



Investigation on the safety of asylum seekers, including those who have exhausted all means of appeal

Last year, the Dutch Safety Board interviewed persons who had requested asylum in the Netherlands, asking them about their experiences in the Netherlands. The Safety Board was most interested in whether these people had been in situations in the Netherlands in which they were, or had felt, unsafe. These interviews formed part of a broader investigation conducted by the Safety Board. A short description of the investigation is given below, as well as a summary of the most important results. Some information on the Safety Board itself is also provided.

What did the Safety Board investigate, and why?

The Safety Board conducted an investigation into the safety of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, including those who had exhausted all means of appeal. The focus of the investigation was on the safety of people residing in government facilities, such as asylum seekers' residence centres or detention centres. The Safety Board wanted to know whether the Dutch government was doing enough to ensure the safety of these people. The investigation was prompted by the suicide of a Russian asylum seeker in the Rotterdam detention centre in early 2013. During the inquiry, the Safety Board interviewed both asylum seekers and staff of organisations that are involved in the asylum procedure, such as employees of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), as well as lawyers, interpreters and doctors.

What were the key results from the investigation?

The investigation showed that people who request asylum in the Netherlands are generally safe in the centres where they are held. However, asylum seekers can occasionally end up in situations that result in psychological problems or physical injury. This can happen if the asylum procedure does not run smoothly, if the persons involved do not receive the proper medical care, or if they are affected by violence or altercations in the centres where they are held.

The Safety Board believes that the Dutch government should ensure that asylum seekers are as safe as possible during their time in the Netherlands. For this reason, the Safety Board looked into what the staff at the relevant organisations can do to ensure the safety of asylum seekers. Of course, the Safety Board also looked at what these organisations can improve on. For example, the Safety Board believes that the government should ensure that:

- collaboration between organisations that deal with asylum seekers is improved;
- the problems that sometimes occur during the transfer of medical information are solved as quickly as possible;
- all lawyers and interpreters do their work properly;
- asylum seekers with psychiatric problems receive better medical care; and
- the relevant organisations learn more effectively from the incidents that do occur.

What is done with investigations conducted by the Safety Board?

The Safety Board has consolidated the results of the investigation and the points for improvement for the Dutch government into a report. On 24 April 2014, the Safety Board presented the report to the State Secretary for Security and Justice, and to the Dutch parliament. These parties will read the report. If they agree with the points for improvement deemed necessary by the Safety Board, they will take measures to ensure they are implemented.

What is the Dutch Safety Board?

The Dutch government believes it is important for people in the Netherlands to live, work and travel in safety. Whenever accidents or incidents do occur, they are investigated to determine their causes. If there is a clear cause, measures can be taken to ensure that such accidents or incidents are not repeated. The Netherlands has a special organisation that was founded in order to investigate accidents and incidents. This organisation is the Dutch Safety Board.

Examples of the types of accidents and incidents investigated by the Dutch Safety Board include plane crashes, fires at chemical factories, or a lack of proper medical care at hospitals. The Safety Board decides autonomously on the most appropriate accidents and incidents to investigate in order to improve safety in the Netherlands. If deemed necessary by the Board, it may issue recommendations to the parties that can take action to create safer conditions in the Netherlands.

The report by the Safety Board can be viewed in Dutch at www.onderzoeksraad.nl. An English summary is available at www.safetyboard.nl.