

REFUGEES. REPORT. LIFE.

NEWTIMES

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ONE OUT OF THREE ASYLUM SEEKERS IS A CHILD

WE GAVE THREE OF THEM A CAMERA. SEE THEIR PICTURES

REPORTAGE FROM TENT CAMP IN NÆSTVED

WHO ARE LIVING IN THE TENTS?

PAGE 10

MORE AND MORE ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE SENT TO RETURN CENTERS

AND THEY ARE AFRAID TO GO THERE

PAGE 12

NEW ASYLUM RADIO IN DENMARK

TUNE IN TO ASYLUM SEEKERS' STORIES

PAGE 16



DEAR READER

One out of three asylum seekers are children. Imagine that. One out of three. Right now that means that more than 1.900 children are living in the Red Cross driven asylum centers.

Often we hear about asylum seekers but rarely we hear from the asylum seekers themselves. And even more rarely do we hear from the children. How do they cope with asylum life?

What do they think about the future?

We therefore decided to give a camera to some of the children in the asylum centers and asked them to take pictures of their daily life in their new temporary homes. The result can be seen in this magazine and on our - new and redesigned - webpage newtimes.dk.

In this magazine you can also see the inside of an asylum

tent camp. There has been a lot of debate about the tent camps in Denmark, so we sent one of our journalists to the tent camp in Næstved that hosts around 360 asylum seekers.

There are many more stories in this magazine that we hope you will find time to read during this summer. If you finish this magazine and are looking for more asylum news you can catch up on our facebook page

(facebook.com/newtimes.dk) or maybe try out the new asylum radio station The Bridge Radio. The radio is being produced by Danish volunteers and asylum seekers in the Trampoline House in Copenhagen. You can read more about the radio in this magazine too.

Thanks for reading and good summer to you all. Especially to all the children in the asylum centers.

Robin Ali
Ahrenkiel El-Tanany



Asylum seekers from the centers Sandholm and Kongelunden at a football event in Copenhagen. The event was organized by the professional football player and captain of FC Nordsjælland, Patrick Jan Mtiliga, in cooperation with Street Society and CPH Panna House the 2nd of April.

Photo: Ahmed

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Editorial Office:
New Times
Rosenørns Allé 31, 2. sal,
1970 Frederiksberg
Email: newtimesdk@gmail.com
www.newtimes.dk
Tel. +45 23 34 58 87

Editor:
Robin Ali Ahrenkiel El-Tanany

New Times Journalists:
Ahmed, Huda, Makmoud, Eden, Nino, Danial,
Negar, Sam, Marion & Ismael

Editorial assistants:
Camilla Q. Madsen, Michael Bang, Nanna Sejsbo
and Anna Franziska

Interns:
Camilla Uhrskov Bank

Layout:
Jens Bureau, supergreen.dk

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but some use pseudonyms because they do not
want their whereabouts known by people in
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Disclaimer:
The opinions expressed are those of the authors
and the persons interviewed and not – unless
stated clearly – the opinion of the Danish Red
Cross.

Frontpage picture shows three girls in Konge-
lunden asylum center. The picture is taken by
12-year-old Yazzen. See more of his pictures on
www.newtimes.dk

CHILDREN IN THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

One out of three asylum seekers are children.

Right now there are more than 1,900 children in the Red Cross asylum centers out of a total of 5,500.

What is it like to be a child in an asylum center?

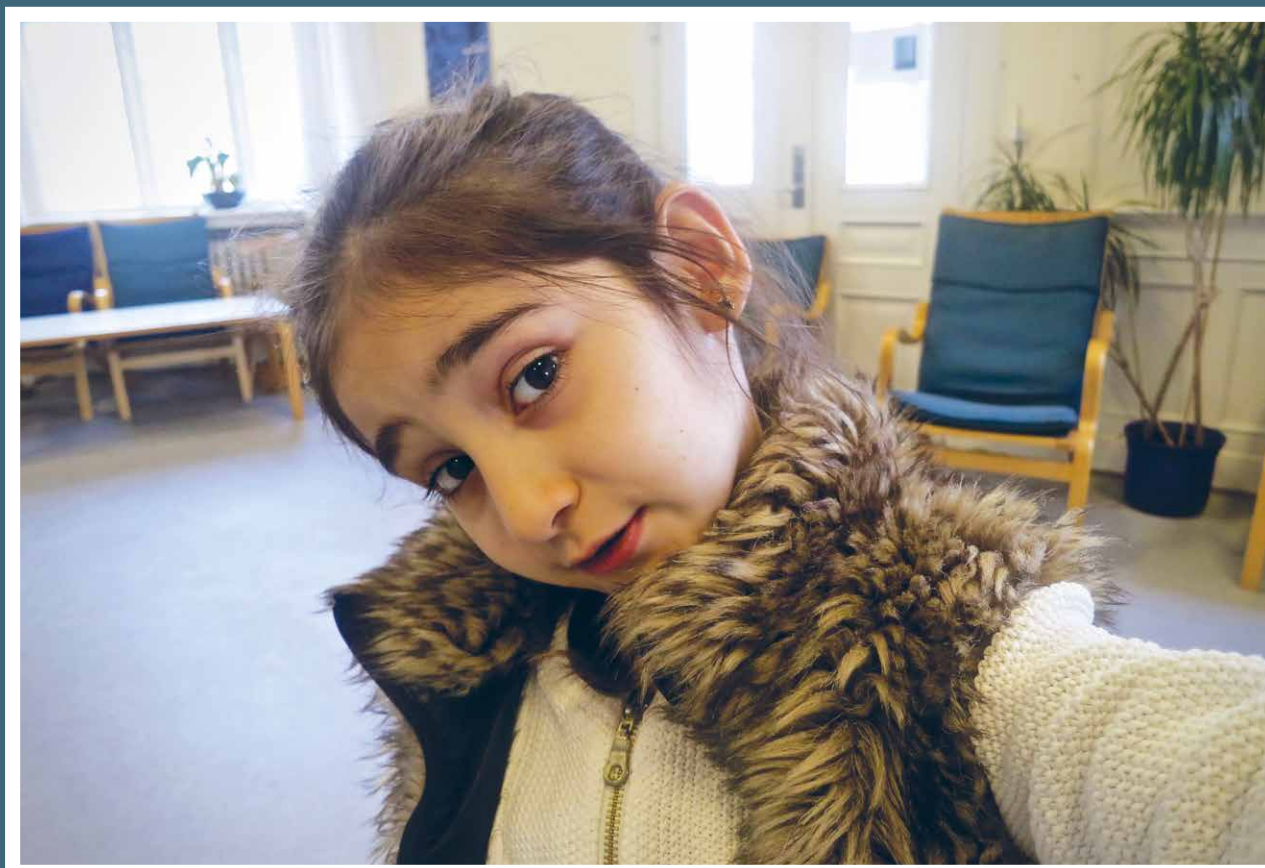
We found three children and followed them for a day and asked them big and small questions to find out.



"MY DREAM IS TO END THE WAR"

We gave the Syrian girl Aya Ibrahim a camera and asked her to take pictures of her daily life in her asylum center in Roskilde.

■ Aya has been assisted by: Steer and Huda



My name is Aya Ibrahim, I am seven years old, I took these pictures of my daily life in the camp.

THREE BIG QUESTIONS FOR AYA

How can we stop war in Syria?

If the president Bashar al-Assad dies, the war will be over.

If you were president, what would be the first thing you would do?

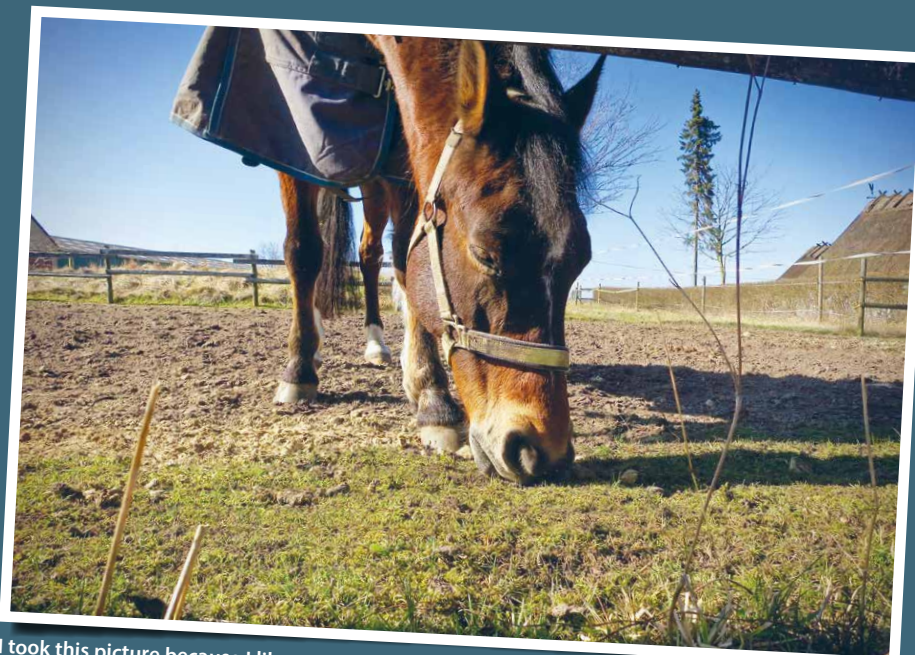
I would place a lot of guards so that no one kill each other or force people into the military and drive them to a war.

What are your dreams for the future?

My dream at first was to become a queen, but now my dream is to end the war.



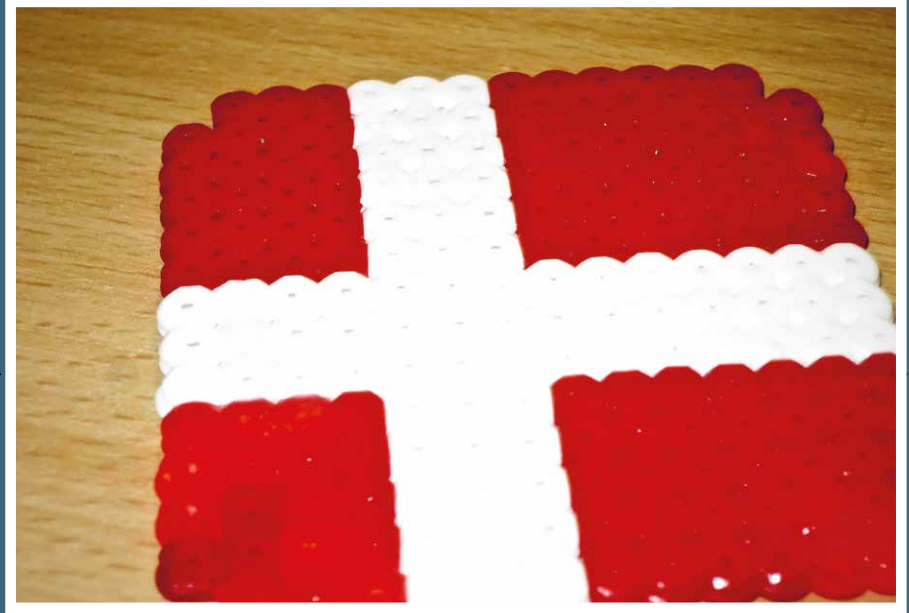
I took this picture, because I love my neighbor in the center. His name is Aboud, and he plays with me all the time and makes jokes with me. He makes me laugh a lot.



I took this picture because I like horses. It reminds me about Syria. During the holidays we used to go to animal farms and watch.



I took this picture because my sister was learning to ride a bike, and I loved to take a picture of her while she was doing that.



I made this because the woman in the after school club asked us to do something with these things. I chose Denmark's flag, because it is a new flag for me.



I took this picture because I like that Danish volunteer. She taught me a lot of things, and I also invited her to my room to show her my place.



I took this picture of cake, because it was my friend's birthday and I loved the cake. We had a party, and it was so much fun.



When I first arrived to Denmark, they gave me this colorful jacket, and some toys I got from a Danish volunteer. So I packed them with my stuff for moving.



I used to play with my friends in Syria, where we would make a fashion show. So me and my sister Ariana and others wanted to play it in the camp as well.



■ By: Mercy and Makmoud (photo)



"I WOULD HELP POOR PEOPLE IF I WAS PRESIDENT"

Tawfiq is nine years old and from Congo. He and his mother are seeking asylum in Denmark and live in Kongelunden asylum center. They have been in Denmark for six years.

If you were president, what would be the first thing you would do?

Help small children, help poor people, and buy a good car.

What makes you happy?

My friends in the school. I like to play football.

What makes you sad?

I got sad when my bicycle was stolen.

What are your dreams for the future?

I would like to be a doctor.

See Tawfiq's pictures from a day in his life in his center at www.newtimes.dk



"I DREAM OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN MECHANICAL ENGINEERING"

12-year-old Yazzen came to Denmark with his uncle. His mother, father and siblings are still in Syria. Yazzen lives in the asylum centre Kongelunden in southern Amager, close to Copenhagen.

■ Text and photo: Makmoud



How can we stop war in the world?

If Bashar Al Assad is killed his army will collapse and war will end.

If you were president, what would be the first thing you would do?

I will look well after the population and give them good food.

What are your dreams for the future?

At home I worked in a falafel restaurant, and I also worked for

six months in a car mechanic shop. I liked the work, and I wish to have a University degree in Mechanical Engineering.

New Times gave Yazzen a camera to take pictures of his daily life in the asylum centre. Watch his pictures on newtimes.dk

THE TERROR OF ISLAMIC STATE

Stoning, cutting off limbs and public executions. An Iraqi Kurdish asylum seeker recounts how Islamic State terrorized his home before he was able to escape

■ Text & photo by Makmoud



Abdullah is 32 years old. When ISIS took over his village, he lived in an Arab area south of Mosul with his 22-year old wife and two children. Before the takeover, Abdullah worked as an ambulance driver, and he was in charge of his family's land.

THE TAKEOVER

"The day ISIS took over our town, hours before the takeover, the Iraqi army abandoned their position, and left all their weapons to ISIS without a fight. They abandoned their American Abrams tanks, their armored cars and their heavy guns," Abdullah says. "All the weapons of the 21. Division, 15000 men strong, were stationed a few kilometers from our village."

A REGIME OF TERROR IN TOWN

As a resident of ISIS territory Abdullah was asked to stay in his job with a reduction of his salary by 30%. The Iraqi state would send him his salary of 720.000 Iraqi Dinar (650 US dollars), and then ISIS would cut 200,000 ID and hand him the remaining 520,000 ID.

The men of ISIS talked soft to win the hearts of the populations at the beginning.

"Few days later they showed their ugly face. They started accusing people of being collaborators with the Iraqi State, and the punishment for this was death by the sword," Abdullah recounts of the new legal system set in motion in his village.

"They would call all the inhabitants of the village and let the execution take place in public. Everyone had to watch, and no excuse was accepted."

Following the rules of the new town chiefs, theft was punished by cutting of the hand of the perpetrator and immersing what is left of the arm in hot boiling oil to stop the bleeding. If a married man or woman was found to have committed adultery, she was to be stoned to death in public – an unmarried person would be lashed in public.

"My wife had mental prob-



Abdullah with his wife and two children in their room in their asylum center in Kongelunden.

lems because she was forced to watch these acts of brutality," Abdullah says. He saw four brothers executed with a bullet in the back of the head in public when they were charged with collaborating with the government of Baghdad.

DOUBLE STANDARDS UNDER THE NEW ISIS LAW

The new town rules were contradictory and hypocritical, Abdullah recounts. Smoking cigarettes and alcohol was forbidden, and offenders would be punished in public by lashing. But people who bought their cigarettes and drinks from the ISIS's own bootleg shop at many folds of the actual price would be safe from punishment.

Likewise, ISIS's men could exchange enslaved women and have sex with them without being prosecuted for adultery.

DANGEROUS MISSIONS FOR AN AMBULANCE DRIVER

As an ambulance driver, Abdullah was given the task of delivering injured ISIS fighters to Mosul hospitals, which was a long drive from his village. Later

on he was ordered to accompany the fighters on the battlegrounds.

"The jet fighters were roaming over our heads, and drones were watching and shelling ISIS in the area. I was in danger of being killed, and that motivated me to escape," Abdullah says. "My situation is very bad now, as both the Kurds and Baghdad governments consider me an ISIS collaborator. I could not go to them with my concerns, so the safest option was to leave Iraq".

EN ROUTE TO SWEDEN

One of ISIS's men worked smuggling people out of Iraq. On the 8th of October 2015, Abdullah agreed with a smuggler that he was to get Abdullah and his family safely out of Iraq at the price of 18.000 US Dollars.

In two and a half day the family fled Iraq through Syria to Turkey. Once in Turkey, another smuggler agreed to get the family to Europe at the even higher cost of 20.500 US Dollars. They were to cross over to Italy from Turkey by the sea in a trailer shipped by boat. The

container held 35 men, women and children.

"All were given some kind of tranquilizer with fruit juice when they were in the trailer," Abdullah recounts. "The journey took three days, and the situation aboard was horrible. The smell and stink was indescribable - from seasickness, urine, feces..."

From Italy, Abdullah and his wife took their children to Hamburg by bus, and from there they bought train tickets to Malmo in Sweden. On the border to Denmark they were stopped by the Danish police and ended up in Sandholm where they applied for asylum. Now, Abdullah and his family stay at Center Kongelunden, and hope to be allowed to start a new life in peace.

Abdullah is a borrowed name. New Times keep his real name for the safety of the rest of his family still in Iraq.

IS THAT FAIR?

Syrians' asylum cases are being processed faster than other nationalities' cases. We ask asylum seekers whether that is fair

■ Text & photos by Marion Chen



What do you think about the policy of granting Syrians asylum faster and easier?

"This is unfair. We came here, because they wanted to kill us, to execute us. The Syrians came here because the Daesh [arabic word for IS] wanted to kill them. All people came here because they would be killed; the situation is the same."

Why did you come to Denmark?

"I was in danger in Afghanistan, because my father was a politician, and politicians and rich people have lots of problems in Afghanistan. The ruling party kills and kidnaps members of the opposite party."

Satar Ghaffai, 25 years old. From Afghanistan. Has been in Denmark for five months.



What do you think about the policy of granting Syrians asylum faster and easier?

"It is the human right of Syrians to have asylum granted very soon. People here in Denmark think that rain comes from the sky, but in Syria instead of rain, comes the bombs. Danish people care for Syrians, they care for everyone. We know the rules, we know the situation."

But to make it fair, you need to think about us also. If Denmark say that they follow the

human rights, then why do they give asylum very easily to Syrians, but wait a very long time to grant asylum for other asylum seekers? I was against the Islamic Iranian government, fighting against them for 17 years, but now I came here, and I'm still waiting for asylum."

Why did you come to Denmark?

"I am a politician. I have been fighting against the regime for 17 years."

Assad Rostand, 30 years old. From Kurdish Iran. Has been in Denmark for nine months.

What do you think about the policy of granting Syrians asylum faster and easier?

"It is okay for Syrians to get positive, but the Danish government should think about us also. It is unfair for Syrians to get positive so easily. They make a long waiting time for Afghan people, Iranian people, Kurdish and Iraqi people. It is unfair. I can not say that this is human rights. If there is human rights, make it equal for us, for every one."

We have stayed in the centre for 14 months, and they put a

lot of pressure on us. I swear, we become crazy. So if we go out of the centre, if we get the positive after two or three years, we are already destroyed, the government can get nothing from us. We become sick, dull, deaf persons"

Why did you come to Denmark?

"Because I had problems with the Afghan regime."



Khalil Rahman. From Afghanistan. Has been in Denmark for 14 months and is still waiting.

KIM HAS HIRED TWO ASYLUM SEEKERS FOR HIS BAKERY

Kim Brimi, a 47-year old boss of a bakery in Roskilde, has signed a contract with the Chinese couple Yipei Hu and Ci Jin, who are seeking asylum in Denmark.

■ By Marion Chen



Kim is very satisfied with Yipei Hu and Ci Jin. They are very precise, on time and even coming to the bakery before they should, Kim says. They work in a different way, but they do their best and Kim points out that he doesn't expect more than that.

In Kim's eyes, the Chinese couple are excellent workers. The only barrier is the language, as Kim is not good in English. But the language is the only

obstacle, and Kim has no other complaints about them. Kim says, they can stay and work as long as they want, because he really likes to have them in the bakery.

REJECTED

Unfortunately the Chinese couple have had their application for asylum rejected. Regarding the rejection, Kim says: "Why should the Immigration Service say no to a Chinese person, who cannot go home

any more, but is able to take care of her or himself here in Denmark? They've got a job, they've got a place to live - they can take care of themselves. The kid goes to school and can speak Danish even better than the other children, why say no to them?"

If it were up to Kim, the Chinese couple should be granted asylum, but unfortunately, that is the decision of the Immigration Service and not him.



Yipei Hu (left) and Ci Jin at work in the bakery.
photo: Marion Chen



Kim says Yipei and Ci are excellent workers.
photo: Marion Chen

YIPEI HU AND CI JIN'S EXPERIENCE IS DOUBLE SIDED

What do you think about being employed by Kim as asylum seekers?

"We did not expect to become employed by Kim actually. On the one side, we feel happy to have this job because we will not take any welfare from Denmark government anymore. According to our morality, it is shame to sit there and take money without doing anything. We want to live a dignified life and be respected. On the other hand, we are still very worried because we were rejected by the Immigration Service, since the Immigration Service had suspicions about our case. We don't know if they might think we just came here for a better life. It is rare for asylum seekers to have employment during the asylum process. Many of our neighbour asylum seekers in the asylum centre felt happy for us. But to be honest, we don't know if it is a good thing or bad thing to our case."

Do you have any plan for the future?

"Because of our experience of persecution in China, the first thing we need to do here is to continue our religion of Christianity and devote ourselves more to the church. And the next we need is to do more for the human rights here in Denmark."

"ISIS BANNED MY BILLIARD HALL"

36-years-old Hossein came to Denmark five months ago, after escaping Iraq because ISIS occupied his city. In Iraq, he was the owner of a billiard saloon, and was threatened to be prosecuted by the ISIS terrorists.

Why did you flee?

I fled from my country because the ISIS took control of my city. When living conditions and security concerns in my city became unbearable, I decided to flee from my country.

What are the biggest differences between your old life and current life?

I had one of the biggest billiard halls in my city before the ISIS warned me to close it. They told me that in a muslim country playing billiard is prohibited. Moreover, I am living in a tent here, so the possibilities which I had in my country, I don't have now. But one of the biggest differences between my old life and current life is the sense of security and freedom, which I have here, but which you cannot see in my country nowadays.

Are you grateful for finding protection in Denmark?

Yes, I'm grateful for finding protection here, because I feel a sense of security here.

What are your dream for future?

If I get positive, the first thing I want is to learn the Danish language very well, because I need that for relating with people and exchanging ideas. In addition, I'm dreaming about opening a billiard hall here, and I hope to achieve that soon.



Hossein shares this tent with five other people.



The bathrooms and toilets are located in a separate space, close to the tents.



Three times a day, a meal is served in the cafeteria.

VISIT IN A TENT CAMP

New Times has visited one of the tent camps for asylum seekers in Denmark - tent camp Næstved - one and a half hours drive south of Copenhagen. The camp was opened in January 2016 and now holds around 360 asylum seekers

■ Text and pictures by Danial



Around sixty people sleep in bunkbeds in the large hall. Two people sleep behind each curtain.



Near the cafeteria, there is a sport hall with possibility for playing games.

"THE REVOLUTION CHANGED MY LIFE"

Ivan came to Denmark five months ago. He witnessed several crimes during the revolution in Ukraine. Because of that he received death threats and was attacked by the government

Why did you flee?

I was involved in the political process in Ukraine during the revolution of 2013-2014. I have witnessed several murders and know the persons directly involved in these murders. Several of my friends were killed under different circumstances. I was attacked several times and I became disabled. Then I fled from my country.

What are the biggest differences between your old life and current life

My life was very good before I got death threats and was attacked by the government. I had a good job in a banking analysis department, and my life was without dangers. Now my current life here in Denmark is without death threats and without stress, which is very important in everybody's life.

Are you grateful for finding protection in Denmark?

I am very grateful for finding protection in Denmark. I feel secure and free here. People are decent and helpful.

What are your dream for the future?

First of all, I want to continue my university here and take my master's degree. Moreover, I want to register in a sport club, because when I was in Ukraine, I was a member of a mix martial arts (MMA) club. I have so many dreams, and I hope to achieve them soon.



The Ukrainian flag. UNHCR informs that 1,3 million Ukrainians have applied for asylum in neighboring countries, in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution.

ERFAN FEARS THAT IT WILL BE LIKE A PRISON

New Times met with Erfan before he was moved to the return center Kærshovedgaard, and asked him about his thoughts of being moved there

■ By Marion Chen & Camilla Uhrskov



Erfan Yari is 20 years old and Kurdish Iranian. He came to Denmark five and a half years ago with his older brother Kaywan. Until now the brothers have been living in Kongelunden asylum center, and have had many internships and have a close network around the center. But both of their applications have been rejected, and now they have both been moved to the Kærshovedgaard return center.

How did you feel when you were told that you were being moved?

"I got so much stress, and I felt that this is unjust and inhumane. Denmark is a democratic country, my only problem is that I'm a refugee, and because of that they take me to prison. Here in Kongelunden, I have everything: I go to school, I have my friends, I have many projects, and I have an internship in the library. When I go there, I will have nothing.

What do you know about the living conditions in Kærshovedgaard?

"Previously, it was a prison. Right now it is a deportation camp for 600 asylum seekers, who have been rejected. You cannot go to Danish school there. My brother is there now: He's just staying in his room there, doing nothing. It's a small room, no activities. You cannot go to the city, because there is no bus, and the center is 8 km from Ikast. Inside the center, it's not the Red Cross staff - it's prison personnel. There are no smiles. It's like you are in prison."

What do you fear will happen if you are sent back to Iran?

"In Iran, we participated in several political demonstrations. Many activists have been killed by the government, because of their opinions or religious beliefs. Also, because I am a supporter of the Yari religion, my life is in danger in Iran. The country uses Sharia law, which gives the state much power to torture and kill people, Kurds being one example because they do not practice Islam. My family lives in constant danger from the current government. If I go back, I am pretty sure I will be hanged as an example to others. I don't have 1% chance of surviving in Iran."



Erfan Yari outside his building in Kongelunden asylum center. This picture was taken four days before he was moved to the return center Kærshovedgaard. Photo: Mahmoud.

FACTS ABOUT THE NEW RETURN CENTER KÆRSHOVEDGAARD

The old prison Kærshovedgaard was opened in March to house rejected asylum seekers. The plan is that all rejected asylum seekers will be moved here or to Sjølsmark. Both places are run by The Danish Prison and Probation Service.

■ By Camilla Uhrskov Bank



Kærshovedgaard is an old open prison, which is located in Jutland around 13 km from the city Ikast. Since March 2016 the old prison has been used as a return center for rejected asylum seekers, people with an expulsion sentence and people on tolerated stay living in Denmark.

In February 2016 the Danish Ministry of Integration published a fact sheet with information about the new center. According to the fact sheet, the government hopes to "put pressure on rejected asylum seekers to cooperate in going back to their home countries" by moving them to return centers like Kærshovedgaard.

A short overview of some of the other information in the published fact sheet:

WHO WILL BE MOVED TO KÆRSHOVEDGAARD?

The asylum seekers being sent to the new center are:

Group 1: Adult asylum seekers, who have received a final rejection of their application for asylum, and whose departure date is overdue. No families. Adults, who have been rejected and have children will be moved to the Sjølsmark return center.

Group 2: Asylum seekers, who have an expulsion sentence due to criminal offenses.

Group 3: Asylum seekers on tolerated stay.

HOW MANY LIVE THERE?

The center has a capacity of 600 people. The Danish authorities plan to gradually fill the facility during the summer.

NO EASY ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The center is located in Jutland, 13 km from Ikast, which is the nearest city. As of now, there are no busses or other means of transportation from the center

to the city. The matter was discussed in the local city council to allow the residents in Kærshovedgaard to be able to use the school busses to the city center, but none of the council members voted in favor of this arrangement due to concerns for the Danish children already using the busses.

THE STAFF

The Danish Prison and Probation Service will have responsibility of the daily running of the center. The daily staff includes regular prison guards. The center will have different sections, which will separate the persons in group 2 and 3 from the persons in group 1.

FREE TO MOVE, BUT NO SLEEPING OTHER PLACES

The asylum seekers will not be detained in the center. They are free to come and go from the center. But they will be obliged to sleep in the center every night. Some of the residents will also be obliged to report at the local police several times a week. A fence will also be built around the center with security cameras and electronic access control.

CAFETERIA

Residents will receive food from a cafeteria three times a day. There is no pocket money, unless the residents agree to assist in leaving Denmark voluntarily. If they agree to sign, the asylum seekers will be given 402 kr. every second week.

The residents are obliged to participate in different daily activities in the center such as cleaning and maintenance of the outdoor facilities. The residents can participate in different tasks of reparations and improvements of the center's facilities.

The residents will be offered around ten hours of teaching in for example English, and their

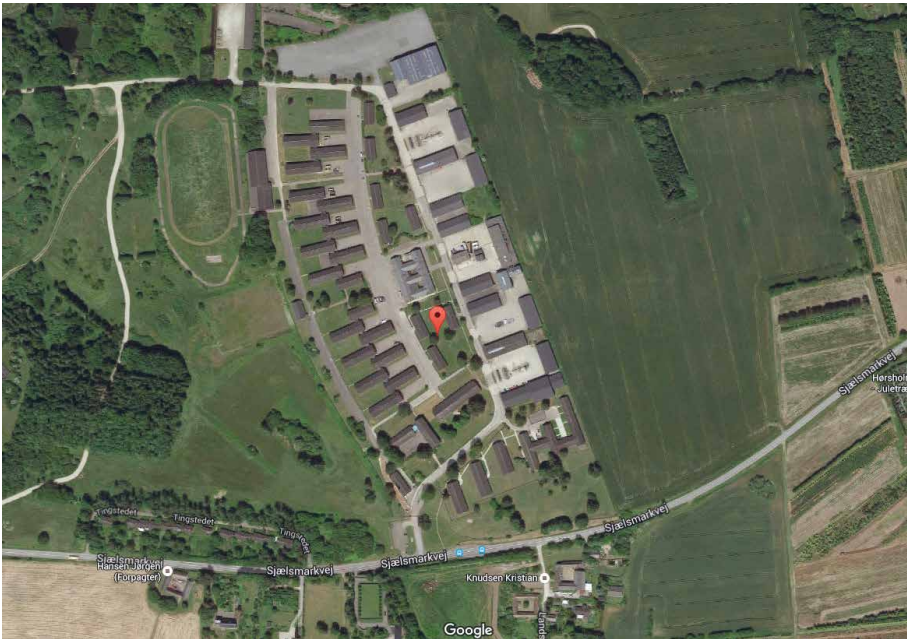
mother tongue. Other types of teaching include subjects that can help them establish a life, when they have returned to their home country. According to the fact sheet, the teaching and the activities will amount to 37 hours a week.

English teaching and other types of teaching is only for people who cooperate in returning.



State Prison in Vridsløselille
Photo: Pudelek/CC

Sjælsmark Photo: Google



Kærshovedgaard Photo: Google



THE OTHER NEW CENTERS FOR REJECTED ASYLUM SEEKERS

Sjælsmark, Hørsholm (2km from Sandholm asylum center)

Sjælsmark is an open return center, located 2 km from the Sandholm asylum center in Hørsholm in Northern Sealand. The center has been in use since 2015. At the moment the center has a capacity of 158 residents, but the plan is to expand the capacity to 400. The center has a fence with access control, and with the obligation for residents to register every four days. There is no opportunity for activities such as internships or other tasks in the center.

Until now, the residents have been used for single men and women, but this will change over the summer. The fact sheet published by the Danish Ministry of Integration in February 2016 states that the groups being moved to Sjælsmark are the following:

- Group 1:** Families with children that have been rejected (phase 3)
- Group 2:** Persons who have been rejected because their application for asylum have been considered “seemingly without reason”
- Group 3:** Persons who are to be transferred to another country because of the Dublin Convention (if they have a fingerprint in another EU-country and have been accepted to have their asylum case processed in that country.)

Vridsløselille, Albertslund (18 km from Copenhagen).

Vridsløselille is an old state prison, located in the city Albertslund. Since March 2016, it has, according to ‘Refugees Welcome’, been used to detain rejected asylum seekers not willing to sign for voluntary return. The prison was originally built to hold 240 prisoners, but the capacity can be expanded to a 1000 residents by having the residents share rooms and building tent pavilions in the prison courtyard. In March, 81 rejected asylum seekers were detained in the prison. In March, the ombudsman visited the prison, and expressed “serious concern” about the living conditions for the residents. He noted that the residents were in conditions close to solitary confinement for up to 23 hours, and he criticised the lack of both information and activities provided to the asylum seekers. The Danish government has no official statement on the criticism, but the Minister of Justice have said that they are currently considering the ombudsman’s criticism.

RUSSIAN ARTIST PRO- TESTS AGAINST DANISH ASYLUM LAWS

On 25th of March the artist from Sankt-Peterburg, Leonid Tsoy, made a performance in Center Kongelunden



By: Nino



"Life is not easy for asylum seekers and it is not needed to make it more difficult" Leonid Tsoy says.

Leonid Tsoy is a photographer, psychotherapist and art performer from Sankt-Petersburg in Russia where he fights for human rights through his art.

The 25th of March he visited the refugees in Kongelunden Centre and showed them photos of Banksy and other art protest pictures. He told, that he was inspired from Ai Weiwei, who boycotts Danish museums because of the new Danish asylum laws. Leonid Tsoy visited Copenhagen's museums the next day.

PHOTOS TO INGER STØJBERG

The exhibition of his photos took place on 26th of March in Folkets Cafe, in Nørrebro. The price of each photo was 1.000 kr. Only 10 photos were left on the exhibition and all others were sent to Inger Støjberg, the Minister of Integration and a central figure behind the new Danish asylum laws. This was symbolic because the new laws makes it possible for the police to search and confiscate valuables worth more than 10.000 kr from the refugees.

Leonid Tsoy's art asylum performance lasted one day. He visited Copenhagen's museums, galleries and other well-known places with the mask, symbolizing the blood-covered face and performance finished near closed gallery, from where Ai Weiwei took his exposition.

Refugees thanked the artist for coming to the center and told him that his art is very important and it meant a lot to them.

HE LEARNED DANISH IN THREE YEARS

Fadi Kourgo is a 26 years old Kurdish man from Syria who got asylum five years ago. New Times met with the man with political dreams for a talk about his experiences living as a refugee in Denmark

By: Steer



When Fadi Kourgo had finished his high school in Syria he wanted to study political science. But his activities as a human rights activist writing reports about the Syrian government blocked this dream.

When he was 19 years old, the regime arrested him for six months, and afterwards he decided to flee and leave everything behind.

How did you start your life in Denmark?

"I started by learning the Danish language, and trying to discover this new world that I was living in. It wasn't easy. There were not many Syrians at that time, and I couldn't talk to anybody. I finished my Danish language classes in one year - usually it take three years. I wanted to finish it fast, because I found out that even if you speak English perfectly, the Danish language is the key to the Danish society. After the language school, I was supposed to start at some special courses before going to the university. But I come from a poor family, and being the only one to help my family, I was faced with two choices: Continue my studies, or take care of my family - of course I chose to help my family. I did that for three years by working full time job in a restaurant. After my family situation got better, I went back to school and started to be active again."

Do you think that you as a refugee have limited opportunities in Denmark?

"No, there are no limitations, but you have to work very hard to get what you want. I decided on a goal and searched for the fastest way to enter a university. I studied at VUC first, and will begin high school next year. I also work at the Danish Refugee Council, where I provide refugees information and guidance."

Would you say that you are a successful refugee?

"I would say that I did what I could; I kept myself active, and have been independent ever since I came here. I didn't get any help from my municipality, and I was always working. I was also lucky because I knew



Fadi Kourgo, Kurdish refugee from Syria. Photo: private

the right people, who opened doors for me to speak out for my people and for my beliefs. I also work with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on different subjects about Syria, Iraq and Kurdish cases, and I work with Copenhagen University in their middle east section. I think I was successful, because I gained the trust from the Danish government."

What kind of image do you think you are giving to the Danish people as a refugee?

"I have always been active in the Danish society. Whenever I meet Danes, they always express how grateful they are to know someone like me. I got chance to speak in a popular place called FOF, and I gave lectures in Danish - they were all surprised that I had only been here for three years at that time. I think I made a nice impression."

What is your hope for other refugees?

"Refugees nowadays have different situations from what I had before. It's a hard time for refugees, and I had much better opportunities than they have now. I would say to them that they should focus on educating

themselves; without education you are nothing. And to be positive in the best way, they can - if you are a positive person, you will do better in the long run."

Are you satisfied with your life?

"I will answer with two different answers: If you ask me, if I am satisfied about myself, I think I could have done more than what I did. If you ask me, if I am satisfied about living in Denmark, I will say that I used to be. Now, after the present government came to power, I don't feel so happy with the situation. We were really happy before this government."

What is your plan for the future?

"I want to finish my study in political science, and I hope to become a politician in the parliament. I will try to change the situation for refugees, and make Denmark a better place to live for everybody."

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

Red Cross in Roskilde has started a new project called “Friends show the way”. The project connects asylum seekers with Danish people, so they can help each other and maybe develop a friendship.

■ Text & photo by Huda



Enaam Alhaj Yahya is a Palestinian from Syria. She lives in Roskilde asylum center and has been matched with a Danish woman.

What made you participate in this project?

“I think that the Danish people are so nice, peaceful and they like to help in any way possible. I did not know the exact idea of the project when I signed up, but I was waiting for my asylum, and the woman in the office told me that I can make a Danish friend here until I move, So I said I will try that.”

How is it going?

“They could find a woman in my age, I asked to be in my age so that we can get along easily.

Even though it is difficult for me to communicate with her, I do not speak the language yet, my kids helped a bit with that. But she came and I invited her for lunch, we talked and she got to know my family and my problems.”

Do you think it is a good idea?

“I look at it in a basic view, in Denmark your credit is not how much money you have in the bank, it is how much friends and connections you have in the society. Away from humanitarian aspects, it opens doors and opportunities. So it is a very good idea.”

Do you think your friendship will last?

“Yes, imagine when you consider a friend as a sister, you visit her as a guest and you love

her, so of course I think it will last. I also have a habit that I love to welcome everybody without discrimination.”

How can this help you?

“It is just nice getting to know people, but it can help me to manage in Denmark, there are a lot of things that we still do not know about in the country, as for now we still inside the asylum camp. Maybe after a while I would consult her with something or I would ask her for some advices or opinions. When I have a special occasion I can invite her to see our habits and cultures”

IF SUCCESSFUL MORE WILL HAVE THE CHANCE

Mia, Red Cross staff and coordinator of the project in Roskilde center, says there are many advantages of the project: *“I think this project serves multiple important purposes for example: better integration of asylum seekers in Denmark, building bridges between Danes and asylum seekers and thereby helping both parties understand and relate to each other.”*

She confirms that the project is still new and has too few matches between Danes and asylum seekers. But all in all the people involved have been very positive about of the project. So if it is a success it may be transferred to other asylum centres.

SAID HOPES TO LEARN DANISH THROUGH HIS NEW FRIEND

Said Nasrat Sadat is a 19 years old boy. He is an asylum seeker from Afghanistan and he lives in Roskilde center. He shared with New Times his thoughts about the project.

What made you participate in this project?

“I want a Danish friend to help me out in learning the Danish language, so that I become better.”

How is it going now?

“Well, I haven't found the perfect match. They found a friend for me, but he is 59 years old. I would like someone in my age.”

Do you think it is a good idea?

“Sure it is, I had a Danish friend before, he was so kind to me, but unfortunately he went to Spain.”

Are you getting along with this Danish friend?

“Yeah, it was good he was so

nice with me but I prefer someone in my age.”

Do you think your friendship will last?

“I do not know yet, I still do not know him that well. I met him only twice.”

How can this help you?

“Knowing someone here who can help feels good. He has told me if I need to do anything I can just ask for his help.”

Do you recommend other asylum seekers to participate in it?

“Definitely, I advice all of the asylum seekers to participate in this project, especially if they want to learn more about Denmark and the language, it would be good for them.”



Said Nasrat Sadat is a 19 years old and hope to learn Danish through “Friends show the way”

NEW ASYLUM RADIO IN DENMARK

The Bridge Radio aims to give asylum seekers a radio voice and invites all interested to workshops. New Times met the two Danish students behind the radio station.

■ Text & photo by Eden



Many asylum seeker's voices do not reach regular people's ears, but that is necessary, because many Danes do not know much about the life in the asylum camp. The Bridge Radio provide stories and information about the life as an asylum seeker and experiences with for examples smugglers and the Mediterranean Sea.

The Bridge Radio was started in the Trampoline House last year by Marie Northrup and Nanna Hansen. We met with them for an interview about the radio.

How many volunteers are working with you?

For now we are 10 people, and some asylum seekers also enjoyed our workshop. And we have comments from different

countries like Germany and Denmark and other countries.

Do people like your programmes?

Yes, some of them even cry when they hear a story about crossing the Mediterranean Sea. A hard life of an asylum seeker touches the hearts of people who didn't know much about asylum life before. We are working hard to be an international radio program and to reach ears in the European countries.

Do you think it will help asylum seekers if people knew more about their stories?

Yes, because if we try to let them know about asylum problems in different ways, some organizations will help. We also teach asylum seekers to make radio and how to speak and record voice.

Do you think asylum seekers will listen to the radio program?

We try to let them know about our program, and we also do the workshops in the Trampoline House. We interview people and make live programs so we try all the best. And we invite any who would like to

share their story on the radio station.

How can you be contacted?

Our e-mail address is bridgeradio@gmail.com and we work at Osramhuset Valhalsgade, 4, 2200 København N.

FACTS

Listen to the radio station and find more information on their webpage:
<http://www.thebridgeradio.dk/>

Information about workshops is on Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/The-Bridge-Radio>



ASK A LAWYER

We sent your questions to the lawyers at the Danish Refugee Council. Here are their replies

1 Hi. I am living under the rules of tolerated stay (tålt ophold). They say that I am going to move to the new departure center Kærshovedgaard in Jutland soon. This place is run by the Danish Prison and Probation Service. I am afraid of going there. I have heard that they will use an electronic device (fodlænke) on us. Is that true? And is it accordance with the UN's Human Rights?

1 On February 9th, 2016, the Ministry of Immigration, Integration and Housing, published a fact sheet with information about the Deportation Center Kærshovedgaard. In the fact sheet it says that the center is planned to accommodate

1. single men and women with a final rejection in their asylum case
2. aliens, who have been expelled from Denmark in a court ruling
3. aliens living under the rules of tolerated stay

The Ministry is expecting to accommodate 600 people at Kærshovedgaard and at the moment only 20-30 people are accommodated there. They are expecting to move the

people currently living in Sandholm (group 2 and 3) from the summer of 2016.

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) do know that there are many rumors regarding Center Kærshovedgaard, because it used to be an open prison, is run by the Danish Prison and Probation Service and is located far away from urban areas.

DRC will visit Center Kærshovedgaard in week 18 and afterwards we will be present at the center as often as we can. DRC is in regular contact with the Danish Prison and Probation Service and we are expecting to have courses for the staff at the center about the asylum procedure and the group of asylum seekers.

As far as DRC is informed it is not true that the Danish Prison and Probation Service will use electronic devices (fodlænker) on the people living at Center Kærshovedgaard. A staff member from Center Kærshovedgaard informed DRC that they are not using or planning to use electronic devices (fodlænker). The staff member informed DRC that they are planning to use an electronic system at the entrance to the center to register when people are leaving and coming to the

camp (the same as in Center Sjælsmark).

2 Hi. There is a rumour in my asylum center. They say that the Danish authorities keep our fingerprints for nine months. Is that true? I would like to leave Denmark and apply for asylum in another country in Europe. But if my fingerprints are saved they will send me back to Denmark I fear.

2 This question deals with the Dublin Regulation which contains the rules deciding the responsible European member state for processing an asylum application. As a general rule, the responsible member state is the member state/country in which the asylum seeker first has been registered/given fingerprints or applied for a visa, but the Dublin Regulation is complex and has many exceptions.

There are many rumors about fingerprints, but if you are registered in EURODAC (European fingerprint database) your fingerprints will be registered in the system as long as you are an asylum seeker and will not be deleted. If you leave Den-

mark and apply for asylum in another European member state/country you will be/risk being returned to the responsible member state under the Dublin Regulation.

If you leave the area of the European member states for more than 3 months, the responsibility under the Dublin Regulation will/can be reset.

In order to reset the responsibility, you will have to present evidence that you have left the area of the member states, for example by presenting a departure stamp in your passport.

3 Hi. I am a single mother living in Sandholm. I am in phase three (rejected). I have heard that rejected asylum seekers are to be moved to the departure center Sjælsmark. Will I be moved there with my son?

3 In the fact sheet published on February 9th, 2016, the Ministry of Immigration, Integration and Housing informs that families with children who are in phase 3 are planned to be accommodated at Center Sjælsmark. The Red Cross will offer counselling to the people living at Center Sjælsmark.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION? WRITE TO:

New Times
Rosenørns Allé 31, 2. sal,
1970 Frederiksberg
or email us at
newtimesdk@gmail.com
Please feel free to ask your questions anonymously.

YOU CAN ALSO CONTACT:

Dansk Flygtningehjælp
Legal Counseling Unit
Asylum Department
Borgergade 10
Postbox 53
1002 København K

www.drc.dk
Email: advice@drc.dk

Free Legal Counseling
for asylum seekers every
Wednesday
from 10:00 - 13:00

You need to present your questions in Danish or English