

NORWAY

ARRIVALS

1. Total number of individual asylum seekers who arrived, with monthly breakdown and percentage variation between years

Table 1:

Source: Directorate of Immigration

Month	2002	2003	Variation +/- (%)
January	1,513	1,176	-22.3
February	1,385	1,181	-14.7
March	1,472	1,275	-13.4
April	1,255	1,105	-12.0
May	1,236	1,073	-13.2
June	1,301	1,201	-7.7
July	1,652	1,325	-19.7
August	1,691	1,798	+6.3
September	1,746	1,820	+4.2
October	1,771	1,411	-20.3
November	1,238	1,053	-15.0
December	1,220	1,196	-2.0
TOTAL	17,480	15,614	-10.7

2. Breakdown according to the country of origin/nationality, with percentage variation

Table 2:

Source: Directorate of Immigration

Country	2002	2003	Variation +/- (%)
Serbia and Montenegro	2,460	2,180	-11.3
Afghanistan	786	2,032	+158.5
Russian Federation	1,718	1,891	+10.1
Somalia	1,534	1,602	+4.4
Iraq	1,624	937	-43.4
Bosnia-Herzegovina	810	657	-18.8
Iran	450	607	+34.8
<i>Others</i>	8,098	5,708	-29.5
TOTAL	17,480	15,614	-10.7

During autumn 2003, the Government applied various measures with the aim of decreasing so-called 'manifestly unfounded' applications, among others through information campaigns in the various countries of origin. This led to a rapid decrease in applications towards the end of the year. Also for other groups, i.e. Somalis, Afghans and Chechens, a decision was made to 'freeze' the handling of the cases until further notice regarding policy development. This too led to a notable decrease in arrivals from these countries towards the end of the year. It is expected that less than 10,000 persons will apply for asylum in Norway in 2004.

3. Persons arriving under family reunification procedure

10,623 (2002: 14,200)

The largest groups were originally from: Iraq (943), Russian Federation (804), Thailand (778), Somalia (648), Pakistan (529), Serbia and Montenegro (502), Turkey (449) and Afghanistan (386).

4. Refugees arriving as part of a resettlement programme

1,633 (2002: 1,216)

The largest groups were originally from: Liberia (402), Iran (237), Democratic Republic of Congo (156), Burundi (133) and Myanmar /Burma (129), Afghanistan (85), Indonesia (75) and Sierra Leone (65).

5. Unaccompanied minors

916 (2002: 894)

The largest groups were from: Afghanistan (306), Brazil (158), Somalia (117), Iraq (108) and Chile (103).

RECOGNITION RATES

6. The statuses accorded at first instance and appeal stages as an absolute number and as a percentage of total decisions

Table 3:

Source: Directorate of Immigration

Statuses	2002		2003	
	Total decisions Number	%	Total decisions Number	%
No status awarded	14,563	81.6	13,053	79
Convention status	332	1.9	585	3,5
Other protection grounds	-	-	2,216	13
Humanitarian grounds	2,958	16.5	756	4,5
TOTAL	17,853	100	16,610	100

The distinction between other protection grounds and humanitarian grounds was introduced in 2003.

7. Refugee recognition rates (1951 Geneva Convention) according to country of origin

Table 4:

Source: Directorate of Immigration

Country of origin	2002		2003	
	Total decisions Number	%	Total decisions Number	%
Russian Federation	69	0.4	138	0.8
Iran	40	0.2	92	0.6
Afghanistan	16	0.1	80	0.5
Serbia and Montenegro	88	0.5	55	0.3
China	3	0	34	0.2
Iraq	35	0.2	9	0.1
Somalia	18	0.1	6	0
<i>Others</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>0.2</i>	<i>127</i>	<i>0,7</i>
TOTAL	332	1.9	585	3.5

RETURNS, REMOVALS, DETENTION AND DISMISSED CLAIMS

8. Persons returned on 'safe third country' grounds

No figures available.

9. Persons returned on 'safe country of origin' grounds

No figures available.

10. Number of applications determined inadmissible

No information provided.

11. Number of asylum seekers denied entry to the territory

No information provided.

12. Number of asylum seekers detained, the maximum length of and grounds for detention

No figures available

13. Deportations of rejected asylum seekers

No figures available.

14. Details of assisted return programmes, and numbers of those returned

No figures available.

15. Number of asylum seekers sent back to the Member State responsible for examining the asylum application under the Dublin Convention (Dublin II Regulation)

No figures provided.

The Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national came into effect in Norway on 1 September 2003. Although Norway is not a member of the European Union, Norway has taken part in the Dublin co-operation since 1 April 2001.

SPECIFIC REFUGEE GROUPS

16. Developments regarding refugee groups of particular concern

2003 saw a drastically more restrictive approach from the Norwegian authorities towards all the major refugee groups:

Somalis

The processing of asylum applications from Somalis was suspended on 17 September 2003, following the arrival of 1,306 asylum seekers from Somalia in the first seven months of the year. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development instructed the Directorate of Immigration to re-examine, and possibly restrict, its practice of granting a residence permit on protection or humanitarian grounds to Somalis from the southern areas of the country (excluding, in general, asylum seekers from Somaliland Puntland).

Chechens

The processing of asylum applications from Chechens was suspended on 15 October 2003, following a high number of asylum seekers from Chechnya during the year. The Directorate of Immigration declared that it would make a new assessment of the situation and of its practice consisting in granting either refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention or a residence permit on protection grounds to ethnic Chechens (in principle excluding ethnic Chechens who had lived for years in other parts of the Russian Federation and other ethnic groups from Chechnya proper).

Afghans

Until the end of 2003, all applicants originally from outside Kabul were granted protection, regardless of the grounds of their claims, on the basis of the insecurity that existed in all other parts of Afghanistan. Applications from persons originally from Kabul were instead assessed on the basis of their individual need for protection. The examination of asylum applications from Afghan nationals was suspended in January 2004.

Iraqis

The processing of asylum applications from Iraqi nationals was suspended in February 2003, due to the unpredictable and unstable situation in Iraq, but was resumed in January 2004. The general practice was that applications from persons deemed to have sufficient links to the autonomous Kurdish areas were to be rejected unless they had individual reasons for asylum, whereas other applications could be considered for asylum or residence permit on humanitarian grounds.

LEGAL AND PROCEDURAL DEVELOPMENTS

17. New legislation passed

For new financial requirements for family reunification see Section 25 below.

Section 37 of the Aliens Act gives the police the authority to use an asylum fingerprint and photo database for criminal investigations where an offence is punishable with more than six months imprisonment.

18. Changes in refugee determination procedure, appeal or deportation procedures

'Unfounded' applications

As of January 2004, a 48-hour procedure was introduced for asylum seekers from countries deemed to be safe. All cases within this procedure are to be decided on within 48 hours and if considered by the Directorate of Immigration to be 'unfounded', deportation is to take place within 72 hours after arrival. If the Directorate of Immigration finds that an individual case is instead well founded, it shall be transferred to and examine under the normal determination procedure.

Asylum seekers within this accelerated procedure will receive general information from the Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) on the first day (before the interview) in the form of a film and a leaflet providing information on their rights and obligations. However, the asylum seekers do not meet with NOAS or their lawyer in person until after the interview. The lawyer will be given only a very limited time to go through the interview with the asylum seeker and to respond. The lawyer is also given only two hours to prepare the appeal.

The list of 'safe countries of origin' includes: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Barbados, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, the Falkland Islands, Finland, France, the Faeroe Islands, Germany, Gibraltar, Greenland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Croatia, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Malta, Monaco, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, South-Africa, UK, Ukraine, USA, the Vatican.

Unaccompanied minors

Since 2003, it is the applicant's age at the time of the decision that forms the basis for the decision itself, and not the age at the time of the arrival. An age test was also reintroduced for asylum seekers who claim to be under the age of 18, in cases where the Directorate of Immigration believes there are some doubts concerning the age of the applicant.

19. Important case-law relating to the qualification for refugee status and other forms of protection

In Norway, courts very rarely handle asylum cases. The practice of the Immigration Appeals Board instead constitutes precedence. However, the Board rarely issues exemplary decisions. There is hardly

any identifiable area where in the years since its establishment (2001) the Board has given a new and significant interpretation of the relevant laws and conventions.

20. Developments in the use of the exclusion clauses of the 1951 Geneva Convention in the context of the national security debate

There were no developments in the use of the exclusion clauses in 2003.

21. Developments regarding readmission and cooperation agreements

No information provided.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

22. Changes in the reception system

There were no changes in the reception system in 2003.

23. Changes in the social welfare policy relevant to refugees

There were no changes in the social welfare policy in 2003.

24. Changes in policy relating to refugee integration

As of 1 January 2003, asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their application are no longer provided with Norwegian language tuitions in reception centres. Language tuitions are only provided after the issuing of a positive decision on the application.

Introductory Programme

On 1 September 2003, an introductory programme was introduced for newly arrived foreign nationals. The Public Employment Service (AETAT) is an important partner in this programme and the Immigration Directorate (UDI) is responsible for its monitoring in each municipality. As a minimum, the programme shall provide Norwegian language tuitions, support in the area of education and employment. The programme is obligatory, and is offered to persons between the age of 18 and 55 in need of basic qualifications. The persons entitled to benefit from this programme are: resettlement refugees, refugees with political asylum, persons with residence on humanitarian/other protection grounds, persons with collective protection or persons who have been granted family reunification where the sponsor falls under one of the above mentioned groups. The introductory programme is full time and lasts for two years; persons who attend will receive an allowance of NOK 113,773 per annum (equivalent to approx. €14,000). As of 1 September 2004, all municipalities resettling refugees will be obliged to establish an introductory programme.

25. Changes in family reunion policy

New financial requirements

In May 2003, the Government re-introduced financial requirements for persons with a residence permit on protection or humanitarian grounds who wish to be reunited with their spouse/cohabitant and/or minor child(ren). Applicants are required to have an income of at least NOK 161,000 (equivalent to approx. €20,000). The financial requirements are lifted when a person is issued with a permanent residence permit (normally after having had a residence permit for three years). In this case, the spouse/cohabitant will have to be married or have lived with the sponsor for at least two years (Sections 23 and 24 of the Immigration Law).

There are no financial requirements for persons with refugee status who wish to be reunited with their spouse/cohabitant and/or minor child(ren). It should be noted though, that refugee status is very rarely granted in Norway. Most applicants receive a residence permit on protection or humanitarian grounds and puts them in a weaker position compared to recognised refugees, as they are subject to financial requirements for family reunification.

Spouses under the age of 23

Section 19 of the Immigration Regulation states that no exceptions can be made to the financial requirements when one of the spouses is under the age of 23. The reason, as stated by the Government, is to prevent forced marriages.

OTHER POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

26. Developments in resettlement policy

In 2003, the quota was reduced from 1,500 per year to only 750. The authorities gave the high number of asylum seekers as the reason behind their decision. Despite the numbers of lodged asylum claims is now drastically decreasing, authorities have shown no signs so far of their intention to raise the quota back to the level set for 2002.

27. Developments in return policy

In 2003, the basic allowance for asylum seekers with a final negative decision was further reduced. As of 1 January 2004, no allowance, even for food, is given to asylum seekers with a final negative decision who do not contact the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) or the police to make arrangements for their voluntary return. They cannot longer stay in the reception centres with the exception of families with minor children.

This also applies to asylum seekers from countries such as Ethiopia and Eritrea that the Norwegian authorities are not able to return. While asylum seekers from these two countries had previously been given a temporary work permit if they received a final negative decision on their application, these work permits are now no longer issued nor extended. The work permit has been removed in order to 'motivate' these persons to return themselves, as there is no possibility of forcible return.

28. Developments in border control measures

There were no developments in border control measures in 2003.

29. Other developments in refugee policy

There were no further developments in refugee policy in 2003.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

30. Government in power during 2003

A conservative coalition government consisting of the Christian Democratic Party (Prime Minister), the Conservative Party (Minister for Immigration) and the Liberal Party was in power throughout 2003.

31. Governmental policy vis-à-vis EU developments

No information provided.

32. Asylum in the national political agenda

The very restrictive policies introduced in Norway should be seen in conjunction with equally restrictive trends across Europe (see Denmark or the Netherlands). The Minister for Local Government and Regional Development expressed his intention to reduce the number of spontaneous arrivals from 15,600 (2003) to 10,000 in 2004 and is clearly willing to use tough measures to achieve this goal.

Moreover, the media coverage of asylum and immigration issues has, over the last couple of years, generally contributed to increase the negative perception among the population, by focussing especially on issues such as the high influx of asylum seekers with allegedly 'unfounded' cases.