Support provided to refugee children in Sweden inadequate: report

Refugees arriving at Malmö's Hyllie station in 2015. Photo: John Alexander Sahlin/TT
The support provided to children during the asylum process in Sweden is often inadequate, according to the Ombudsman for Children (BO), which is tasked with representing the rights and interests of children in Sweden.

In its new annual report, BO interviewed 600 refugee children and found that they describe the asylum process and the long waits involved as "difficult" and "painful".

Some felt like the discussions which took place during their asylum application were not designed for children, as they did not understand the questions and did not feel secure. The children also told stories of unsafe living environments and disruption which impacted their schooling.

It is not clear what proportion of the interviewed children experienced the shortcomings however, while some have also been positive about their asylum investigation according to BO.

The agency also claims that age revaluation assessments of children have been done on a ‘discretionary’ basis, in a subjective manner without access to all of the facts. BO is critical of that and stresses that the decisions, which have major consequences, require an objective and clear criteria.

The children highlighted the long wait to be appointed a legal guardian in Sweden, sometimes taking up to seven months. Half of all of the children who came to Sweden during the height of the refugee crisis in 2015 were without a guardian. In total the country received 35,369 lone refugee children that year.

BO’s report features proposals on how children who have fled to Sweden can have their human rights protected, and is to be handed in to Swedish Minister for Children Åsa Regnér.

In February BO raised concerns that refugee children in Sweden are using online forums to plan mass suicides and are not always receiving the care they need for mental illness.

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