

# Summary Annual Report 2017



## Who we are and what we do

**The Dutch Council for Refugees (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland) is an independent organisation that represents and defends the rights and interests of refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands. We are devoted to promoting the fair and just treatment of people in a vulnerable position: those who were forced to leave their home because of war, political violence, their sexual orientation, race or religion.**

The Dutch Council for Refugees helps refugees make a success of their new life in the Netherlands. Backed up by a large branch network, paid staff and volunteers throughout the country, The Dutch Council for Refugees is the only organisation in the Netherlands that offers support to refugees during all the various stages they have to go through before they finally become Dutch residents.

We advocate a society in which people are considerate towards others. Offering Dutch citizens the chance to personally meet refugees helps to achieve that goal. Therefore, The Dutch Council for Refugees organizes meetings around June 20, World Refugee Day. There is also an Open Day for Asylum Seekers Centres (Open azc dag), during which many extraordinary meetings between citizens and refugees take place.

In 2017:

- We assisted nearly 65,000 asylum seekers during their asylum procedure.
- 13,000 volunteers offered their support to refugees.
- Our 5 regional foundations operated in 79% of all municipalities.
- We submitted 3,350 applications for family reunification and assisted many thousands of refugees during family reunification processes that already started in previous years.
- Our help desk answered over 9,000 questions.
- We organized several one week holidays for over 800 children.
- 27,000 people visited the Open Day for Asylum Seekers Centres (Open azc dag).

Thanks to support from our donors, companies, funds, government grants and contributions from the Nationale Postcode Loterij (People's Postcode Lottery), The Dutch Council for Refugees is able to commit itself fully to the support of refugees in the Netherlands.



Photo: Goedele Momens

Abel, from Eritrea, receives assistance from volunteer John

## Representing refugee interests

**We represent the interests of refugees by consulting ministries, lobbying Parliament, conducting our own research, contacting the media and mobilising our supporters.**

### Commenting on the harsh coalition agreement

In the Netherlands, 2017 was an election year. The newly elected government presented its plans in the autumn. The Dutch Council for Refugees labelled the coalition agreement plans concerning migration and integration as harsh. The legal position of refugees was undermined even further: the basic right to an attorney for refugees was withdrawn. The availability of legal support will be very limited. Refugees are therefore at risk of being wrongfully rejected. During a live television news broadcast, our general director Dorine Manson was the first to comment on the new coalition agreement.



Volunteer Kiki in conversation with refugee children at Time4You in Rijswijk: 'Refugee children have been through a lot and deserve extra support'.

### Petition favouring the resettlement of refugees

In order to stress our support for the resettlement of refugees, we launched the 'Together for Refugees; Home Safe Home' campaign in collaboration with ice cream manufacturer Ben & Jerry's. We collected over 17,000 signatures, which we offered in a petition to European Union MP Kati Piri and MP Joël Voordewind. With resettlement, European countries invite (vulnerable) refugees, thus preventing them from having to embark on a dangerous journey. In the coalition agreement, the quota for the resettlement of refugees was raised from 500 to 750 people for the first time in decades.

### International cooperation

On an international level, we closely collaborated with partner organisations in countries within the European Union's external borders, where many refugees are forced to stay. We offered them training and shared knowledge. We collaborated with our Greek and Italian sister organisations and the European umbrella organisation ECRE (The European Council on Refugees and Exiles). Thus, we could inform refugees about their rights and possibilities in the new European identification centres in Greece and Italy: the so-called hotspots. We ensured that Dutch news organisation NOS could accompany us on our visit to the Moira refugee camp. For the first time ever, the poor living conditions in these hotspots were shown on Dutch television.

### No forced return of refugees to Afghanistan

The Dutch Council for Refugees has concluded that Afghanistan is too unsafe. Refugees from that country therefore need protection and should not be forced to return to their country of origin. We joined forces with Amnesty International, Unicef and other human rights organisations and children's rights organisations in order to prevent that Afghans were forced to return to their country of origin. We initiated a petition, had discussions with MPs and wrote a letter to the state secretary in which we made an urgent appeal to stop forcing refugees to return to Afghanistan.

## Sharing knowledge

The Dutch Council for Refugees provides employees, volunteers and lawyers with up-to-date information about the asylum procedure, the security situation in the countries of origin and the legal status of refugees.

### Support for asylum lawyers

We offer support to asylum lawyers by explaining jurisprudence in our biweekly digital newsletter UPdate. We also set up different kinds of meetings for the Work Group Legal Assistance for Refugees (Werkgroep Rechtshulp aan Vluchtelingen). Asylum lawyers and other parties involved are informed about important new developments with regard to legislation that affects asylum seekers and refugees. In 2017, we organized two extra highly acclaimed expert meetings about the lack of documentary evidence with regard to family reunification: the way in which a family can prove that they are related to one another. It is key to increase the specific knowledge of asylum lawyers on this specific subject, because many applications for family reunification are wrongfully rejected.

### Strategic litigation

In our project on 'Strategic litigation' ('Strategisch procederen'), we support asylum procedures in order to make sure that the national practice is in accordance with European law. In 2017, we offered support in a Dutch asylum case about the return of asylum seekers to a country the Dutch government had qualified as a safe third country. Basically, this meant that a refugee could be sent to a different country because the asylum procedure could be started in said country. The Dutch Council for Refugees however believes that in certain cases, these countries are not safe enough because they do not offer refugees the possibility to follow an elaborate asylum procedure. This particular asylum case was mainly ruled in our favour. Henceforth, the state secretary will have to examine in more detail whether a country is really safe enough before sending asylum seekers there.



Photo: Patrick Post/VluchtelingenWerk Zuidwest-Nederland

Volunteer Marijke (right) is language-coach for Senait in Leiden: 'I know the importance of learning the language as soon as possible when arriving in a new country.'

## Regional activities

**The Dutch Council for Refugees operates in all asylum seeker centres and in 79% of all municipalities. We provide information about the asylum procedure and offer refugees in the municipalities social support in order to enhance their independence. Other projects focus on children, employment, return possibilities and integration courses. These projects are executed by volunteers who are trained to do this important task as efficiently as possible.**

### Less asylum requests, integration becomes more important

In 2017, the number of asylum seekers in the Netherlands decreased. Because the number of refugees that fled to the Netherlands was higher in previous years, this year most refugees came to our country due to family reunification - this represented approximately half of the asylum requests. We received extra financial support from the Nationale Postcode Loterij (People's Postcode Lottery) to offer these people guidance. In order to facilitate their integration, it is of the utmost importance that refugees already start learning the Dutch language, work as a volunteer or study at an early stage. The Dutch Council for Refugees cooperates with municipalities and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) to start with these activities right at the asylum seekers centre. We assisted nearly 65,000 asylum seekers during their asylum procedure and 71,500 refugees in the municipalities.

### Customizing job search assistance

With the project 'Refugees Invest in Participation' ('Vluchtelingen Investeren in Participeren', VIP), which is co-financed by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (Europees Asiel, Migratie en Integratiefonds, AMIF), we ensured that over 1,200 refugees are better prepared before entering the Dutch job market. For instance, by enabling them to pay a visit to companies, refugees can build up their own network and have a better understanding of their chances of finding a job.

### Assisting asylum seekers who have to return to their country of origin

By means of two projects, which were also co-financed by the European AMIF fund, we assisted asylum seekers that were not allowed to stay in the Netherlands. In preparation for their return, we consulted our partners from the countries of origin. Together we discussed work or study possibilities, family contacts, medical care or the refugees' housing post-return. Our partners in the countries of origin are essential when it comes to providing up-to-date information and good guidance within these countries. We assisted asylum seekers whose application had been rejected and helped them orientate on the future, and offered nearly 90 people intensive assistance while they prepared for their return.

### One week holiday for children (Kindervakantieweken)

In 2017, 170 enthusiastic volunteers guided an absolute record number of 803 children during the Kindervakantieweken (one week holiday for children). While being on a one week holiday, these children were able to relax more than when they are at home. They meet other children with similar backgrounds, which boosts their self-esteem.

### Eigen-Wijs (Self-willed)

By means of the 'Eigen-Wijs' (Self-willed) project, which was co-financed by the AMIF fund, we supported children that live in asylum seeker centres. By setting up a music production in cooperation with the Orkest van het Oosten and the Amersfoorts Jeugdorkest, we offered 3,000 children a stage, using music as a universal language. We also offered Time4You, during which we informed thousands of children about the asylum procedure, and one hour consultations. In the pilot 'Child-specific Grounds for Persecution' (Kindspecifieke vervolgingsgronden), we investigated whether children have an autonomous right to protection. For this pilot, we cooperated closely with the legal profession and The Immigration and Naturalisation Service. In the meantime, several children have been granted asylum because they personally are at risk, not just their family members.

## Communication and support

**By means of actions, campaigns and education, The Dutch Council for Refugees aims to increase public acceptance of refugees within society.**

### Would you like to share a cup of coffee with me? (Bakkie doen?)

On June 20, World Refugee Day, refugee baristas offered a cup of coffee to passers-by in seven different cities. Thus, refugees and Dutch citizens were able to meet each other in person. This led to inspiring meetings and conversations that contribute to mutual understanding. Because this campaign was also conducted near the House of Parliament, numerous politicians got to share a cup of coffee with a refugee. Over 1,000 refugees and Dutch people got to know each other while enjoying a nice cup of coffee.

### Open Day for Asylum Seekers Centres

Whenever people meet each other in person, mutual understanding grows. That is the reason why we organized the Open Day for Asylum seekers Centres, in association with the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and the Ministry of Security and Justice (MVJ), for the third consecutive time. On September 23, over fifty asylum seekers centres in the Netherlands welcomed over 27,000 visitors. For many visitors, refugees finally became real life persons instead of just an abstract notion.

## Having a conversation with a refugee

Thanks to the 'Familiarity Breeds Compassion' (Bekend maakt Bemind) project, churches, associations or schools can request to meet a refugee in person. Offering people the opportunity to talk to a refugee often leads to increased awareness.

## Sending refugees a card

In the run up to the holiday season, we started the 'Warm Hart' card campaign. We offered anyone who was interested the possibility to show refugees their support by sending them a card. In total, we handed out over 10,000 cards to refugees in asylum seekers centres.

## Finances and organisation

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### Vital support by donors

In 2017, the number of donors decreased from 67,500 to 64,000 persons. In addition, the money raised by commercial fundraising slightly decreased: this year we received € 6,290,000. Although the media pay less attention to refugees and there is less public debate, the number of donors is still substantially higher than before 2015, when there was a rise in the number of people that sought refuge in the Netherlands.

### Nationale Postcode Loterij (People's Postcode Lottery) support

On top of the structural € 8 million we already received from the Nationale Postcode Loterij (People's Postcode Lottery), The Dutch Council for Refugees was granted an extra € 950,000 for assistance during family reunification and for the Refugee Talent Hub, an online matching platform that aims to help talented refugees find employment.

### Municipal funds for integration

Municipalities call on us to support refugees during their integration process. In 2017, we offered support in 79% of all Dutch municipalities. The work is carried out by volunteers from our regional foundations.

## Funds finance projects

We received € 2.8 million from European and Dutch funds. This includes support by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (Asiel, Migratie en Integratiefonds, AMIF), which is part of the grant scheme for the European migration and security funds. There were also several Dutch organisations that granted the funds we applied for, such as the Oranje Fonds, the VSBfonds, C&A Foundation and the Adessium Foundation.

## Government grants

In 2017, the Ministry of Security and Justice granted us a subsidy of € 10 million as support for our work in asylum seekers centres and for interpretation services. In order to train and support our volunteers and employees who assist refugees during the integration process, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment granted us a subsidy of € 1.4 million. In addition, we were granted € 1.4 million by the Council for Legal Aid (Raad voor Rechtsbijstand) for the legal assistance we offered to refugees during the asylum procedure.

## Organisation

The Dutch Council for Refugees is an association consisting of five members: the regional foundations. The board consists of the directors of these five foundations and the chief executive officer, who also directs the national office.

## Volunteers are the backbone of our organisation

The volunteers that assist The Dutch Council for Refugees offer personal assistance to refugees and are the backbone of our organisation. In 2017, 13,000 people volunteered to support refugees.

## Vision2010 (Visie2020) – focus on the refugee

We have formulated a new vision, Vision2020, that envisions the ideal situation which all our employees and volunteers work hard for on a daily basis. We can describe our roles by using three metaphors: companion, entrepreneurial idealist and bridge-builder. We also described in which areas we will be looking for innovation within the next couple of years. Whatever choices we make, our focus will remain on the refugees' best interests.



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