Asylum inflow 2014-2016: a cohort of asylum seekers

The Netherlands Court of Audit concludes that the authorities involved in the asylum chain show great resilience when faced with a large inflow of new asylum seekers. An audit of the asylum inflow in the period 2014-2016 found that the EU Dublin agreements were not properly observed. Under the Dublin Regulation, the Netherlands can return asylum seekers to the EU member state in which they were first registered. The Court found that just 14.8% of the Netherlands' Dublin requests actually led to asylum seekers being returned. There were also significant differences in the EU member states' willingness to honour the Netherlands' requests that they take back asylum seekers.

The 2015 refugee crisis prompted the Court of Audit to investigate the facts and figures surrounding the asylum inflow in the period 2014-2016. The number of asylum seekers jumped sharply in 2015 after years of moderate inflows.

During the refugee crisis, about 60% of applications for asylum in the Netherlands were honoured. Most of the refugees came from Syria and Eritrea. In the wake of the large inflow of refugees from these countries, many asylum seekers also came to the Netherlands from safe countries such as Morocco and Algeria. Nearly all these applications (98.4%) were rejected.

Failure to comply with EU agreements on sending back asylum seekers

A growing number of the refugees seeking asylum in the Netherlands were already registered in another EU member state. In these cases, the Netherlands can invoke the Dublin agreements and hand the refugees over to the country in which they were first registered. On average, the Dublin procedure was initiated for a quarter of the asylum seekers during the period audited. By the end of 2016 the number had risen to just over half of the refugees seeking asylum in the Netherlands.

The Court of Audit found that fewer Dublin requests to return refugees to other EU member states were honoured than was assumed at the time. Of the 19,979 requests that the Netherlands made to other EU member states between 2014 and 2016, only 2,953 (14.8%) had been honoured by the end of 2016. There are significant differences between individual member states regarding the number of asylum seekers they receive from the Netherlands.

Wide differences between European Countries in terms of honouring of Dublin claims

Why did we audit the asylum chain?

The 2015 refugee crisis prompted the Court of Audit to investigate the facts and figures surrounding the asylum inflow during the period concerned.

What standards and methods did we use in our audit of the asylum chain?

Asylum procedures hinge on decisions about individual people or families who have their own refugee stories. It is important that these individual procedures are conducted correctly but sometimes things can go wrong. Our audit was not carried out at this level, however, and we therefore do not express an opinion on the conduct of the procedure in our report.

We tried to find patterns in the procedural data about asylum seekers in the Netherlands. We requested quantitative data on asylum seekers from various organisations involved in the asylum chain. We used the data to walk through the process that asylum seekers must take from the moment they arrive in the Netherlands until the moment they are granted a residence permit or their application is rejected and they leave the Netherlands. To put the outcomes of the data analysis into context, we held interviews with officials from several organisations involved in the asylum process. We also studied parliamentary documentation and third-party studies.

Current status

The State Secretary for Security and Justice responded to our audit on 23 May 2018.