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**Sweden calls on army to help manage refugee crisis**

10/11/2015



Military chiefs to aid migration agencies as Scandinavian country that has taken far beyond its share of migrants strains from sheer weight of numbers.

Sweden's army is to help manage the fallout from the country's refugee crisis, with the civilian administration struggling to cope with an unprecedented surge in arrivals and a top official claiming there is no room left, in the short-term, for migrants reaching Swedish shores.

On Monday, military officers were sent to help coordinate logistics at Migrationsverket, Sweden's refugee and immigration agency. They will be involved at a management level, rather than on the ground.

For several weeks, Migrationsverket has already been working with [the country's civil contingencies agency \(MSB\)](#), a department usually involved in the aftermath of natural disasters or in overseas humanitarian catastrophes. The severely short-staffed migration agency cannot find enough housing for refugees, some of whom have been forced to sleep on the floor of reception centres. Despite some centres quadrupling their manpower in recent months, many agency officials are working double-shifts and weekends.

"We don't have any more space," the agency's lead spokesman, Fredrik Bengtsson, said. State-owned accommodation has been full since 2012, he said, and now officials cannot find [any more affordable private housing](#). "For the time being, all of these are finished as well, so for the last three or four nights we've had people sleeping in our [non-residential] centres across the country. Right now we're just looking for people to have a roof over their heads."

Sweden is bearing a disproportional burden of the European refugee crisis, due in part to its pledge in 2013 to provide permanent residency to almost any Syrian who reached Swedish soil. Of the roughly 800,000 people to have arrived in Europe by sea this year, at least one in seven have ended up in Sweden, even though the country accounts for just one in 50 EU citizens. So far in 2015, [more than 120,000 people](#) have applied for asylum in

Sweden.

Migrationsverket expects the total number of refugees to reach about 170,000 by the end of the year, with 10,000 people arriving every week, compared with 4,000 during the summer. A few years ago, case workers hoped to reach a decision on every asylum application within two or three months; now some speculate each one might take two years.

For those familiar with other parts of the European migration trail, the scenes in Sweden will seem contained and organised compared with the chaos in places such as [the Greek island of Lesbos](#), where refugees are left to walk and even sometimes sleep in the rain, with little institutional support. But in Sweden, even experienced asylum officials are nevertheless shocked by the unprecedented scale of the challenge that faces them, especially with [winter fast approaching](#).

"I've never seen this many people, ever," said Olof Grindemark, a team leader at Märsta, one of the two main reception centres in Stockholm, as he walked past the queues at the centre on Monday. "We don't seem to have any more beds in [Sweden](#). We don't have anywhere to send them."

In the medium-term, the situation is not so dire. The government has identified potential space in sports halls and other public buildings for an extra 66,000 arrivals, just under half of which could be converted without too many adjustments. But in the short term, ready-to-use space is proving hard to find due to a combination of [allegedly greedy landlords](#), arsonists and health-and-safety laws. Vandals have set fire to several sites earmarked for refugees, while the agency blames legislative bureaucracy for the delay in opening a series of tent cities in southern Sweden.

This struggle to provide something as basic as accommodation has led to fears about Sweden's ability to handle more complex refugee needs, such as education and healthcare. "How will they manage doctors and schools, and how will [refugees] learn Swedish?" asked Enar Bostedt, one of Sweden's most experienced asylum lawyers. "That's totally another issue that no one has had time to think about yet."

For the time being, the migration agency is struggling even to register asylum seekers fast enough. In Solna, the second of Stockholm's two big reception centres, staff numbers have risen from 30 to 130 in two years, but even this increase is not enough. The volume of applicants is still so great that the management usually has to turn less vulnerable people away, "sometimes by 10am or 11am", said Joakim Selen, deputy head of the centre's asylum seeking unit.

Staff often work until 11pm, even at weekends, while experienced case workers have been asked to help out with the more basic role of migrant registration, leading to further delays in the decision-making process. In an ideal situation, case workers should judge three asylum applications a week, but this is now rarely possible. "We can't get out three decisions a week," said Emma Weinstock, a case worker. "The more cases you have, the more preparation work you have."

Some refugees have lost patience with the backlog. "In Sweden the process is so slow, so I'm going back to Iraq," said Hassanein, a 29-year-old technician, waiting at Stockholm central station, before his attempted homewards journey. "My family is waiting for me there, and it isn't safe for them to wait there for so long without me." Hassanein said he was scared to return, holding up a disfigured hand that he claims was the result of an attack by Islamic State. "But I'm just going back to gather my family, and bring them to Sweden again, so we can all wait here together."

The Swedish government has been criticised for failing to accompany its 2013 promise to Syrians with appropriate measures to prepare for their arrival. In defence of their preparations, Bengtsson said the situation had been very manageable until mid-2015, when the sudden rush of arrivals through Turkey and Greece took all of [Europe](#) by surprise. The situation this autumn has been made more critical by a spike in the number of unaccompanied Afghan children, all of whom require an even greater level of care than adult asylum seekers.

But whatever the cause of the refugee crisis, it has undeniably caused a crisis of identity within Sweden itself. Some stoke the fear that Sweden risks being unable to provide for its own citizens if it continues to let in so many outsiders. The Swedish Democrats, a far-right party that has recently grown in popularity, [distributed a flyer to refugees landing in Lesbos](#) this week that claimed that thanks to immigration "our society is falling apart", and warned migrants from trying to reach Sweden. Hours later, Sweden's conservative party, known as the Moderates,

called for increased border controls against refugees.

Others feel that any dereliction of duties to refugees would mark an abandonment of the core tenets of Sweden's social democracy. "Our society is built on the principle that people are entitled to the same as everyone else," said the secretary-general of the Swedish bar association, Anne Ramberg, as she waited to provide legal advice to new refugee arrivals at Stockholm central station. "But we are in a situation where we can't even give refugees housing."

The answer, Ramberg argued, is not for Sweden to lower its standards, but for the rest of the world's richest continent to take on its fair share. "A crisis for us," said Ramberg, "is very different from the crisis in Jordan or Lebanon," two countries where refugees are estimated to respectively constitute around a tenth and a quarter of the total population. "We could take these people if we had solidarity between EU countries. We are a continent of 500 million people – of course we could do it. But there's no solidarity. It's just Germany and Sweden."

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