



Summary Annual Report 2019

WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO

The Dutch Council for Refugees works to protect and defend the rights and interests of asylum seekers and refugees. We advocate for fair and just treatment of people in vulnerable positions: those who were forced to flee their homes because of war, political violence, their sexual orientation, race or religion.

We assist refugees in building a new life in the Netherlands. Working through a network of offices, staff and volunteers throughout the country, the Dutch Council for Refugees is the only Dutch organisation that offers support to refugees throughout all stages of their stay in the Netherlands.

Thanks to private donors and companies as well as contributions from the Dutch Postcode Lottery (in Dutch: Nationale Postcode Loterij) and government funding, we remain fully committed to supporting refugees in the Netherlands.

In 2019

- We assisted over 57,000 asylum seekers during their asylum procedure.
- Our 5 regional offices operated in 280 municipalities.
- We helped over 81,000 refugees settle in the Netherlands.
- We submitted 1,841 applications for family reunification and assisted thousands of other refugees with their ongoing family reunification procedures started in prior years.
- Our helpdesk answered over 7,700 asylum and integration questions posed by volunteers, asylum lawyers and staff.
- We organised summer camps for over 600 refugee children and their parents.

Chairman Abdeluheh Choho:

'In 2019, it has become abundantly clear that our support in standing up for the interests of refugees is still essential.'



OUR SERVICES TO REFUGEES

The Dutch Council for Refugees provides information about the asylum procedure and assists refugees in settling down in their new communities and municipalities. We also offer integration courses and projects concerning work, financial self-sufficiency and return counselling.

Volunteers are at the core of our work

Our volunteers are key in providing refugees social support. They are the linking pin between refugees, our organisation and society at large. Their help is also essential when it comes to creating and increasing support for refugees within society. Our volunteers are well-trained and therefore able to offer refugees thorough support during this period of uncertainty in their lives.

Result

- 👍 12,500 volunteers offer social support and guidance to refugees in the Netherlands.

Information about the asylum procedure

In 2019, 22,533 asylum seekers applied for asylum in the Netherlands for the first time. Nearly all asylum seekers were informed and assisted by volunteers working for the Dutch Council for Refugees.

Result

- 👍 We assist 57,000 asylum seekers - newly arrived asylum seekers and people with ongoing procedures - in over 50 asylum seekers' centres.

Social support

We offer social support to refugees in 77% of all municipalities in the Netherlands. This includes helping them understand how things work within the municipality, offering them assistance with their administration and showing them how to navigate the Dutch healthcare and education system.

Our volunteers also play an important role when it comes to identifying psychosocial problems and war trauma in refugees and helping them find professional support. Our support helps refugees to make a head start in the Netherlands.

Result

- 👍 We assist 81,000 refugees in 280 municipalities in the Netherlands.

Emergency Fund as final safety net

The Emergency Fund of the Dutch Council for Refugees offers refugees a final financial safety net. Funds are for example used to pay for airline tickets for family reunification, fees for residence permits, daily reimbursement payments and special needs. Refugees can apply for funding in close consultation with one of our staff members.

Result

- 👍 In 2019, the Emergency Fund paid out a total of 240,000 euros, helping over 1,500 refugees. Funding was mostly used to help cover the costs of family reunification.

Towards employment for refugees

For refugees, finding a paid job is an important step towards independence. As many employers are looking for employees, it offers a window of opportunities for refugees. The Dutch Council for Refugees developed several initiatives to help refugees find employment.

Result

- 👍 Thanks to our assistance, 540 refugees found a job or traineeship.
- 👍 Over 600 refugees received training and guidance to access the labour market through our employability project (VIP²).
- 👍 VIP² is offered in 70 municipalities. Over 100 different employers are involved in the project. ■

Social counsellor Susanna:

'You see clients taking gradual steps towards integration. Their understanding of the language is improving, their confidence is growing, they find a job or start making future plans. I'm proud being able to contribute to that process.'



STANDING UP FOR REFUGEES' RIGHTS

The Dutch Council for Refugees stands up for the interests of refugees and their families. We do this by consulting ministries, advocating with members of Dutch Parliament, doing our own research, maintaining close contact with the media and mobilising public support.

Focus on long waiting periods

In 2019, the average waiting period for asylum procedures ran up to one year and a half. Asylum seekers awaiting the start of their procedure are forced to live in conditions with a lack of activities and privacy. Frequently they have to move from one place to another, and asylum seekers awaiting the start of their procedure do not receive a living allowance like asylum seekers whose procedure started. Mid-November we presented the report *Trapped in a dead-locked asylum system; consequences and case stories* to members of Parliament. This led to renewed political attention and the promise that the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) would be increasing staff involvement.

Result

👍 Thanks to our lobby, those awaiting their asylum procedure will now receive the same healthcare as asylum seekers whose asylum procedure has already been started. ■



Hala (36) from Yemen has been awaiting the start of her procedure for over a year: 'At times, I feel completely worthless. It's hard when you can't do anything or be of importance for such a long period of time.'



Living conditions of children

The Minister for Migration gave a detailed response to the report about the living conditions of children in the asylum seekers centres, which was a publication of the working group Children in asylum seekers' centres (Dutch Council for Refugees, Unicef, Stichting de Vrijheid, Warchild, Save the Children and Kerk In Actie) and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). There are already signs of improvement with regard to some of the issues mentioned in the report, such as the need for more swimming lessons for refugee children.

Result

👍 More swimming lessons will be offered to refugee children.

Fight against human trafficking

In association with the Red Cross, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), CoMensha and Nidos, the Dutch Council for Refugees developed the toolkit *Discussing human trafficking/exploitation with (former) asylum seekers*.

Result

👍 The toolkit *Discussing human trafficking/exploitation with (former) asylum seekers* is now available. ■

STRATEGIC LITIGATION

Dutch asylum legislation is not always in accordance with international law, which may lead to refugees being deprived of protection. Therefore, the Commissie Strategisch Procederen (Commission Strategic Proceedings) was set up by the Dutch Council for Refugees, together with asylum lawyers and academics. If Dutch legislation seems to have a negative impact on a large group of asylum seekers or refugees, this matter is brought to the attention of the national court, the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice.

Result

- 👍 Adult refugees can now invoke the European Family Reunification Directive, should they wish to reunite with their (grand)parent(s) in the Netherlands.

Interpreter Farhad feared for his life: 'I was accused of being a spy. Why else would I have been working for the American army for such a long time?'

Standing up for the protection of Afghan interpreters

In 2019, we supported Farhad, an Afghan interpreter who, according to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), would not be at risk when returning to his country of origin. He was facing deportation. Farhad's case became an inspiration for renewed action regarding the protection of interpreters who had supported the international troops in Afghanistan.

We obtained broad support from soldiers, military unions and others. In collaboration with Amnesty International, we also offered a petition to the Members of Parliament.

Result

- 👍 Almost the entire Parliament supported a motion for enhanced protection of Afghan interpreters. As a result, these interpreters are now offered protection in the Netherlands. ■



INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND SOLIDARITY

The Dutch Council for Refugees also stands up for the protection and integration of asylum seekers and refugees on a European level.

Internationally, we cooperate closely with partner organisations, particularly those at the external borders of the EU, where many refugees are stranded. We offer training courses and share our knowledge and experience with these organisations.

Result:

- In 2019, we continue to call for solutions to end the inhumane conditions for refugees at the borders of Europe. We are doing so in cooperation with our umbrella organisation in Brussels, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), and facilitate new research in order to break the deadlock surrounding the situation in Greece.
- With our support, the Greek Council for Refugees is able to help 475 refugees on the Greek islands. Thanks to legal assistance, in particular to the most vulnerable groups, 49 refugees are permitted to leave the islands and apply for protection.
- We cooperate with local partner organisations in the Balkans, Greece, Hungary and Curaçao, where we jointly organise twenty training courses and work visits, exchange knowledge and develop projects together.
- On Curaçao, we support the establishment of a new human rights organisation in order to assist Venezuelan refugees on the island. ■

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

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

Helpdesk support

In 2019, our Helpdesk answer many questions posed by lawyers, staff and volunteers.

Result

In 2019, we answered 7,722 questions:

- 👍 1,930 questions about the asylum procedure.
- 👍 3,313 questions about countries of origin.
- 👍 2,479 questions about integration in the Netherlands.

Training for asylum lawyers

We support asylum lawyers, staff and volunteers not only through our Helpdesk, but also by means of our online knowledge database *VluchtWeg*. In addition, we dive deeper into the topic of jurisprudence in *UPdate*, a fortnightly digital newsletter. We also organise thematic expert sessions and meetings for lawyers.

Result

- 👍 Thanks to our support and knowledge, asylum lawyers, staff and volunteers are better equipped to defend the interests of their clients. ■

FOCUS ON REFUGEE CHILDREN

We stand up for the interests of refugee children in asylum seekers' centres. Our projects are designed to boost children's self-confidence, to offer them opportunities to play and relax, and to support them during the asylum procedure.

Summer holiday camps for kids

For almost 30 years now, we've been organising the holiday weeks for children for refugee children who live in asylum seekers' centres or have already moved to a municipality. During these holiday weeks, children and single parent families are able to enjoy a holiday in the Dutch countryside. These holiday camps are a welcome distraction from their daily concerns, and boost the children's self-confidence.

Result

- 👍 525 refugee children and 101 single parents went on holiday in one of the 39 holiday camps throughout the country.

Time4You

With our *Time4You* project we stand up for the interests of refugee children in asylum seekers' centres. We talk to the children about their asylum procedure, children's rights and living in the Netherlands. The children are able to ask questions and discuss difficult topics in a trusted environment, which enhances their self-confidence and empowers them.

Result

- 👍 We organised 783 *Time4You* meetings in 34 asylum seekers' centres.

Kids in concert

Through our project *Samenspel (play together)* we offer children at asylum seekers' centres the opportunity to learn several songs and dances within the course of ten music lessons. The project's grand finale consists of a festive performance with a professional orchestra in a theatre.

Result

- 👍 1,515 refugee children participated in music lessons. ■



PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT REFUGEES

Through actions, campaigns, encounters and educational activities, the Dutch Council for Refugees aims to increase awareness for refugees within society. More compassion for refugees leads to them being able to participate in society more easily.

'Nobody flees voluntarily' campaign

In the run-up to the 4th and 5th of May – respectively Dutch Commemoration of war victims, and Liberation Day – and the European elections in 2019, the Dutch Council for Refugees launched the campaign *Niemand vlucht vrijwillig* (*nobody flees voluntarily*). Through the personal stories of refugees, the campaign illustrates how important it is that refugees are offered protection in the Netherlands.

Aziz (25) from Eritrea:

'It is very important for me to share my story. Many people wrongfully assume I fled from poverty or starvation, but I became a refugee because I didn't have the right to live my own life.'



In relation to the European elections, we designed a voting advice application showing the extent to which political party programmes were refugee-friendly.

Result

- 👍 Our tv commercial reached over 3 million viewers. The videos on Facebook and Instagram are viewed almost 200,000 times.
- 👍 About 10,000 people consulted the voting advice application for the European elections.

Familiarity breeds compassion

Our *Bekend maakt Bemind* project (*Familiarity breeds Compassion*) enables schools, companies, associations and churches to meet a refugee and one of our volunteers. The most valuable part of these encounters is the refugee's personal story. What's it like to be a refugee and start a new life in the Netherlands?

Result

- 👍 We organised 350 information sessions at schools and 250 at companies, associations and churches.

Open day at Asylum Seekers' Centres

Mutual understanding can also be accomplished by visiting the place where refugees live when they arrive in the Netherlands: the asylum seekers' centre (azc). In September 2019, we co-organised the fifth edition of the Open azc dag (open day) in association with the COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) and the Ministry of Security and Justice.

Result

- 👍 40 asylum seekers' centres across the Netherlands opened their doors to the public. Over 11,000 people visited at least one of them. ■

SUPPORT FOR THE DUTCH COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES

The Dutch Council for Refugees is able to stand up for refugees thanks to the support of our donors, companies, funds, contributions from the Nationale Postcode Loterij (Dutch Postcode Lottery), government subsidies and municipal contributions.

Key support provided by our donors

Thanks to the generous support of our supporters and donors, we are able to carry out activities that are not financed by the government, such as organising the holiday weeks for refugee children or facilitating family reunification.

Result

👍 In 2019, we received 6,575,983 euro from almost 64,000 donors.

Support from the Dutch Postcode Lottery

In 2019, the Dutch Council for Refugees received a contribution of 10 million euros.

Support from funds

We received support from several funds: 3.3 million euros in total.

Municipal contributions to integration

Municipalities engage our services when it comes to providing refugees guidance during their integration. We received a contribution in return for our efforts.

Government subsidies

In 2019, we received 10.9 million euros of subsidies from various ministries for our work for asylum seekers in asylum seekers' centres (azc's), for interpreting services and for the training and support of volunteers and staff who assist refugees during their integration. We also received 1.1 million euros from the Council for Legal Aid to provide information to refugees during the asylum procedure. ■

Johke Heerkens Thijssen is one of our donors who has included the Dutch Council for Refugees in her will: 'I know what it's like to not be on solid ground. I know how essential it is to get support when it comes to learning a new language and culture.'

