

Labour immigration

Since the expansion of the EU, labour immigration to Norway has risen dramatically, and this trend is continuing. In 2006, around 40 per cent more work permits were granted than in 2005. The highest number of permits was granted to persons from the EEA area, but the number of permits granted to skilled labour from third countries also increased. Around 2000 skilled workers were granted work permits, with workers from India topping the statistics.

Sought-after skills

Suneel Regulla is one of around 300 Indians who were granted a work permit in 2006.

After earning his Master of Business Administration degree in India, Suneel was employed by the international consultancy company Capgemini, working for them first in Singapore, Tokyo and London and now more recently in Oslo.

"After two and a half years in London I wanted a fresh challenge and when the option of a year in Norway turned up I didn't hesitate to accept," says Regulla.

Friendly Norwegians

Suneel has been in Norway for a month now and has already formed some opinions about the country. One of the things he noticed quickly was that most Norwegians are friendly and easy to get along with.

"Almost everybody I have met speaks English, and that makes it so much easier to shop and find my way around."

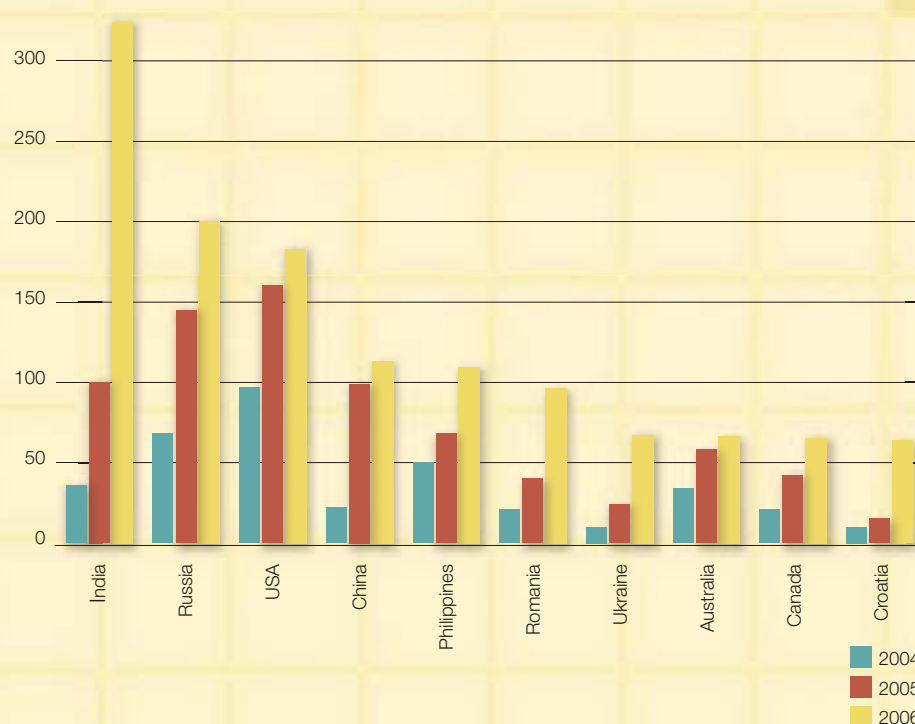
Suneel says that he read much about Norway before he arrived and was therefore prepared for the cold Norwegian winter. "I really had no idea how cold it actually is when it's 15 below and snowing and blowing a gale!"

India an obvious choice

Ivar Spydevold, marketing and communications director at Capgemini in Norway, says that his company is recruiting a growing number of people from India.

"Previously we generally found our employees in other European countries, particularly Sweden, Netherlands, Germany and France, but now we're unable to find competent employees in Europe. For us India is an obvious choice for recruitment. Several hundred thousand Indians are trained in IT each year, and they have excellent skills. As many Indian schools use English as their

Work permits granted to skilled workers, ten largest countries. 2004–2006



language of instruction, there is no language barrier either.”

Many Indians choose to either study or work abroad. Suneel says that he has many friends and acquaintances living beyond India's borders. “Many Indians train in fields where there is great demand for labour; currently IT, technological subjects and natural science subjects,” says Regulla.

Back to Hyderabad

After spending more than six years abroad, Suneel is planning to return to India after his year in Norway. He is planning to move back to the metropolis of Hyderabad in the south of India.

“I have gained invaluable international experience which will be extremely useful when I return to India,” concludes Suneel Regulla.

Labour in demand

On several occasions the political authorities have pointed out that Norway has and will continue to have a shortage of skilled workers. A national strategy for increased and targeted labour immigration is therefore needed, also covering countries outside the EEA area.

However, Norway is competing with a number of other countries for labour with skills and qualifications in particular trades. This can be seen in connection with the future demographic trend where the proportion of elderly citizens is increasing and the need for labour is growing significantly.

To meet the competition for skilled workers, Norway must be seen as an attractive choice. Therefore, in 2006 the Directorate concentrated on preparing easily accessible information on the conditions for different types of permits, application procedures and requirements regarding necessary documentation. To speed up case processing, the Directorate has also made organisational changes to process the greater influx of cases and intensified its cooperation with employer and employee associations.

Skilled worker

A skilled worker, previously called a specialist, is a person with training in a trade or special qualifications needed in the Norwegian labour market. Training in a trade means vocational training corresponding to at least three years of upper secondary school or a degree from university or college. Special qualifications means competence gained through practical work experience, possibly in combination with some training.

Organisation of case processing

The UDI wants to process applications for work permits quickly. Procedures were therefore established to filter the applications for which all the necessary information and documentation is available. When the conditions are deemed to be satisfied, a work permit is granted shortly after the case has been received by the Directorate. The same procedure applies to residence permit applications from citizens who come under the EEA regulations. However, it takes significantly longer to process cases where there is doubt and cases which are being considered for rejection. The estimated case processing time towards the end of 2006 was three to four months for EEA cases and four or five months for most work permit applications, including those from skilled workers.

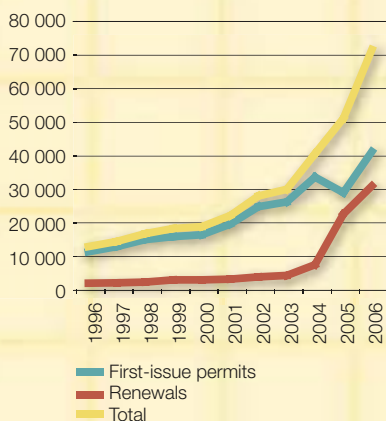


Engineers and IT competence

After many years during which craftsmen and health service personnel in particular came to Norway, the proportion of skilled workers in the IT industry and the oil and ship building industries has increased substantially.

In 2006, the highest number of permits for skilled workers was granted to Indian nationals. Compared with 2005, this figure has more than doubled. Other countries contributing skilled workers in a high number of trades are the USA, Russia, China and the Philippines.

Labour immigration permits. 1996-2006



Labour immigration from the EU/EEA

The largest group of labour immigrants from the EEA area comes from Poland. The trend shows that a growing proportion of this group wishes to have long-term or permanent residence, which is also reflected by the increase in family immigration. For employees from Poland and other countries that joined the EU in 2004, the transitional rules have been extended by up to three years from 1 May 2006.

The trend in 2006 was, however, for the basis for residence to increasingly be self-employment or service provision. For this group of applicants, the same rules apply as for applicants from the old EU countries.

On 1 January 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU. It has been decided that transitional rules will apply to these countries from the date on which they come under the EEA agreement. Norway has traditionally allowed musicians from Bulgaria to perform on temporary permits. Whether the EU membership will in the

long run lead this group to request permanent residence in Norway more frequently is difficult to determine.

Seasonal workers

Traditionally, many foreign seasonal workers have come to Norway each year, mostly from Poland and the Baltic states. Since these countries joined the EU, the UDI has seen an increasing number of applications for seasonal worker permits from nationals from countries such as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

A condition for a work permit as a seasonal worker is that the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV) recommends approval of the permit. The UDI had close cooperation with the local NAV offices in 2006, enabling these applications to be processed rapidly.

Social dumping

Labour immigration does not always take place in controlled settings. The Directorate has seen cases of unacceptable working conditions. To keep this problem in check, in



2006 the Directorate intensified its focus on drawing the line between real employees and service providers/self-employed people.

An EEA permit as a service provider may be granted to a person who enters Norway to provide a service based on a contract between a Norwegian company and the foreign company in the EEA area where the person in question is employed. As there is no requirement in the Immigration Act for a general wage agreement for service providers, some less reputable employers may offer workers standards that would not satisfy the normal requirements for working conditions in Norway. To remedy this situation, the Act relating to the General Application of Wage Agreements sets a minimum wage requirement for various trades and industries.

UDI's initiative

In 2006, the UDI also focused more on the actual employment relationship. The Directorate rejects applications where there is doubt as to whether the applicant is indeed a service provider or self-employed person or whether he or she is actually employed by a Norwegian company. The Directorate is also cooperating with other agencies, such as the Norwegian Labour Inspection Directorate, NAV and the tax authorities, to improve information measures providing employees and employers with an easy to understand and comprehensive overview of the regulations and penalties for violations.

When it comes to employees in Norway, it is easier to check that the requirements are satisfied. An employee must be paid according to the general wage agreement in force. If there is no agreement in the trade in question, the wage must be in accordance with what is normal in the trade/industry in question. If it subsequently becomes apparent that the wage requirement is not being met, the Directorate will rescind the permit. Serious violations of the Immigration Act or the Working Environment Act are dealt with by the police and the Norwegian Labour Inspection Directorate.

Other measures

On 1 December 2006, the Norwegian Labour Inspection Directorate and the Petroleum Safety Authority were authorised to intensify their efforts to control social dumping. They now have powers to shut down enterprises where there are violations of the working conditions.

In December 2006, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (AID) sent a proposal for a new package of measures for comments and recommendations from interested parties. These measures are aimed at cleaning up the situation in the labour market and employment agencies and gaining more control over wages and working conditions.

International focus on labour immigration

- Bjarne Håkon Hanssen, Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion, spoke on a number of occasions in 2006 about the importance of labour immigration in the years to come. In October the Ministry announced that it would be looking into possible measures to satisfy the need for more labour immigration. One of the ideas the Ministry is going to assess is a points system for recruiting foreign employees. Similar systems have been introduced in Canada and Australia.
- A Spanish study estimates that Spain will need around four million immigrants before 2020 to satisfy the need for labour. This is because, as in the rest of Europe, low birth rates will lead to a considerable rise in the proportion of elderly people in the population.
- In September 2006, the Irish Government adopted a new Immigration Act which introduces measures to attract highly qualified employees from third countries. The designation "foreign national" is only used in the new act to refer to persons from countries outside the EU.
- Denmark introduced a scheme for specially qualified labour immigrants, such as research scientists, engineers, registered nurses and doctors. Under the scheme employees with an employment contract will be granted a work permit immediately.



In 2006, the UDI launched a renewed website which makes it easier to find information on permit application procedures. The website is available in English, and facts about a number of permits have also been translated into many other languages.

Asylum seekers and refugees

Each week, about 100 people from various countries arrive in Norway to seek protection. In 2006, 5300 applicants arrived from a total of 104 countries.

Asylum seeker or refugee?

An **asylum seeker** is a person who individually and with no prior notification asks the Norwegian authorities for protection and recognition as a refugee. The person is called an asylum seeker until a decision has been made on the application.

A **refugee** is a person fleeing, for example, from war, civil war or persecution. In a legal sense, a refugee is a person who satisfies the requirements in Art. 1 of the UN Refugee Convention. A convention refugee is a person who has good reason to fear being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

Processing asylum applications

Over the last three years, the number of asylum seekers has declined, yet a greater proportion of applicants are granted residence or work permits. The combination of higher number of eligible applications, applicants from many countries and fewer arrivals from each individual country is giving executive officers a broader range of work tasks and magnifying the need for interdisciplinary cooperation. It is necessary to have both a broad knowledge of countries and decision-making and interviewing skills.

The UDI aims to ensure that individual applications are processed in accordance with the regulations in force, as set out in the Immigration Act and international conventions and based on an assessment of the situation in the asylum seeker's country of origin.

The explanation given by the asylum seeker during the asylum interview is assessed together with his or her personal statement, necessary verifications and language tests, in addition to any additional information from the applicant and his/her references provided while the case is being processed. The UDI compares the

statement to facts about the conditions in the asylum seeker's country of origin.

Outcome of the application

There are five possible outcomes of an application for asylum:

- The asylum seeker is granted asylum and thus receives the status of convention refugee (i.e. the person in question satisfies the conditions in the Refugee Convention of 1951).
- The asylum seeker is granted protection on grounds similar to a refugee situation.
- The asylum seeker is granted a residence permit on humanitarian grounds.
- The asylum seeker's application is rejected.
- The asylum seeker's application is rejected pursuant to the Dublin Convention.

An asylum seeker whose application is rejected must return to his or her country of origin voluntarily. If the person in question fails to do so, the police will escort him or her out of the country wherever possible.

The Dublin cooperation

The Dublin cooperation is of great importance to the processing of asylum cases. The basic premise for this agreement is compliance with the Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human



Rights. The agreement makes the country where the applicant initially applied for asylum or was granted a residence permit/Schengen visa responsible for processing an application for asylum. If another country that has acceded to the Dublin Convention is responsible for processing an application for asylum, the application submitted to the Norwegian authorities is rejected without further consideration.

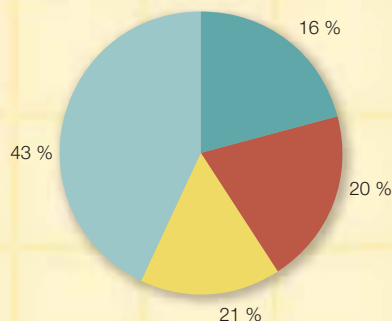
About one in five asylum applications in 2006 was a Dublin case. More than 40 per cent of these cases are resolved because the applicant's fingerprints are contained in the common European EURODAC database, where fingerprints of all asylum seekers are stored for a limited period of time.

Exclusion from refugee protection

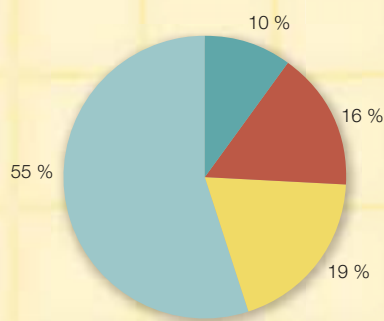
The Refugee Convention stipulates that asylum seekers who have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity or other serious crimes shall be excluded from protection as refugees. Even if the asylum seeker is excluded, other international obligations, such as the European Human Rights Convention, may nonetheless stipulate that the person in question may not be deported from Norway if he or she could face the death penalty, torture or inhumane treatment in the country of origin. These provisions have so far been used in relatively few cases.

The Norwegian authorities pay close attention to how other Western countries handle these complex cases. In 2004, the UDI initiated a research project to compare Norwegian exclusion practice with that in Canada, Netherlands, Denmark and Great Britain. The project report was submitted in the spring of 2006 and a number of recommendations were made. One such recommendation was to establish a special group to process asylum applications in cases where serious crimes are suspected which might indicate exclusion. The group, which commenced its work in November 2006, will establish a more systematic approach in accordance with the principles applying to such cases.

Asylum decisions by the UDI. 2006



Asylum decisions by the UDI. 2005



■ Asylum
■ Other protection
■ Humanitarian grounds
■ Rejection*

* Only cases processed based on facts in issue.

Identity issues

In 2006, the UDI put much effort into resolving issues concerning the identity of foreign nationals and the way in which identity is assessed and clarified in various case types. This is due to concern relating to threats of terrorism and security issues, the fact that some asylum seekers are unable to document their identity and the problem of forged identity papers.

In 2006, the media showed considerable interest in a case of forged identity papers allegedly sold in Iraqi and Kurdish communities. The case was brought to court and the principal perpetrator was sentenced to five years in prison.

The UDI's point of departure is that the credibility of immigration policy depends on it being impossible to forge papers to gain residence in Norway under a false identity. It is also important for the nation's security that the authorities know the correct identity of people who are lawfully resident in Norway.

One result of this work is a draft circular concerning the registration, assessment and amendment of identity information. The draft was distributed for comments and recommendations in January 2007. The circular aims to clarify the requirements for the documentation of identity and what is to be assessed in such cases.

The UDI also wants applicants to be more aware of the possible consequences if a claimed identity cannot be substantiated, for example when subsequently applying for a settlement permit or citizenship.



Resettlement refugees

Resettlement refugees are people who have fled their country of origin and are recognised as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They cannot continue living in the country they have fled to, and must therefore be resettled in a safer country.

In 2006, more than 900 refugees were granted residence in Norway, fully utilising the full annual quota. Two selection committee trips were made to Thailand and Malaysia, primarily to assess Burmese refugees.

The UNHCR presents the needs for resettlement on a global basis for the coming year, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (AID) uses this information to determine which countries Norway will resettle refugees from. The decision is based on input from the UDI and a close dialogue with the UNHCR. The UDI cooperates closely with the UNHCR on resettlement, both with the resettlement department at the head office in Geneva and with the UNHCR's field offices.

The AID and UDI also participate in permanent working groups for resettlement

together with the UNHCR and the other 14 resettlement countries. The UNHCR arranges annual meetings with the humanitarian organisations involved and the resettlement countries. There is also close cooperation between the Nordic resettlement countries.

The UDI has entered into an agreement with the IOM (International Organisation for Migration) on transporting resettlement refugees to Norway. The IOM also assists with medical examinations of refugees as necessary before departure.

The MUF dispute

At the end of the 1990s, a large group of people from northern Iraq came to Norway and applied for asylum. After individual assessments of the asylum applications, around 2000 persons were granted a limited residence permit in Norway. These permits were given the name "MUF", a Norwegian abbreviation for "temporary residence permit without the right to family reunification".

Many of those who were granted a MUF permit remained in Norway. In 2005, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development drew up temporary regulations which enabled people from this

group to be granted an ordinary work permit if they were employed at a particular point in time. This permit would be valid for one year at a time, and facilitated the possibility of family reunification (after the first renewal) and permanent residence.

Of those who applied, around 550 were granted a residence permit pursuant to the regulations. Moreover, 197 persons were granted permits on strong humanitarian grounds pursuant to the Immigration Act. The permits granted on humanitarian grounds led to a commission of inquiry being convened (the Graver Commission, see page 7) to examine the UDI's work relating to this matter. The Ministry then decided to formulate new regulations to regulate applications for the renewal of residence permits from those who had received residence permits on humanitarian grounds.

In connection with the inquiry, it was decided to suspend all MUF applications. In the autumn of 2006, work permits which were valid for one year began to expire and many applied for renewal. The Directorate will resume the processing of these cases when the new regulations have been completed and these applications can again be processed.



Family immigration

In recent years, many persons have arrived in Norway to be reunited with their spouse, cohabitant, partner, child or parents.

High rate of family immigration continues

In 2006 14 000 family immigration permits were granted. This was a slight increase compared to 2005. Most of those who were granted a permit based on family immigration are nationals of Poland, Thailand, Somalia, Germany and Great Britain.

The increase is in part due to the fact that European nationals are increasingly applying for family immigration with their spouse, partner or cohabitant working in Norway. The EU expansion and the fact that Norway is an attractive country to work in may explain this increase. Family immigration also includes uniting foreign nationals with Norwegian nationals resident in Norway.

Pro-forma marriage

In recent years there has been an increasing focus on the abuse of the rules for family immigration, including pro-forma marriages where a marriage is entered into to obtain a work or residence permit. A pro-forma marriage does not constitute a valid basis for family immigration in Norway. In September 2006, AID instructed the Directorate to scrutinise cases more closely when a pro-forma marriage is suspected.

This type of case presents major challenges. The aim of preventing the misuse of the family immigration regulations must be balanced against an individual's right to family life. The Directorate cooperates closely with the foreign service missions and the police in these cases.

Combating forced marriage

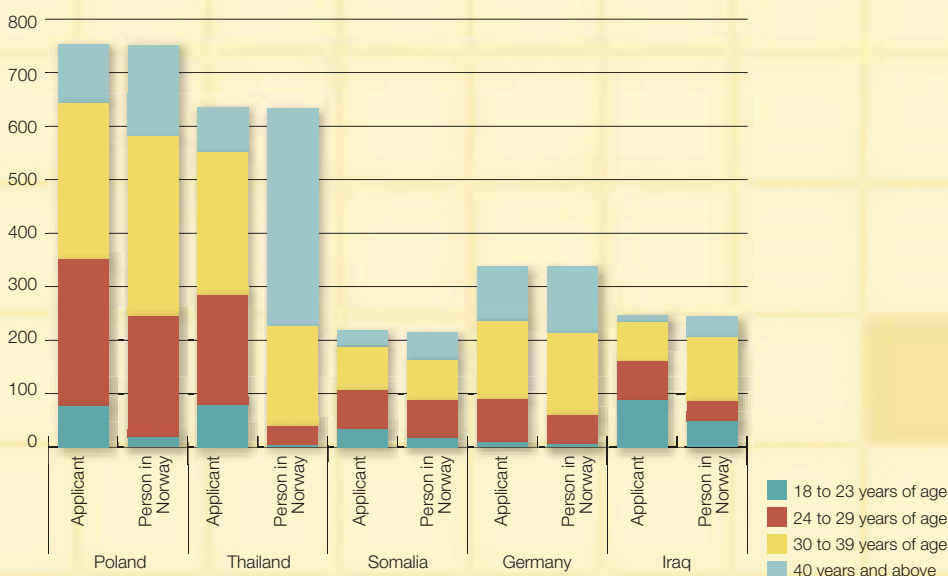
A forced marriage is a serious violation of fundamental human rights. There is currently no clear overview of the number of forced marriages in Norway. The UDI's

specialist team combating forced marriage worked on approximately 220 cases in this field from 2004 to 2006.

Immigration legislation makes it clear that forced marriage cannot provide a valid basis for family immigration. In February 2006, several amendments to the Immigration Act came into force, one of which is aimed at counteracting forced marriage by allowing the authorities to reject an application for a work or residence permit if the reference person, when asked, does not consent to the applicant being granted a permit, or if it is probable that the marriage has been entered into against the will of one of the parties. The aim of the amendment is to prevent a marriage that is entered into against the will of one of the parties from constituting the basis for a work or residence permit.

These measures must be considered together with other legal and practical measures introduced in recent years.

Family immigration permits for spouse/cohabitant/partner by age of the person residing in Norway and the applicant's age, five largest countries. 2006



Specialist team

UDI's team specialized in combating forced marriages was established in 2004. As part of their duties, they are to help those working with victims of forced marriages. Participants in this collaborative team are the UDI, the police, Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (BUFDIR). The team also places emphasis on cooperation with voluntary organizations. Funding has been granted in 2007 to establish this group on permanent basis.

Children and the immigration administration

Every year, several thousand children come to Norway. More than half come to be reunited with their family. Others come as adopted children, asylum seekers or on a visit.

The best interest of the child

There are many considerations to take into account when processing cases involving children. "The best interests of the child" must be the fundamental consideration. Other important aspects to consider include the child's health and connection to Norway, the care situation here and ties to the country of origin.

Many of the children who arrive or already live in Norway are affected by applications being processed by the UDI. The best interests of the child are assessed in several types of residence cases, for example in family immigration cases, expulsion cases and in connection with applications for asylum.

"Maria's story"³ (see text box) illustrates some of the aspects that the Directorate must take into consideration when deciding what is best for the child.

The example illustrates that deciding "what is in the best interests of the child" is a difficult process. Is it best for Maria to be granted residence? Experts will suggest that being separated from parents is a very heavy burden for children to bear. The UDI therefore finds that consideration of what is best for the child indicates that all necessary steps must be taken to reunite Maria with her mother.

The case also shows the tension between regulated immigration and what is in the child's best interest. Bearing the idea of regulated immigration in mind, it is not desirable for foreign national children to be left alone in Norway to obtain a residence permit. In most cases where children are left behind, the parents reappear after a period of time (after a few weeks to a year).

3. This is not an authentic case, but elements of the story have been taken from real events.

Maria's story

A mother from the former Eastern Europe and her child, Maria, are staying at a reception centre. Their application for asylum has been rejected. The mother places Maria with another family and disappears. This family does not want to be responsible for Maria and contacts the child welfare services in the municipality. Maria continues to stay at the reception centre and applies for asylum as an unaccompanied minor asylum seeker. The UDI rejects her application because she does not need protection and there are indications that she knows where her mother is.



Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers

Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable because they usually come to Norway without an accompanying carer.

When assessing a child's grounds for asylum and need for protection, special attention is paid to whether there is a risk of persecution of a nature particularly damaging to children (such as forced marriage or forced recruitment into military service), and consideration is given to the fact that children are vulnerable and less tolerant than adults. The threshold for granting them protection may therefore be lower than for adults.

The UDI gives priority to applications from unaccompanied minor asylum seekers when processing cases, but many cases need closer examination. When a child does not need protection, residence on humanitarian

grounds is granted if the parents cannot be found in the country of origin or in a safe third country where reunification is possible.

One problem here is that many asylum seekers wrongfully claim that they are minors in an attempt to benefit from the special case processing given to this group. In the case of doubt as to whether the stated age is correct, the applicant is offered an age test. This test is voluntary and any doubt will be counted in the applicant's favour. In decisions made during 2006 where the applicant was age-tested, the tested person was found to be 18 years or older in 38 per cent of the cases.

Important to find caregivers

The UDI traces parents or other caregivers for unaccompanied single minors without an independent need for protection. This is partly done to enable the child to establish contact with his/her parents or caregivers and receive the security this provides.

In 2006 UDI worked on the possibility to develop a method that can be used in its

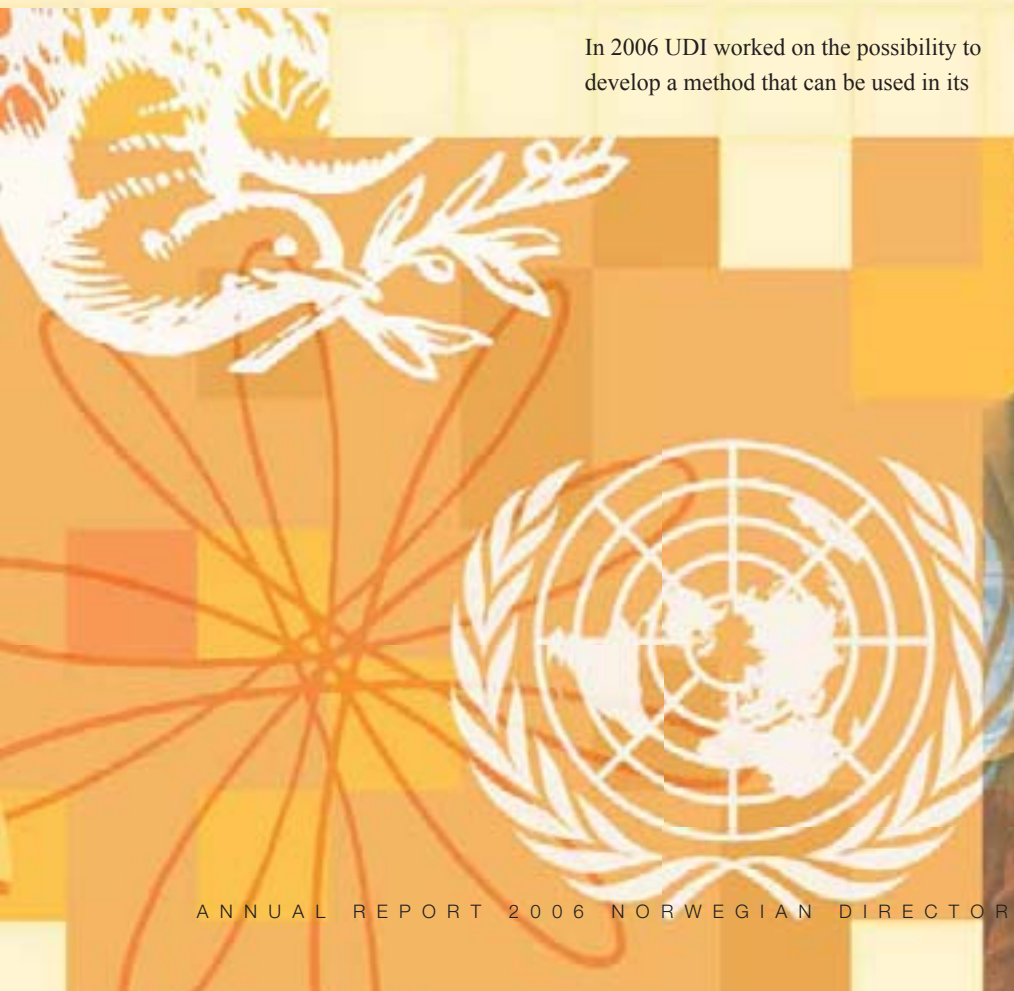
tracing activities, at the same time it also collected information on the experiences other countries have gained from their tracing activities.

The Rights of the Child

In 2003, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated into the Human Rights Act. The convention itself does not give any child or adult the right to asylum or residence in Norway, but it does take precedence over other Norwegian legislation in the event of a conflict between the Convention and the legislation.

Four articles are especially relevant for children and immigration cases:

- Article 3 - the child's best interests
- Article 10 - family reunification
- Article 12 - the right to express one's views
- Article 22 - child refugees



THE UDI'S AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The UDI's spring conference

The topic for the UDI's spring conference in 2006 was children in immigration cases, including the balance between the best interests of the child and regulated immigration. Bjarne Håkon Hanssen, Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion, signalled that the regulations for processing asylum cases concerning children would be relaxed, and was particularly interested in cutting the waiting time for children staying at a reception centre.

Compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child was an issue that many of the experts addressed.

Professor Kirsten Sandberg elaborated on the importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the field of immigration, pointing out that the child's health, connection to Norway, ties to the country of origin, the need for stability, the care situation and the parents' health are factors to take into consideration when assessing what is in the best interests of the child.

Anne Kirsti Ruud, a clinical educator, examined the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and explained how fleeing their country and the waiting period at a reception centre influence children's mental health. She pointed out that children at reception centres are not only in a post-traumatic state, but also in the middle of a traumatic situation.

Children and young people at reception centres

As of 31 December 2006, around 2000 children were staying at reception centres. This means that one in four residents at a reception centre is a child. Reception centres are intended to be places of temporary residence, rather than a home where children grow up.

The early development conditions of children at reception centres are often in the public eye. This issue was addressed at the UDI's spring conference. It is important that children at reception centres have day-to-day routines and tasks that can help them experience life as meaningful.

Reception centres in Norway support parents in their provision of care. School-age children must go to school and children over two years of age must have daily programmes lasting at least three hours at a day-care centre or the reception centre's child base. Activities can help to normalise an abnormal life situation, and children seeking asylum must therefore have one or more optional recreational programmes and the opportunity to have normal contact with children of the same age in the local community.

In accordance with the UDI's focus on improving living conditions for families with children, these families are offered flats in normal housing areas wherever possible. The UDI is also considering the introduction of a requirement for minimum housing standards for families with children.

Child welfare

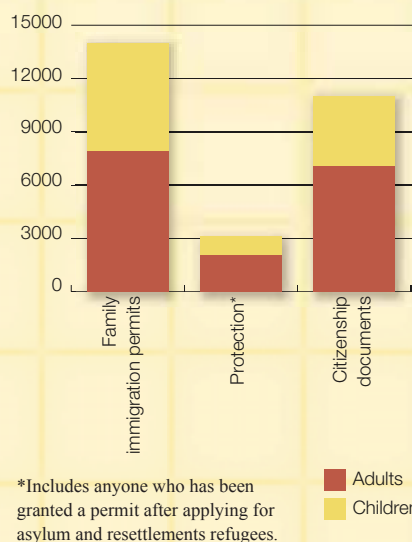
The Child Welfare Services Act applies to all children in Norway, including children without a residence permit, for example those staying at a reception centre.

In recent years, the UDI has seen an increase in the number of child welfare cases. Mental illness, events in their country of origin, fleeing their country, the exile situation, the stay at the reception centre and uncertainty about the future can affect the ability of parents to provide care for their children.

Many parents with mental problems therefore need assistance from the child welfare services, such as parental guidance and outreach contact. In some cases a child may move to a child protection relief home or foster home for a brief or long term.

From 1 October 2007, the Ministry of Children and Equality will offer unaccompanied minor asylum seekers under 15 years of age housing and care through the child welfare services. The UDI will help the child welfare services take over the responsibility for caring for these children. For the time being, the UDI will continue to have care responsibility for unaccompanied minors over 15 years of age.

Permits granted to children and adults. 2006



Visas

Record number of visa applications

The number of visa applications received by Norway was higher in 2006 than ever before. Some foreign service missions experienced a dramatic increase in the number of applications compared with

2005. This increase reflects a growing interest in Norway as a tourist destination. The foreign service missions with the highest increase are Moscow (37 per cent), Beijing (46 per cent) and Shanghai (59 per cent).

The Schengen cooperation

Through its participation in the Schengen agreement, Norway undertakes to cooperate with the other Schengen countries on issuing visas. This means that all the countries comply with common visa regulations and endeavour to harmonise their practice in the processing of visa applications.

A visa to one Schengen country is generally also valid in the other countries. Thus a person entering Norway on a visa may freely travel in other Schengen countries while the visa is valid.

Citizenship

Steep rise in the number of applications

There was a sharp rise in the number of applications for Norwegian citizenship in 2006. As the general rule is that applicants for Norwegian citizenship must have lived in Norway for seven years, or four if they are married to a Norwegian citizen, the number of applications generally coincides with the number of asylum and residence permits granted seven and four years ago.

New Citizenship Act

On 1 September 2006, a new Citizenship Act came into force in Norway. The new Act continues the principle of one citizenship. The major changes are:

- Children automatically become citizens if the mother or father is a Norwegian citizen, regardless of the marital status of the parents and regardless of whether the child was born in Norway or abroad.
- Children may apply for citizenship independently once they have turned 12 years of age.
- A settlement permit is required.
- There are requirements concerning Norwegian language skills (to be implemented from 1 September 2008).

Citizenship ceremony

From 1 September 2006, applicants who have been granted Norwegian citizenship are invited to a ceremony held by the County Governor. The ceremony is considered to be a dignified and solemn celebration of the transition to Norwegian citizenship.

