

Synopsis:

CADA: A reception centre for asylum seekers (CADA : Centre d'Accueil pour Demandeurs d'Asile)

Photographic documentary

Didier VANDON

March 2012 / December 2014 – France

The subject of asylum.

Asylum seekers are often in the headlines, their story being one of migrants seeking to leave their warring home countries by whatever means possible. Those who manage to get to France, whether by choice or luck, and who were able to register as asylum seekers, are faced with a long wait while the relevant authorities treat their application and decide whether or not to accept it.

In the first place, it is the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and the Stateless (OFPRA*) that works on the request for asylum. If it is rejected at this stage, it is possible to lodge an appeal at the National Asylum Court (CNDA**), which is a frequent occurrence. The Interior Ministry is looking to speed up this long and expensive procedure so that it would take only six months instead of the average eighteen months in 2014.

The 275 reception centres which exist in France are able to treat roughly one request for asylum in three.

The subject of the documentary.

I chose to share this waiting period by visiting a reception centre for asylum seekers (CADA) located in Sartrouville, on the western outskirts of Paris.

As time went by, I focused especially on nine families, covering their story up to its administrative conclusion – asylum granted or not – and documenting the phase just after leaving the CADA. For some, this was the break that they had hoped for, while for others it was met with apprehension and indeed voluntarily postponed, because it marked for them the hard transition to social, linguistic and financial autonomy.

The countries of origin of these families were representative of the asylum seekers coming to France: Russian speakers (Chechens, Kyrgyz, Georgians), West- or sub-Saharan Africans (Ivory Coast, Senegal, Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo), and South-East Asians from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

These people chose to leave their countries for various reasons, political, economic, or sometimes just due to issues with common law. None of their cases was clear or simple, and these reasons frequently overlapped.

The Sartrouville reception centre.

Built in the sixties to house migrant workers, the centre is composed today of three buildings, two of which are dedicated to asylum seekers. The remaining rooms are rented by single immigrant workers – active or retired - from North Africa. Families have their own rooms, while singles are lodged three to a room.

While the shared common areas, kitchens and toilets encourage the residents to mix, they are also a source of conflict. This CADA has its own entry, courtyard and green space which allow the children to play and get together outside of the principal buildings.

An administrative team present during the week manages the residents' dossiers as well as the centre itself.

*OFPRA (Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides/ French Office for the Protection of Refugees and the Stateless)

Part of the Interior Ministry, its principal mission is to examine requests for asylum or refugee status, and to ensure the judicial and administrative protection of those who are granted the status.

**CNDA (Cour Nationale du Droit d'Asile/ National Asylum Court)

This is a specialised court, covering all appeals against decisions taken by the OFPRA. It is under the control of the Council of State which has the final say in matters of asylum.