

http://www.svd.se/dynamiskt/inrikes/did_15263082.asp,

<http://www.thelocal.se/7127/20070426/>)

Terrorist-branded man can be deported

The Swedish Higher Migration Court has ruled that Bahman Abdullah Hussein, labelled terrorist by the Security Police, can be deported to Iraq. The Court says it is "relatively stable" in Northern Iraq. Hussein's wife and children have residence permits because they are considered to have strong connections to Sweden. The Court does not specify why Hussein should have fewer connections to Sweden than his family. Connections to Sweden are considered as a hindrance to deportation. The government will make the final decision on the issue.

(Sydsvenskan 27 April 2007 <http://sydsvenskan.se/sverige/article234654.ece>)

Refugees could be told where to live

In the future, refugees who have been granted asylum in Sweden could be forced to live in municipalities far from where they had themselves wished to live while waiting for the formal asylum decision. Several municipalities have been criticized for letting asylum-seekers choose where they wish to live. Many have chosen to live with their relatives and friends in communities with high immigrant populations. Minister for Integration Nyamko Sabuni says that people cannot be prevented from living close to their families while waiting for asylum, but that one solution could be to disperse them more evenly across the country shortly after they have received asylum.

(Dagens Nyheter 27 April 2007, translation by Swedish Press Review)

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Tuesday 24 to Wednesday 25 April 2007

Iceland

Iceland to receive 30 refugees

The Icelandic Refugee Committee has decided to accept 30 refugees from Colombia this summer. The group will consist of women and children in connection with United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) project Women at Risk. The idea of the project is to give priority to female refugees and single mothers in need of refuge. In 2005, Iceland received a similar group of refugees from Colombia.

(Iceland Review 23 April 2007

http://www.icelandreview.com/icelandreview/daily_news/?cat_id=16539&ew_0_a_id=278094)

Latvia

Belarus resident granted alternative status

The Refugee Affairs department in the Latvian Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has granted a citizen of Belarus, accused of drug crimes in his home country, an alternative status. According to the Latvian Asylum Law, the alternative status may be granted if the person may be executed, subjected to corporal punishment, torture or other inhumane punishment in the country of citizenship or residence as well as for several other reasons. A person with an alternative status is issued a temporary residence permit and is entitled to economic, social, personal and other rights. The Belarussian man was caught by Latvian border guards last year attempting to enter Latvia.

(Baltic News Service 24 April 2007)

Norway

Kurds can reapply for residence permits

The 204 Iraqi Kurds, whom The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) granted residence permits on humanitarian grounds last year, will have their cases reviewed. UDI applied a much more liberal practice in its decisions than the Norwegian government had intended. The dispute led to the resignation of the director of UDI. Moreover, from 1 June onwards the Norwegian authorities will no longer accept the Iraqi S passports issued in the Embassy in Stockholm. Minister for Labour and Social Inclusion Bjarne Håkon Hanssen says the Kurds will not have any special treatment, but the issue of residence permits will be handled according to the ordinary practice.

(Bergens Tidende 25 April 2007 <http://www.bt.no/innenriks/article358429.ece>)

Sweden

Suspected human traffickers arrested

Five people have been detained suspected of organizing human trafficking of Vietnamese nationals to Sweden. These arrests are the first in the extensive investigations ongoing in the region of Halmstad since October. The police suspects a dozen of families for being involved in the trafficking.

(SVT 24 April 2007

http://svt.se/svt/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=22620&a=813572&lid=senasteNytt_275214&lpos=ru brik_813572)

Human trafficking case in court

A Malaysian citizen is suspected for having brought five Chinese citizens illegally to Sweden. The Stockholm city court is hearing the human trafficking case today. The Chinese nationals are charged for having entered the country with false passports. They were arrested at airport in Stockholm on Easter. Upon arrest, several of the Chinese citizens applied for asylum. District prosecutor Henrik Söderman at the office of the public prosecutor says their original plan was not to stay in Sweden, but they were on their way to London.

(Svenska Dagbladet 25 April 2007, translation by Swedish Press Review)

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Denmark

Danish People's Party refrains from the interpreter issue

The Danish People's Party leaves the issue of Iraqi interpreters after assurances both from the Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Per Stig Møller that there are no separate agreements with the opposition on helping the Iraqi interpreters who have assisted the Danish troops. The Social Democrats and the Social Liberals have earlier said that there is an understanding between the parties and the government on not leaving the interpreters in trouble.

(Jyllands Posten 18 April 2007 <http://www.jp.dk/indland/artikel:aid=4358922/>)

Broadcaster exaggerated UN comments

The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR claims that the Danish public service broadcaster DR misinterpreted the agency's criticism of Denmark's Iraqi refugee policy by calling the UNHCR Iraq office director's comment "unusually sharp criticism". Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen denied the criticism and subsequently had the Refugee Board write a letter to UNHCR requesting grounds for such accusations. Additionally William Spindler, the UNHCR spokesperson, accused DR of having a long-standing practice of intensifying UNHCR's comments in order to put the organization into confrontation with the Danish government.

(Jyllands Posten 20 April 2007 http://www.jp.dk/english_news/artikel:aid=4362192/)

Over 300,000 fled in Somalia

According to the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR some 321,000 people have fled battles in Somalia's capital Mogadishu during the last two months.

(Jyllands Posten 20 April 2007 <http://www.jp.dk/udland/artikel:aid=4362468/>)

Former Ministers say Denmark should take more refugees from Iraq

Social Democrat's spokesperson for EU issues Sven Auken and two other former Ministers say Europe has a responsibility of Iraq and EU countries, including Denmark should take more Iraqi refugees.

(Jyllands Posten, Berlingske Tidende 18 April 2007

<http://www.jp.dk/indland/artikel:aid=4357870/>

<http://www.berlingske.dk/indland/artikel:aid=885586>)

Estonia

Deportations of illegal immigrants

The Russian newspaper in Estonia, Molodyozh Estonii, discusses the possibilities of simplified deportations of illegal immigrants and residents.

(19 April 2007 Baltic News Service)

State invites expatriate Estonians to return

Estonia has decided to support the return of expatriate Estonians to their native country and the relevant provision has been included in the coalition agreement. Non-citizen returnees will not be able to get Estonian citizenship automatically, and they have to prove they have ethnic Estonians among their ancestors.

(Baltic News Service 23 April 2007)

Finland

NGOs oppose deportations to Iraq

Last month the Finnish Directorate of Immigration said that rejected asylum-seekers could be deported to the relatively calm Kurdish area of northern Iraq. The Refugee Advice Centre and the Finnish section of Amnesty International have condemned the idea arguing that no area of Iraq is safe enough to warrant sending anyone there. About 200 Iraqis applied for asylum in Finland last year, in comparison to some 9,000 in neighboring Sweden.

(YLE 18 April 2007 <http://www.yle.fi/news/left/id58251.html>)

Finland must rethink moves to deport Iraqis

According to the newly-appointed Minister of Migration and European Affairs Astrid Thors Finland needs to reconsider moves to deport Iraqi asylum-seekers. She says the worsening security situation in Iraq needs to be carefully monitored. Directorate of Immigration said late last month that rejected asylum-seekers could be deported to the relatively calm Kurdish area of northern Iraq. Thors says Finland is waiting to see how other EU countries will handle Iraqi asylum-seekers.

(YLE 19 April 2007 <http://www.yle.fi/news/left/id58305.html>)

Parliamentarians reject deporting the 71-year-old Kosovar

Last week Finland's Directorate of Immigration decided to deport 71-year-old Halide Latifi to Kosovo. On Wednesday, Latifi's support group handed over a letter to Finnish parliamentarians appealing to prevent the deportation. The group points out that Finland is planning to deport a half paralyzed, severely demented and depressed old person to a country where nobody can take care of her. Parliamentarians receiving the group's letter agree on the issue saying the decision is inhumane and should be reconsidered.

Latifi's case will be taken to the Helsinki Administrative Court.

(Hufvudstadsbladet 19 April 2007 <http://www.hbl.fi/pagespeed/url/News>)

Demonstration for permanent residence permit

Some 200 immigrants and five Finnish organizations held a demonstration against Finnish asylum procedure in Helsinki on Friday. Criticism was targeted especially towards the temporary residence permit, the so called B status. According to the Directorate of Immigration temporary permits are granted if there are no grounds for asylum or other residence permit but deportation is not possible due to technical reasons. Demonstrators say B status is a discriminating practice and that Finland's Aliens Act obliges to grant protection to people fleeing crisis areas. B status has been granted primarily to people from Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia.

(Helsingin Sanomat 20 April 2007

<http://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/artikkeli/Helsingiss%C3%A4+osoitettiin+mielt%C3%A4+pysyv%C3%A4n+turvapaikan+puolesta/1135226706111>)

Latvia

Number of foreigners visiting Latvia on rise in 2007

According to the Latvian Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs the number of foreigners visiting Latvia rose in the first three months of this year compared to the same period in 2006. In the three-month period the Office issued 2,392 residence permits with a limited validity term, which is 367 permits more than a year ago.
(Baltic News Service 19 April 2007)

Need for improvements to citizenship law

On Saturday, the Head of Latvia's Naturalization Board Eizenija Aldermane said the law needs improvements among other things in terms of making it possible for the non-citizens of more than 65 years of age to obtain citizenship through an interview. She said also that non-citizens should be granted voting rights. According to the latest data by the Naturalization Board, 81 percent of the Latvian residents are citizens, 17 percent are non-citizens and 2 percent are citizens of foreign countries.
(Baltic News Service 21 April 2007)

Norway

Refugee Council: Iraq's map could be redrawn

In the UN Conference on Iraq last week Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) report on Iraq served as a central working paper. The report states that the whole map of Iraq could be redrawn. NRC's spokesperson Thomas Horne says violence is following ethnic lines, since Sunnis are forced out of the Shia areas and vice versa.
(NRK 21 April 2007 <http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/utenriks/1.2279870>)

Annan: Norway must help Iraq

Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan encourages Norway to take as many Iraqi refugees as possible. Annan describes the situation in Iraq tragic and says that all countries must be generous and help. According to UNHCR, some 50,000 people flee from their homes every month. During his visit to Norway Annan met with the former Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik who had just visited Jordan and said the country faces severe economical problems as a result of the massive flow of refugees and is in need of international help.
(NRK 21 April 2007 <http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/utenriks/1.2279486>)

Sweden

UN concerned over Iraqi refugees

Yesterday the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) ended its conference about the acute situation of the Iraqi refugees. Two million Iraqis have fled the war to neighboring Syria and Jordan. The refugees' situation is untenable as they for instance are not getting the medical attention they need. UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres called on the international community to pledge financial support to the four million Iraqi refugees who are refugees both within Iraq and outside the country's borders.
(Dagens Nyheter 19 April 2007, translation by Swedish Press Review)

Sweden's Billström commented on the Iraqi refugee issue

Sweden's Minister for Migration Tobias Billström participated in the UN conference on Iraq and is at the moment in Luxembourg where the EU ministers will discuss the situation on Friday. Billström says he intends to raise the issue of financial support to Syria and Jordan. Billström pointed out that Sweden already gives more than many other countries; for instance last December Sweden gave financial support to UNHCR specifically earmarked for Iraqi refugees. He also says Sweden will accept 1,900 refugees who are deemed especially vulnerable by the UN. In total some 20,000 persons are estimated to seek asylum in Sweden this year.

(Dagens Nyheter 19 April 2007, translation by Swedish Press Review)

Migration Board pays an organization to help Iraqis

For the first time, the Migration Board is turning to a volunteer organization in order to receive help with getting 1,400 Iraqi refugees to return to the northern Kurdish parts of the country. The Iraqis were granted temporary residence permits that have now expired. The Board is paying 3,326 USD per returned person to the German organization AGEF for its services. AGEF helps returning refugees to find employment and may also pay the initial wages.

(Dagens Nyheter 19 April 2007, translation by Swedish Press Review)

Asylum-seekers to be paid for returning

From July onwards rejected asylum-seekers can apply for financial support from the Swedish state if they leave the country voluntarily. Government's aim is to diminish the number of people in hiding with this initiative. However, migration expert Philip Muus says money is not the issue, but people go hiding because they fear for their lives if they would have to return to their home countries.

(SR 19 April 2007 <http://www.sr.se/ekot/artikel.asp?artikel=1314624>)

Iraq gives financial support to refugees

Iraqi government has decided to give 24 million USD to help the refugees in Syria and Jordan. Iraq's initiative emerged during the UN conference in Geneva on Iraqi refugees. UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres sees Iraq's initiative as an important breakthrough for getting more money from other countries. According to Guterres, the conference has shown that the countries receiving refugees, aid organizations and donor countries now agree that there has to be more contributions to help the Iraqi refugees.

(SVT 18 April 2007

http://svt.se/svt/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=22577&a=809199&lid=is_search549588&lpos=1&queryArt549588=flykt*&doneSearch=true&sd=22634&from=siteSearch&pageArt549588=0)

Refugees may be indebted for health care costs

Refugees who have been in hiding and thereafter granted residence permit are at risk of indebtedness for the health care they have received. County Council in Stockholm decided last year not to require refugees to pay old health care costs after they have been granted residence permit. The decision was however appealed and the appeal went through.

(SVT 19 April 2007

http://svt.se/svt/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=22577&a=809483&lid=is_search549588&lpos=0&queryArt549588=flykt*&doneSearch=true&sd=22634&from=siteSearch&pageArt549588=0)

Sweden could deport 1,400 Iraqis

Sweden can deport 1,400 Iraqis from Kurdistan against their will, even though the Kurdish government refuses to accept them. Minister of Migration Tobias Billström has previously said that certain parts of Iraq are safe enough for people to return to but Amnesty International and the Left Party argue that for humanitarian reasons nobody should be forced to return.

(Dagens Nyheter 23 April 2007, translation by Swedish Press Review)

EU allocates aid to Sweden for Iraqi refugees

The EU Commission will set aside 24 million USD to help refugees from Iraq. Eleven million euros will go to countries such as Syria and Jordan that have accepted big numbers of Iraqi refugees. EU also wants to support EU member countries that accept Iraqi refugees with seven million euros, of which Sweden will receive a large part. Minister for Migration Tobias Billström welcomes EU's help saying the money will facilitate the reception process for the refugees.

(Dagens Nyheter 21 April 2007, translation by Swedish Press Review)

EU setting up border police force

EU is in the process of setting up a border police unit. As a result, some 500 police officers and migration officials can be called in to manage large groups of refugees such as was the case when thousands of Africans came to the Canary Islands last year. EU's border control authority Frontex will call in personnel from the member countries. Also Swedish police officers could be called in for missions in southern Europe.

(Svenska Dagbladet 21 April 2007, translation by Swedish Press Review)

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Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen rejects UN's criticism

Fogh claims that the Danish immigration legislation follows international conventions. He stressed that the concrete decisions are made by an independent authority headed by a judge. The Prime Minister also said that the chairman of the Refugee Board, High Court judge Bent Ove Jespersen, will write to the UNHCR in order to more closely investigate what the criticism is about.

(DR 17 April 2007 <http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Politik/2007/04/17/130249.htm?nyheder>)

Start-help gets jobs for immigrants

The Rockwool Fund studied the situation of 11,000 refugees and immigrants who came to Denmark before and after start-help was introduced. The research shows the group that benefited from the start-help was more successful in employment after 16 months than the group that came before it was introduced.

(DR 17 April 2007 <http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Penge/2007/04/17/225242.htm?nyheder>)

Estonia

Foreign Minister: Estonia remains active in the UN

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet met with Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Sir John Holmes from the UN Organization in NY. The key topic discussed was the situation in Sudan and what the UN can do to solve the crisis. Migiro and Holmes thanked Estonia for its support to Sudanese refugees.

(Baltic News Service 17 April 2007)

Finland

Ministers in the new 20-seat Finnish government have been named

The Swedish People's Party has named former MEP Astrid Thors as Finland's first Minister of European and Immigration Affairs. As of the beginning of next year, the Ministry of Labor will be dissolved and Finland will see the establishment of a new "super ministry" - the Ministry of Labour and Commerce. Immigration issues will be transferred to the Ministry of the Interior.

(YLE 16 April 2007 <http://www.yle.fi/news/left/id58066.html>)

Minister for European and Immigration Affairs Astrid Thors wants to work for a more humane immigration policy

With her newly established portfolio, Astrid Thors promises to speed up the decisions about the quota refugees and says that the immigration policy should be active and give the right to people with residence permits to start working as soon as possible. (Hufvudstadsbladet 16 April 2007 <http://www.hbl.fi/pagespeed/url/News>)

Second person arrested in human trafficking case

Two persons have now been arrested as suspects of human trafficking. Both men are Finnish citizens of Indian origin. The Finnish Boarder Guard suspects that the two had forced an Indian man to work for free in different businesses around Southern Finland. (Helsingin Sanomat 18 April 2007

<http://www.hs.fi/english/article/Second+person+remanded+in+human+trafficking+case/135226626864>)

1,400 deported last year

Police deported 1,400 foreigners from Finland last year. More than 900 of them were sent back to their home countries because they did not have a residence permit. Police data shows that no one was returned to Afghanistan or Somalia, however, one person was ordered to return to Iraq. Large groups of people from Russia and Bulgaria were also deported. By far the biggest amount was persons returned to Sweden under the Dublin convention.

(YLE 18 April 2007 <http://www.yle.fi/news/left/id58213.html>)

UN calls for help to Iraqi refugees

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon calls for countries to keep borders open for Iraqi refugees. In his speech at the Iraq conference in Geneva, Ban addressed his message to Syria, Jordan and all Western countries. UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres points out that Syria and Jordan have been carrying the refugee burden without significant support from other countries. Guterres says the international community must now start to give generous support to Iraqi refugees and the countries receiving them.

UNHCR estimates there are some 50,000 Iraqis fleeing from their homes every month. (YLE 18 April 2007 <http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/24h/id58182.html>)

Norway

The Head of the Directorate of Immigration is concerned about bribe cases

Two employees of the Directorate of Immigration in Norway have been offered bribes during the last few months. One of them was offered 1,639 USD (10,000 crowns) to get a residence permit for a foreign citizen. The Head of the Directorate of Immigration Ida Borrsen expresses her concern and says this encourages corruption in the organization. (NRK 18 April 2007 <http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/okonomi/1.2252369>)

Sweden

Desperation among refugees in Syria

Today and tomorrow the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is holding a conference in Geneva to discuss the plight of the 2.1 million Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan. According to UNHCR, the situation is becoming more desperate as the refugees cannot support themselves and Jordan and Syria lack adequate resources to host them. Prostitution and child labour are becoming more common in the areas surrounding

Amman and Damascus. UNHCR is calling on the world's governments to help Syria and Jordan cope with the refugee flows.

(DN 17 April 2007)

Human trafficking blow to police budget

The situation of the Iraqi refugees is on the agenda of the EU ministers' meeting on Thursday. The large refugee flows are leading to a rise in human trafficking. Director of the intelligence unit of the National Criminal Investigation Department, Thord Modin, says that human trafficking cases take an increasingly large share of their resources which could otherwise be used to fight international crime.

(DN 17 April 2007)

More money to asylum-seeking children

The Minister for Social Affairs Göran Högglund is critical to the fact that many communes refuse to receive unaccompanied minors. During his visit to Uppsala he also presented the government's budget proposal, which states an increase to the government's grant for communes who receive refugee children.

(SR 16 April 2007 <http://www.sr.se/cgi-bin/uppland/nyheter/artikel.asp?artikel=1314320>)

The care home closes after criticism

The owners of care home Baggershush announced they would close down the institution after the radio reported on abuse and physical violence of young immigrants and unaccompanied minors that had taken place. Baggershush was one of the biggest and fastest growing private care homes for young people. The municipality is now also expressing concerns about placing young unaccompanied minors together with 20-year old men with major criminal and drug problems.

(DN 17 April 2007 <http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=147&a=639985> and SR 15 April 2007

<http://www.sr.se/cgi-bin/P1/program/artikel.asp?ProgramID=1316&artikel=1308805>)

The subsidy for refugees does not influence middle-class municipalities

The government wants to encourage municipalities to sign a contract agreeing to receive more refugees by offering an additional subsidy of 1,450 USD (10 000 crowns) per refugee. For the middle class municipalities, receiving only few refugees or none at all, the allowance is not likely to make a difference.

(SR 18 April 2007 <http://www.sr.se/ekot/artikel.asp?artikel=1316953>)

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Denmark

UN criticizes Danish asylum policy

UNHCR aims sharp criticism at Denmark's asylum policy. The chief for UNHCR's office in Iraq, Andrew Harper, says Denmark goes against the Refugee Convention when it denies asylum to a group of Iraqis who belong to a religious minority, the Mandaeans. He says the Mandaeans coming from the Southern or Central Iraq have a special claim to asylum. According to UN and Amnesty, the Mandaeans are persecuted by Islamic fundamentalists.

(DR 15 April 2007 <http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Indland/2007/04/15/153250.htm>)

Mandaeans' case can be reconsidered

The Conservatives' spokesperson for integration issues Henriette Kjær says it is possible to reconsider the Mandaeans' case if new information is available and the Mandaeans' situation in Iraq can be considered to have worsened. On Sunday, UNHCR aimed hard criticism over Denmark for not granting asylum to the Iraqi Mandaeans. However, Kjær says there is no need for a special law for the Mandaeans as a group. The Social Democrats and the Socialists are also demanding Minister for Integration Rikke Hvilshøj for an explanation for the 30 Mandaean asylum-seekers that Denmark has rejected.

(DR, Politiken 16 April 2007 <http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Politik/2007/04/16/070445.htm>, <http://politiken.dk/indland/article284352.ece>)

Artists to get asylum in Denmark

Persecuted authors, illustrators, writers and journalists and their families will have the possibility of a two-year residence permit in Denmark. Towns joining the arrangement will provide the artists with accommodation and other things with the economical support they receive from the funds and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

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(Berlingske Tidende 15 April 2007 <http://www.berlingske.dk/udland/artikel:aid=884656>)

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(Baltic News Service 14 April 2007)

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(YLE 16 April 2007

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(Helsingin Sanomat 12 April 2007

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(NRK 12 April 2007 <http://www.norwaypost.no/cgi-bin/norwaypost/imaker?id=68636>)

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Saturday 14 to Monday 16 April 2007

Denmark

UN criticizes Danish asylum policy

UNHCR aims sharp criticism at Denmark's asylum policy. The chief for UNHCR's office in Iraq, Andrew Harper, says Denmark goes against the Refugee Convention when it denies asylum to a group of Iraqis who belong to a religious minority, the Mandaeans. He says the Mandaeans coming from the Southern or Central Iraq have a special claim to asylum. According to UN and Amnesty, the Mandaeans are persecuted by Islamic fundamentalists.

(DR 15 April 2007 <http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Indland/2007/04/15/153250.htm>)

Mandaeans' case can be reconsidered

The Conservatives' spokesperson for integration issues Henriette Kjær says it is possible to reconsider the Mandaeans' case if new information is available and the Mandaeans' situation in Iraq can be considered to have worsened. On Sunday, UNHCR aimed hard criticism over Denmark for not granting asylum to the Iraqi Mandaeans. However, Kjær says there is no need for a special law for the Mandaeans as a group. The Social Democrats and the Socialists are also demanding Minister for Integration Rikke Hvilshøj for an explanation for the 30 Mandaean asylum-seekers that Denmark has rejected.

(DR, Politiken 16 April 2007 <http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Politik/2007/04/16/070445.htm>, <http://politiken.dk/indland/article284352.ece>)

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Thursday 5 to Wednesday 11 April 2007

Denmark

Majority of Danes support better conditions for rejected Iraqis

According to an opinion poll, 75 percent of Danes consider it is a good idea to give rejected Iraqi asylum-seekers the possibility for vocational training or education while they are waiting to return home. Almost as many think the offer should apply to all rejected asylum-seekers regardless of nationality that cannot return home.

(DR 8 April 2007,

http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Indland/2007/04/08/094038.htm?wbc_purpose=updatehttp%253a)

Fogh Rasmussen sees Social Democrats undermining the asylum policy

The Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen said on Tuesday that the conditions for the rejected Iraqi asylum-seekers must be improved. However, Fogh Rasmussen rejected the Social Democrats suggestion to allow the Iraqis to work and move from the reception centers. He says this would make applying for asylum seem like an admission ticket to labor market and make Denmark an attractive country to apply for asylum.

(Jyllands Posten 10 April 2007 <http://www.jp.dk/indland/artikel:aid=4343138/>)

Fogh Rasmussen does not prevent interpreters coming to Denmark

Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen says the cases of the Iraqi interpreters that have helped Danish troops in Iraq will be handled individually. Fogh Rasmussen denies the existence of a secret agreement between the Social Democrats, the Danish Social Liberal Party and the government about the future of the interpreters.

(Jyllands Posten 10 April 2007 <http://www.jp.dk/indland/artikel:aid=4343136/>)

Minister to clarify statements on returns to Iraq

The Danish Red-Green Alliance wants Minister for Integration Rikke Hvilshøj to clarify her statements returning refugees to Iraq. The demand is based on the case of Abdul Karim who was denied asylum in Denmark, went back to Iraq and was kidnapped and beaten. Jørgen Arbo-Bæhr from the Alliance says Karim's case is in conflict with the UN Refugee Convention and that guaranteeing people's safety in Iraq is impossible.

Alliance wants the government to reopen the cases of the rejected asylum-seekers.

(Politiken 7 April 2007 <http://politiken.dk/indland/article279692.ece>)

Iraqi refugees under difficult circumstances in Jordan

Berlingske Tidende portrays the situation of 750,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Some 2 million people have left Iraq and the majority of the refugees stay in the neighboring countries, especially in Jordan and Syria. Jordan does not want the refugees to stay and does not give them legal residence permit or the right to work. Jordan sees Iraqis

as "temporary visitors", not as refugees. Therefore many refugees live under the threat of being deported back to Iraq. According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, the world has ignored the situation in Iraq, which he calls "a humanitarian catastrophe".

(Berlingske Tidende 6 April 2007 <http://www.berlingske.dk/udland/artikel:aid=870188>)

Finland

Genocide suspect identified

The Rwandan man arrested in Finland last week on suspicion of genocide has been identified by Human Rights Watch (HRW) as a main suspect in a massacre of Tutsis in 1994. HRW says the man was a Baptist preacher who organized fighting schools in Rwanda and he is also accused of acquiring and distributing weapons. The man applied for asylum upon arrival in Finland in 2003.

(YLE 8 April 2007 <http://www.yle.fi/news/id57490.html>)

More efficient legal advising for asylum-seekers

A working group at the Ministry of Labour in Finland calls for clarifying asylum-seekers' legal advice. According to the working group, asylum-seekers must have access to legal advice, right to choose their legal advisors and to get the services at a reasonable price. The reception centres would ensure the competence and experience of the service providers.

(YLE 5 April 2007

71-year-old Kosovar to be deported

The Finnish Directorate of Immigration (Uvi) has decided to deport Halide Latifi, a 71-year-old half paralyzed woman suffering from severe dementia and depression, to Kosovo. According to Uvi there are no humanitarian grounds for Latifi to stay in Finland where she has been living since 2005. Latifi's family says she has no relatives in Kosovo who could take care of her. Latifi's family can take the case to the Supreme Administrative Court within a month. Several bishops and citizens in Finland have appealed for granting Latifi a residence permit.

(Hufvudstadsbladet 10 April 2007 <http://www.hbl.fi/pagespeed/url/News>)

Sweden

Problems in the reception of unaccompanied minors

Sweden's County Administrative Boards have looked into the arrival of unaccompanied minors and found shortcomings in their reception. Upon arrival to Sweden, four municipalities take care of the minors for two weeks and they should then be transferred to other municipalities. In practice, they often stay in the initial municipalities for months because only few municipalities have signed the contract on permanent housing. The government is raising its financial support to the municipalities in order to encourage more communities to receive unaccompanied minors.

(Dagens Nyheter 4 April, SVT 6 April

<http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?a=636145>,

http://svt.se/svt/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=22620&a=801299&lid=is_search549588&lpos=3&q

ueryArt549588=flykt*&doneSearch=true&sd=22634&from=siteSearch&pageArt549588=0)

1,400 Iraqi asylum-seekers may be returned

Around 1,400 Iraqis from the Kurdish northern region of Iraq can expect to be sent back if they cannot come up with new, previously unknown reasons to stay in Sweden. They have all been in Sweden on temporary residence permits, which have now expired. Christer Lyck from the Migration Board says that there may still be protection reasons in individual cases and that each case shall be examined separately. (Dagens Nyheter 8 April 2007 <http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?a=637046>, translation by Swedish Press Review)

Amnesty criticizes deporting Iraqis

In February, the Swedish Superior Migration Court decided to send an Iraqi asylum-seeker back to Northern Iraq, which it did not consider dangerous anymore. Due to this pilot case the 1,400 Northern Iraqis with a temporary residence permit in Sweden risk being sent back. Madeleine Seidlitz from Amnesty says it would be inappropriate to carry out the deportations of the Iraqis. According to Seidlitz, Northern Iraq is still too unsafe to return people there. (SR 5 April 2007 <http://www.sr.se/ekot/arkiv.asp?DagensDatum=2007-04-05&Artikel=1295271>)

Many Christian Iraqis flee to Sweden

The situation of the Christians in Iraq has worsened and a growing number of Iraqi asylum-seekers in Sweden are Christian. The majority of them are Catholic and belong to the Chaldean Church. The Christians in Iraq are being systematically persecuted by the Muslim fundamentalists. According to UNHCR, almost every third person fleeing from Iraq is Christian. (SR 8 April 2007 <http://www.sr.se/ekot/arkiv.asp?DagensDatum=2007-04-08&Artikel=1300253>)

Ministers present new guidelines for integration policy

Swedish Minister for Education Lars Leijonborg, Minister for Migration Tobias Billström and Minister for Integration Nyamko Sabuni present Sweden's "new integration policy" in an opinion piece in Dagens Nyheter. They say the main idea of the new policy is to avoid that immigrants become passive during the first months. Ministers say it is a challenge to make integration work better for the growing number of asylum-seekers from Iraq than it did in the 1990's during the war in the Balkans. (Dagens Nyheter 5 April 2007 <http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?a=636224>)

Investigation on refugee reception

The Swedish Minister for Integration Nyamko Sabuni will appoint a commission to investigate refugee reception in Sweden. Sabuni says the first year after arrival is crucial for the future and that the system should focus on getting the newly arrived to start work as soon as possible. The investigation deals with the ways to accomplish this. It will also look into whether the state could support people until they can support themselves. Now the municipalities take over the responsibility to support the newly arrived after two years. The investigation will be published in spring 2008. (Dagens Nyheter 5 April 2007 <http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?a=636408>)

Suspected human traffickers taken into custody

During Easter nine suspected human traffickers were held in Sweden. They are suspected of trafficking Iraqi refugees to Sweden. The majority of the trafficked refugees are transported from Greece across Europe to Sweden. Also one refugee was taken into custody suspected of falsifying ID documents.

(Sydsvenskan 9 April 2007 <http://sydsvenskan.se/malmo/article230385.ece>)

Extra funds to refugee children

The government is earmarking an additional 2,17 million USD to encourage municipalities to accept unaccompanied refugee children. One-off reimbursements to municipalities are being doubled. The daily reimbursement is raised and will be paid out until the child is 21 years, instead of 18 years of age. The new measures will take effect as of 1 July. Migration minister Tobias Billström says that with the new measures the state is taking a great deal of responsibility for the issue, and now it is up to the municipalities to encourage each other to take care of the children.

(Dagens Nyheter 11 April 2007, translation by Swedish Press Review)

Police going after war criminals

The State Criminal Department in Sweden wants to speed up investigations on war criminals. At present, there are an estimated 1000 war crime suspects in Sweden and 30-40 ongoing investigations. According to Therese Mattson in the State Criminal Department, Sweden must prepare itself better for this kind of criminality. She says among refugees there are also hiding criminals. During the last years 25-50 persons have been denied asylum based on suspicions of crimes against humanity.

(Svenska Dagbladet 11 April 2007)

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External Relations Unit

UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

A press review with summaries of asylum and refugee-related articles in regional media.

Tuesday 3 to Wednesday 4 April 2007

Denmark

The Social Democrats support a softer asylum policy

The Social Democrats want to give all asylum-seekers a chance to work, which would again allow them to live outside of the asylum centers. The proposal is supported by the Danish Trade Union Confederation, but criticized by the Liberals and the Danish People's Party.

(Politiken, 4 April 2007 <http://politiken.dk/indland/article277881.ece>)

The Danish People's Party insists on clarification on Iraqi interpreters' case

The Danish People's Party insists on a need for clarification on the agreement made between the government, the Social Democrats and the Danish Social Liberal Party on the Iraqi interpreters' case. The demand comes out at the same time as The Liberals former chairman, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, has encouraged the government to offer residence permits to the 19 Iraqi interpreters who have worked for the Danish troops in Iraq.

(Danish Radio, 4 April 2007 <http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Politik/2007/04/03/181524.htm>)

Finland

Finland is forcing a Chechen family back on the run

A Chechen family of four, living in hiding in Finland, hopes to have their case reopened in Finland. Most likely, however, they will be sent back to their first country of asylum - Poland, which has already denied them asylum. This family is one of thousands of families running away from the violence and unsafety in Chechnya to Poland. ECRE notes that Chechen asylum-seekers are treated in very different ways within the EU. For example, Slovakia does not give asylum to anyone, whereas Austria gives asylum to 90 percent of Chechen asylum-seekers.

(Hufvudstadsbladet, 3 April 2007 <http://www.hbl.fi/pagespeed/url/News>)

Human rights organizations: Finland harboring genocide suspects

Two human rights organizations claim that Finland is one of the European countries harboring persons suspected of committing genocide in Rwanda. In a special report, they require that governments should ensure that immigration services screen asylum and visa applicants for potential involvement in serious international crimes. They should also build cooperation between immigration authorities, investigation and prosecution services to ensure that persons identified through immigration checks will be investigated and prosecuted, instead of being deported.

(YLE, 4 April 2007 <http://www.yle.fi/news/left/id57249.html>)

Sweden

Northern Iraqis can be deported

Around 1,400 Iraqis whose asylum applications have earlier been rejected, and who have been granted temporary residence permits according to the temporary asylum law, may now be deported. The Swedish Migration Board's leading body made a decision concerning a Northern Iraqi woman, who applied for another permit as her temporary permit ran out. The Migration Supreme Court decided on 26 February that there are no general hindrances for the return of a person back to Northern Iraq. The woman's application was rejected and the decision cannot be appealed.

(Swedish Migration Board, 30 March 2007 <http://www.migrationsverket.se/>)

Iraqi refugees must return home

Minister Tobias Billström says that the estimated 2 million Iraqis who have fled the country's borders, mainly to neighboring Syria and Jordan, must eventually return home. Billström, who is currently visiting Amman, says that if Iraq is to be rebuilt and function as a nation, many of those who have fled must return to Iraq. The Swedish government is currently lobbying in the EU for other countries to receive more Iraqi refugees.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 3 April 2007)

A league for human trafficking arrested

The German police arrested ten persons, belonging to an organized criminal league specializing in human trafficking from Iraq to Sweden. According to the police, they have smuggled 100 Iraqis into Germany and further to Sweden and Denmark. The estimated price per person has been around 13,000 USD.

(Svenska Dagbladet April 04 2007

http://www.svd.se/dynamiskt/inrikes/did_14972378.asp)

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Sunday 1 to Monday 2 April 2007

Estonia

Nigerian denied asylum in Estonia

Estonian authorities have refused to grant asylum to Faith Etiosa, a Nigerian woman who arrived illegally in the country. The Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board (KMA) rejected her appeal for asylum for the first time last August. KMA then renewed the asylum procedure as the woman had initially appealed for asylum under a different name, a spokesman for KMA said. KMA cannot comment on the reasons for not granting asylum. In case of a negative decision to an appeal for asylum, the person will be ordered to leave the country, but has a right to file an appeal against it. (Baltic News Service 2 April 2007)

Finland

Finnish refugee quota unfilled

66 places remain unfilled in Finland's refugee quota of last year. Leni Salmelin from the Ministry of Labour says Burmese refugees will fill the quota in the autumn. She says the situation is not unusual, because a majority of each year's quota refugees in practice arrive during the succeeding year. In order to fill this year's quota of 750 refugees, Finland is planning to take refugees from Congo, Iraq and Iran.

(Helsingin Sanomat 2 April 2007

<http://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/artikkeli/Suomen+viime+vuoden+pakolaiskiinti%C3%B6ss%C3%A4+yli+60+avointa+paikkaa/1135226287640>)

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