



A WELCOMING NETHERLANDS

LOCAL SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES

Europe and the Netherlands face the challenge to provide shelter and a safe place to larger groups of asylum seekers and refugees from conflict zones. Whereas on a political level an appropriate answer remains to be formulated, on a local level the support for refugees has become visible through the emergence of multiple solidarity initiatives. In this factsheet Justice and Peace Netherlands will put the spotlight on these local actions to strengthen the voice and the support for a nuanced debate about refugees and migration and to stress that there are more views and ideas on how to deal with the challenges surrounding Refugees.

The arrival of refugees in Europe and the Netherlands is a phenomenon of all times. People who were in danger in their country of origin, like Iran, former Yugoslavia and Vietnam, searched for refuge in Europe and the Netherlands to create a safe living. Professional, community and grassroots organizations, volunteers, churches and other religious institutes have been involved in providing decent shelters for refugees and a smooth integration in Dutch society just as long.

The end of armed conflicts, amongst others in Syria, Libya and various African countries is not foreseen in the near future. In addition, there is no decrease in oppression, negative effects of climate change, human rights violations and violence in the world – all reasons for people to flee for their own safety. Most of them stay in the region of their country of origin, but some travel further to Europe. Giving shelter to the current high numbers of refugees and warranting their human rights is a challenge for Europe and the Netherlands. It demands long-term thinking about integration, in addition to short-term solutions for dignified sheltering and assistance for these people.

LOCAL DUTCH COMMUNITIES STAND BY REFUGEES

Where politicians struggle to find an appropriate answer, on a local level people have combined their efforts to show their solidarity and to create initiatives in support of refugees. Organizations on the forefront at reception centers receive huge amounts of applications from volunteers, large quantities of clothing are being donated for refugees and multiple activities are organized to meet and assist refugees.

These local initiatives and all positive actions in the shelters are hardly ever mentioned in the news. In general, good news does not score and as such, reports about interrupted public meetings, riots in asylum seekers' centers and discriminating statements dominate the media and a negative sentiment prevails. The negative reporting leaves no space for the numerous people who have a positive stance towards refugees, something which can go hand in hand with a critical attitude towards policy and its implementation.

It's time to talk about alternatives, since this is just one side of the story! Justice and Peace Netherlands wants to put another story in the spotlights: the story of thousands of volunteers, the successful public meetings, the local initiative that brings Dutch citizens and refugees together. These stories are not just about the numerous short-term initiatives, but also about long-term integration and assistance that is needed. By giving attention to local initiatives, Justice and Peace wants to show the local organizing power of the Netherlands and other European Countries. It connects people, whereby new initiatives arise and existing ones can be strengthened. By knowing what happens out of solidarity in their neighborhood, people can join and create a nuanced image of refugees together.

Because locally the Netherlands and Europe shows solidarity.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: 5 EXAMPLES OF LOCAL SOLIDARITY WITH REFUGEES



Platform 'Arnhem voor Vluchtelingen'

"It is nice to see what can happen if you just do, take action and let your heart speak"

From a small group of people who wanted to do something for refugees in Arnhem, to a social platform for the coordination of local initiatives for refugees in Arnhem, in which COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), the municipality and neighborhood committee are also represented. The platform 'Arnhem voor vluchtelingen' (Arnhem for refugees) coordinates citizens' initiatives, enforces them by linking them to social partners and brings the city of Arnhem closer to the refugees. On their Facebookpage (which received over 2.300 likes within 2 months) inspiring initiatives are posted – chess matches between Rotary members and people from Syria, a weekly exercise bootcamp and even an attempt to break the world record of book domino (a cooperation between refugees and the local library). Mariel Hutten, coordinator of 'Arnhem voor Vluchtelingen' is impressed by all the meetings: "Even though we cannot solve their direct problems, refugees tell us that we do make an important difference. This is reflected during the meetings between refugees and the community, where there are a lot of opportunities for positive framing and integration".

Kerk en Vluchteling Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen

"Integration requires the dedication of a refugee, but also from society. Encounters between refugee and local community brings them closer to each other"

The effort of volunteers for the reception, guidance and assistance of refugees is not something new. Since 2005, the ecumenical foundation Kerk en Vluchteling (Church and Refugee) in Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen supports people without documents and asylum seekers actively with personal assistance, language lessons and meetings between asylum seekers and the local community. The foundation has been involved with the 72-hours emergency shelter in Cadzand and Hulst twice, and will be involved with the long-term care for 600 refugees in Hoek. Structural contact with the refugees will be organized through church meetings and encounters with the citizens. Speaking out from a long experience of working with refugees, Derk Blom tells us: "It is important to cooperate with people who have experience and expertise within this field (Vluchtelingenwerk, Red Cross, COA). It is necessary to investigate which help is really needed before offering support." To maintain local public support, Derk Blom highlights the power of encounters in which refugees can share their stories. This contributes to the understanding of new Dutch citizens



and decreases apathy in society.

Volunteers in Weert

"Very quickly, asylum seekers greet everybody on the streets with 'hi' in dialect".

After seeing images of groups of refugees in the media, Inge de Monte posted a concordant message on Facebook. Because of this post, she was contacted by another inhabitant of her town and soon an ad hoc group of volunteers developed in Weert. Since September 2015, Weert gives accelerated shelter to 1.000 asylum seekers in an old barrack. Volunteers were ready from the beginning with a great diversity of initiatives. "Of course it is a challenge, considering the short time and the big number of refugees, to connect fast with COA. But it is inspiring to see how different initiatives are starting up" according to Inge de Monte. Likewise, the library is organizing evening meetings with (recent) refugees and local citizens and refugees who live in Weert for a longer time open their houses, to enter into a dialogue with residents from Weert. Along with providing education for children in the shelter, volunteers are also occupied with collecting old music instruments for music lessons and there are some considerations about starting a book collection for refugees, similar to the action of Kamagurka in Belgium.

Premiere League football day for refugees

"The power of football is that it connects people within communities. By letting children do sports, they have fun, they are free from their worries for a moment, and they are active".

Football clubs in the Netherlands do not only have a social function for Dutch citizens, but also for people who come to the Netherlands from other parts of the world. With this though multiple boards of directors of professional football clubs came with the idea to organize a football day for children living in the asylum seekers' centers (AZC's). On November the 11th 2000 children from AZC's could play football at 34 clubs, often with the players and staff of the first team. Kevin Coolen of the Eredivisie was impressed by the unanimous enthusiasm from the clubs and the positive reactions from refugees, the AZC's and the media. Numerous football clubs have been involved in helping since a longer time, but as a result of this day other clubs have indicated to organize such days more often. The reaction of the refugees impressed Kevin the most: "That through football we are able to make so many children forget and play together in such a difficult time, even for a short moment, has made a big impression on me".

Welcome School in The Hague

"Children were very enthusiastic about the Welcome School; on the first day they were waiting to come in, with their noses pressed against the door"

After the tough journey that refugees make to go to the Netherlands, people need be surrounded by safety, tranquility and regularity, certainly when it comes to children. The municipality of The Hague thought had the same thought and took immediate action to arrange temporary education materials for an emergency shelter for 600 refugees. The city brought local school committees together and soon the idea of the Welcome School was born. Roel Gordijn, general coordinator of the Welcome School, did not doubt for one second about putting effort into the initiative. The result is astounding. Within two days a learning-area was created in one of the shelters with educated teachers, donated school furniture and course material for six groups of children between 4 and 18 years old. Also the local community participated by cooking, arranging a free cartoon movie in a cinema or organizing joint lessons with children at local schools. Roel Gordijn is impressed: "It's moving to see how eager these children are to learn something. It is actually just a big party and the parents are actively participating. Let's think in chances instead of risks".

Facebook page 'Welkom Nederland' (A welcoming Netherlands)

These five initiatives are just some of the examples of the many initiatives that are set up by volunteers and organizations in the Netherlands to work with and for refugees. You can find more initiatives on our [Platform Welcome Netherlands](#). Share your initiative as well on the Facebook page!

JUSTICE AND PEACE MIGRATION PROGRAM:

– From Apathy to Solidarity

It is the positive local initiatives that inspire the migration program 'From Apathy to Solidarity' of Justice and Peace. Strengthening local power and bringing this to the forefront in national and European politics is the starting point of Justice and Peace. Justice and Peace strives for a positive, but also realistic sound, in which a human rights approach and a decent life for asylum seekers and refugees are focal points.

– Justice and Peace locally

Justice and Peace is active in different cities with the [Shelter City Program](#). With an information and education program about migration and human rights for secondary schools and universities in the Shelter City cities (and elsewhere, where possible), Justice and Peace engages in a debate with scholars and students about refugees, to stimulate a thoughtful view on this issue.

– Dutch policy

Justice and Peace is committed to the return of a human dimension in Dutch law and policy. We build upon our research about, a.o. alternatives for detention.

– European policy

Justice and Peace believes that only an uniform policy from the European Union, based on human rights, can be a solution for the protection, reception and support for refugees. On the European level, safe passage, alternatives for detention and local power are core themes for Justice and Peace.

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