

# Norwegian mother wins asylum in Poland

## Norway

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A Norwegian woman and her young daughter have been granted asylum in Poland because she feared that social services in her home country would try to separate them.

Silje Garmo, 37, and Eira, 23 months, are thought to be the first Norwegians to be accepted as refugees in another European country since the Second World War.

Norway's child protection agency, known as the Barnevernet, has been criticised for allegedly being too hasty to separate children and parents. The service is the subject of six cases at the European Court of Human Rights.

Ms Garmo, the daughter of a former

MP, fled to Warsaw in May last year after social workers apparently accused her of abusing painkillers, leading a "chaotic" life and suffering from chronic fatigue. She denies the allegations and says the authorities searched her flat without a warrant after she left. Her older daughter, Froya, 13, remains in Norway with her former boyfriend.

Jan-Aage Torp, a Pentecostal pastor in Oslo who has taken up Ms Garmo's case, said that Mateusz Morawiecki, the Polish prime minister, had stepped in to ensure that she was given asylum. "There's no doubt that when Poland intervened it was not without the risk of losing certain privileges in its relationship with Norway," Mr Torp said.

The Barnevernet has faced heavy criticism from Christian organisations,



Silje Garmo fled with Eira in May 2017

human rights campaigners and governments, including those of Russia and India, for a series of cases in which it ordered children to be taken into care.

In 2011 two Czech boys were taken from their parents after their father was accused of sexually abusing them. The father was later acquitted but his child-

ren were separated and placed with Norwegian families.

Marit Skivenes, director of the Centre for Research on Discretion and Paternalism at the University of Bergen, said there was little empirical evidence that the system was any more draconian in Norway than in other rich countries. Just over ten out of every 1,000 children in Norway have been placed in care, compared with nine in Germany and six in the UK.

Christian groups tended to focus on isolated cases, Professor Skivenes said. "[The Barnevernet] has got a bad reputation and then it is easy for people to believe stories that this is a state that kidnaps children."

Linda Hofstad Helleland, the Norwegian children's minister, would not

comment on Ms Garmo's case, but said that children's services tried to help families "function better and live together". She added: "Placing a child in alternative care is a measure of last resort. The service should always first try to help the parents."

The Norwegian foreign ministry said that Ms Garmo's case would not alter its "close co-operation" with Poland.

Its Polish counterpart confirmed Ms Garmo and her daughter had been granted asylum. "The ministry took into account the constitutional guarantees regarding the protection of motherhood and parenthood, protection of family life, protection of parents and parental authority against the arbitrariness of public authority, and protection of the child's rights," a spokesman said.