

Summary Annual Report 2010

Dutch Council for Refugees



Who we are and what we do

The Dutch Council for Refugees is an independent organisation that defends and represents the interests of refugees and asylum seekers. We campaign for just and fair treatment to be given to these people, who are in a vulnerable position. They have fled from their homes because of war, political violence, their sexual orientation, race, or religion. The Council for Refugees helps them to make a success of their new lives in the Netherlands. With a widespread network of branches, paid staff, and volunteers, the Council for Refugees is the only organisation in the Netherlands that supports refugees throughout all the stages of their settlement in this country. With around 550 paid staff and 7,000 volunteers, we have a presence in nearly all local council districts and asylum seeker centres.

What went well?

- In 2010, certain changes were made to the asylum procedure. With relentless campaigning and lobbying we managed to improve the plans in a number of areas. The procedure now includes a rest and preparation period during which medical advice can be obtained, the provision of four weeks of accommodation for refused asylum seekers, and the assignment of a single lawyer to each case file. Furthermore, the Dutch Council for Refugees has been assigned a specific role. We are formerly responsible for providing asylum seekers with information about the entire asylum procedure. All asylum seekers can turn to us for information and support right at the start of their procedure.
- We managed to block the deportation of a group of Iraqis. Or at least until the European Court of Human Rights has taken a decision about these deportations. Furthermore, we managed to prevent a number of Somalis being sent back to their war-torn homeland by compiling detailed background information and legal arguments.
- Employment is the driving force behind the integration of refugees. The *Emplooi* employment agency helped 273 refugees to find work or work experience placements. With the project '*From Pardon to Work*' we found work, training, or voluntary work for 395 pardonners.



Photo Tim Stet

Tesfa Micheal and Ada, language-couple in Mijdrecht

- The Council for Refugees received funding from the Ministry of Social Affairs to help improve the debt counselling services to refugees. Volunteer budget coaches now help refugees to get a grip on their finances and to keep their financial situation under control. In 2010, 111 budget coaches helped 919 refugees.
- The Council for Refugees launched a campaign to attract new young and ethnic minority volunteers. The recruitment campaign '*Wanted: Part-Time Hero*' was a success. A total of 888 young people and 852 people from refugee and ethnic minority backgrounds registered to become volunteers. This campaign was just one part of the bigger '*Quality in Diversity*' project.
- Language breaks down barriers, language improves integration. The recruitment of language coaches has made excellent progress. We actively approached such companies as KPN, Achmea, ABN AMRO, and Albert Heijn during the year. And with success. In 2010, there were 4,600 language coaches.

What went less well?

- Our open letter to the Ministry of Justice about the methods of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) had no effect. Before family reunification can take place, the IND now requires all family members to report to the Dutch embassy in the country of origin. But in many countries of origin there are no Dutch embassies. Family members therefore have to travel to another country, and sometimes have to wait there for months on end.
- The Netherlands continued to deport asylum seekers back to Greece, despite pressure not to do so from the Council for Refugees, other European NGOs, the UNHCR, and the European Commissioner for Human Rights. Physical abuse, imprisonment, and overcrowding in tiny tent camps are the order of the day in Greece. Furthermore, the chance of a fair hearing is minimal. Many asylum seekers enter Europe through Greece. Under the Dublin Regulation, the Netherlands can send asylum seekers back to the country where they first entered Europe.
- With letters, studies, and a publicity campaign, the Council for Refugees tried to influence the policy formulated in the coalition agreement of the new government. Despite our efforts, the section on asylum policy was still harsh: asylum seekers now have to prove, for example, that they will be at risk if they go back to their country of origin. Previously, they had to show that this was reasonably likely; a totally different burden of proof.

Asylum

Worldwide, almost 9 million men, women, and children have been forced to leave their homes. In 2010, almost 1 million people applied for asylum in another country, of which 15,000 in the Netherlands. The Dutch Council for Refugees provided them with assistance. Around 6,000 people were granted refugee status and thus protection in the Netherlands.

Changes to the asylum procedure

Refugees, asylum seekers, and the Dutch Council for Refugees were confronted with changes to the asylum procedure in 2010. The new procedure was introduced as a result of changes to the Aliens Act. The Dutch Council for Refugees has played a critical role in the consultations concerning these changes for many years. Our lobbying efforts yielded some results. For example, we managed to introduce the condition that a medical adviser can record details of any scars. That is very concrete information which lawyers can use as evidence of possible torture. Furthermore, asylum seekers can now be relocated no more than twice. Nonetheless, we still have objections to certain areas of the new asylum procedure. Our biggest objection concerns the short eight-day procedure, which will now become the standard procedure, with the extended procedure only being applied under exceptional circumstances.

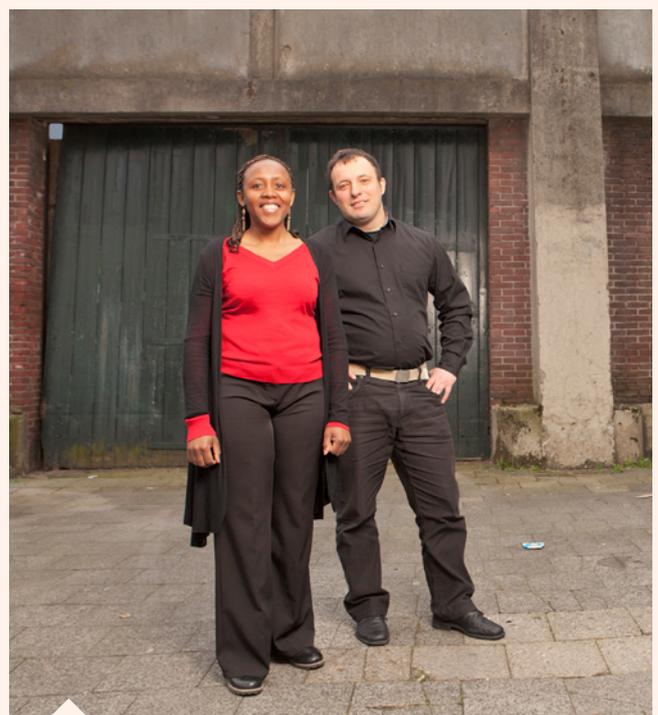
This means there is a risk that asylum seekers with complex cases will not have enough time to prepare their case. This may result in their application being rejected. All in all, the new procedure is still unsatisfactory in many ways.

Violence in Somalia

All Somali refugees in the Netherlands have to prove that they have been a personal target of violence. This is almost impossible to do in a country where violence is so indiscriminate. The Council of State has moreover called on the State Secretary of Justice to give a better explanation of why there is not a general threat of violence in Mogadishu. A successful outcome for the Council for Refugees, which had compiled extensive background information and legal arguments about Mogadishu and consulted experts from the Red Cross and the United Nations.

Visible strength of refugees

With the support of the National Postcode Lottery, the Council for Refugees, De Vrolijkheid (Positivity Foundation), and the Foundation for Refugee Students (UAF) started a project entitled *'The Reality'* in 2010. The main aim of this project is to make the strengths and talents of refugees visible, and to inspire others in society. "The Reality" project has a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, musicians, artists, theatre makers, film makers, designers, photographers, and dancers with a refugee background are trained to become social entrepreneurs. On the other hand, lasting networks are created around asylum seeker centres. This involves social networking between the people living in an asylum seeker centre and the people living in the surrounding neighbourhood, village, or city; this includes everything from football clubs, choirs, theatre groups, to neighbourhood police officers.



Anita, initiator region Zuid-Holland Noord and Danny, social worker in Leiden

Photo Tim Stet

Integration

Once they arrive in the Netherlands, refugees have to find their place in society. The Dutch Council for Refugees helps them to get started. We help them find work and develop language skills, the biggest driving forces behind the integration of refugees. And by providing help with debts and family reunification.

The positive effect of finding work

The Council for Refugees helps refugees gain access to the labour market via *Emplooi*, the only employment agency specifically for refugees. The career advisers at *Emplooi* helped 273 refugees to find work or work experience placements. The '*From Pardon to Work*' project is another way we help refugees to find work. We managed to find work experience, training, or voluntary work for 395 pardonners. In 2010, the '*Refugee Job Offensive Reinforcement*' project was launched, which will be carried out over a period of two years. The central objective of this project is to find employment, training, or voluntary work for 700 refugees.

Getting out of debt

It is not easy for refugees to furnish their homes when they have virtually no income at all. Although they can get a loan from the local council, trying to pay it back while on benefits can make the situation worse. This is often the case because it takes a while before refugees can speak Dutch good enough to get a job. In other words, refugees constantly find themselves in financial difficulties. The Council for Refugees therefore started the '*Volunteers for Debt Counselling*' project. Through this project, volunteer budget coaches give refugees advice on debt management. In 2010, 111 volunteers gave debt counselling to 919 refugees. Training was given to 147 voluntary budget coaches. As a result of this project, government-funded jobs were created at two regional branches for a refugee volunteer and a native Dutch volunteer.

Children's holiday weeks

For many refugee children, the summer holidays mean six weeks of boredom in the asylum seekers centre. Since 1990, the Council for Refugees has been organising the Children's Holiday Weeks for young people and single-parent families. Holiday activities are also organised in asylum seeker centres. Thanks to the Children's Holiday Weeks, refugee children and single-parent families are able to enjoy a summer holiday. In 2010, 1,292 people benefited from this project (1,266 children and 26 parents). The YMCA camps and '*Chillin' on Vlieland*' were particularly popular. The Council for Refugees organises the Children's Holiday Weeks together with nine regional branches and a number of other organisations experienced in this area, such as the YMCA, Stichting Weekje Weg, Stichting VakantieKind, Stichting Capriool, NIVON, Humanitas, and Stichting de Vrolijkheid.



Photo Tim Stet

Johnson and Reint, language-couple in Amsterdam

Public Relations

Twitter, Facebook, the Council for Refugees Magazine, *Voetsporen*, the annual report, folders, the website, *Compact*, the e-mail newsletter, campaigns, press releases... these are all ways of raising the profile of refugees and the Dutch Council for Refugees. Both our organisation and refugees benefit from a strong level of public support.

Golden volunteers

Our volunteers are worth their weight in gold. They help refugees to find missing family members, to find a job or a place to live, to play a simple game of chess, or to help improve their language skills. Our goal for 2010 was to attract at least 1,000 young volunteers and 1,000 volunteers with a refugee or ethnic minority background. We went a long way to achieving that. Thanks to our successful recruitment campaign '*Wanted: Part-Time Hero*', by the end of 2010 there were 888 young volunteers and 852 volunteers with a refugee or ethnic minority background. This campaign was part of the larger project '*Quality in Diversity*', which is aimed at attracting more volunteers from ethnic minorities and younger age groups.

General Election

We were concerned about the tone of the general election debate and the policy formulated by the new government in its coalition agreement. We felt more attention needed to be given to the hardship and suffering faced by refugees. Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook were used to establish a dialogue with the general public. We also used a whole range of other methods: proposed amendments to party manifestos, letters to parliament, an appeal to the coalition coordinator, and comparisons between the policies of the different parties in relation to asylum seekers and refugees. Plus a short, lively publicity campaign to generate public debate.

Refugees in *Het Klokhuis*

A special mention should be given to the two episodes about refugees in the children's television programme *Het Klokhuis*. The first episode followed a family from Somalia, explaining their reasons for leaving home, the asylum procedure, and how they are trying to build up a new life here. This episode was broadcast on 10 December, the International Day of Human Rights. The second episode was shown one week later. In this episode, *Het Klokhuis* told the story of a 10-year-old girl called Parwana. She fled from Afghanistan with her parents and now lives in an asylum seekers centre.

Half a million newspapers

Two days before the International Day of the Refugee, the newspaper *Vluchtelingenkrant* (Refugee News) was published with a print run of almost half a million copies. In this newspaper, refugees described what it means to have to flee your homeland. The newspaper was an initiative of the UNHCR, and was a collaboration between the Council for Refugees and six other organisations. The newspaper was distributed as a supplement to the free daily newspaper *Metro*, via churches, and at festivals.

Finances

We have ideals: a better world for refugees, fair treatment of asylum seekers, and equal opportunities for refugees to participate in society. Ideals that require funding. Especially now, when the Dutch Council for Refugees wants to play a more prominent role in the increasingly polarised public debate about immigration and integration.

How do we finance our work?

The Council for Refugees receives subsidies from the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. In 2010, we received more than € 11 million in government funding. The National Postcode Lottery also supports us with funding: in 2010, it provided some € 10 million in funding. Furthermore, we received more than € 3 million from over 43,000 donors. Donations we appreciate greatly. Donors are indispensable for our work and for the refugees themselves. Not only in terms of their financial support, but also their moral support. They show just how much support the Council for Refugees has in society.

Cost of fund-raising

The Council for Refugees aims to keep the cost of its fund-raising in line with the CBF norm. Over a period of three consecutive years, the cost of fund-raising must not exceed 25% of the income generated from fund-raising. The cost percentage for 2010 was 21%, while in 2009 it was 19%.

Ideals despite cutbacks

We expect to receive less funding over the coming years for our work. In order to prevent a major financial shortfall in the future, we have had to make budget cuts of € 1.3 million. We managed to do this by restructuring the organisation, making savings on energy and office accommodation, and by reducing the number of staff.



This is an abbreviated version of the annual report 2010. The full annual report (in Dutch) can be found at www.jaarverslagvluchtelingenwerk.nl.