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Contactperson: Liselot van Zantvoort Telephone number: +31 (0)70 - 7631499

E-mail: liselot.van.zantvoort@justiceandpeace.nl

Design: Maranke de Krieger Photography: Esmée de Vette

Follow us

on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

@samenhier
#samenhier

Address

Samen Hier p/a Justice & Peace Riviervismarkt 4 2513 AM The Hague

Contact

info@samenhier.nl www.samenhier.nl +31 (0)70 763 14 99









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Introduction

"It was a small party, everyone was smiling a lot, I had the feeling everyone was happy to see us."

(Abdalla, one of the people that took part in the resettlement pilot of Samen Hier, on his first contact with the Samen Hier-groups)

"As a city, we have been taking in resettled refugees for a long time but in the beginning it lacked intensive guidance. This group had a lot of questions in the beginning. In the past, they called me 24/7 about all kinds of things. There was a gap that could easily be bridged by a group. I was positive about the fact that it is a group: the questions don't all go to one person."

(Employee at the Municipality of Rotterdam)

Resettlement concerns the selection and transfer of refugees to a third State, who cannot return to their country of origin and cannot stay in the country where they have sought protection. Resettlement is hereby, next to voluntary repatriation and local integration, one of the three durable solutions for refugees. Municipalities in the Netherlands can indicate per mission if they want to house resettled refugees.

The refugee crisis that unfolded in 2015 mobilised many people. Initiatives developed across Europe and local solidarity became visible. Also in the Netherlands citizens committed themselves as volunteers, opened language cafés, collected clothing, organised small-scaled shelters or opened their homes as sleeping places through initiatives such as Takecarebnb. Currently, Dutch people show their willingness to welcome and support Ukrainians with open arms.

The European Commission calls on member states to set up *community sponsorship* initiatives with civil society to safely bring refugees to the EU¹. This is a sustainable way of implementing the existing **public support**. Years of practical experience in Canada teach us that *community sponsorship*, in which a group of five residents invite a refugee (family) and commit time and/or financial resources for a good reception, is an innovative model for durable integration. The interest in sponsorship led several member states to implement it with their own characteristics.

In Italy, Belgium² and France, refugees can safely arrive through multiple legal routes, such as humanitarian corridors of student sponsorship, and they are received by **local**

¹ European Commission (September 2020). New Pact on Migration and Asylum

² Caritas België. https://www.caritas.eu/community-sponshorship-europe/

communities. In Germany³ and England⁴, residents act as sponsors to support refugees being resettled in their countries.

Public-private collaboration

When Dutch people are provided with the same opportunities as in other EU member states, this international issue can be tackled with **local solidarity**. With municipalities again being in charge of integration there is room for *more* involvement through public-private collaboration. At the beginning, resettled refugees require intensive guidance to shape their integration process. **Groups of citizens can play a crucial role here and provide tailor-made informal support**. In line with the dual character of integration – in which language and participation reinforce each other – the newcomers learn Dutch faster through the groups, have access to existing networks and get acquainted with cultural and social facilities in the city. Sponsor groups hereby complement the support provided by municipalities and organisations to newcomers for **complete and durable** participation. Additionally, the public **support** for receiving refugees in our neighbourhoods, towns and cities is increased by involving residents in an accessible manner. ⁶

Added value

Therefore, following international examples, Justice & Peace introduced the first Dutch variant of community sponsorship with **Samen Hier**. After a successful pilot with status holders in Dutch municipalities, the first two resettled refugees were welcomed by sponsor groups in Rotterdam in December 2020. **This report maps out the practical experiences and conditions for success**. **Justice & Peace shows the added value of Samen Hier and encourages municipalities to collaborate with residents in shaping the reception, integration and participation of refugees**.

³ NesT. https://resettlement.de/wp-content/uploads/nest_broschuere_quadratisch_auflage_EN_v03.pdf

⁴ Reset UK. https://resetuk.org/

Kennisplatform Integratie & Samenleving (January 2020). Handreiking: Hervestigde vluchtelingen in uw gemeente? Informatie en tips bij het plaatsen en begeleiden van hervestigers.

⁶ ICMC Europe and Caritas Europa (2019). Fostering community sponsorships across Europe.

Community sponsorship of refugees

Refugees often have to take **dangerous routes** to reach the Netherlands but community sponsorship works based on an **invitation**: a 'sponsor group' of five people – friends, family, colleagues, neighbours – invites⁷ a refugee (family) to their hometown, so that they can settle in their new place of residence from day one. The group engages their social and professional network and provides support with practical matters so that the newcomers can settle quickly and build lasting relationships within the community.

Safe routes and **safe havens** form two inseparable pillars of community sponsorship: making it possible that refugees can arrive through legal and safe routes and that they can count on the supporting network of citizens in their new place of residence.

What is community sponsorship?

In some variants refugees arrive on humanitarian visa and in others through resettlement.⁸ In some variants groups can indicate whom they want to invite ('Naming') while in others this is done by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). Lastly, in some variants sponsor groups only support with their time and network while in other variants they are also financially responsible. All variants of community sponsorship have the following in common⁹:

- 1. They provide an opportunity to welcome refugees through safe and legal routes, complementing existing resettlement programmes.
- 2. They divide the responsibility for financial, civil and social support through a public-private partnership between the government, civil society and citizens, with the government having the primary responsibility for integration.

Active citizenship is a crucial component of community sponsorship: the difference with volunteering is that a sponsor group itself takes **responsibility** for welcoming the refugees and is supported by an organisation, whereas volunteers work for an organisation. If residents can take on this responsibility, they can relieve the pressure on municipalities and partners. To maintain their involvement, it is important to uphold the community-based character of sponsorship in order to maintain their involvement.¹⁰ This means that there must also be the opportunity for groups of residents to exchange

⁷ Through resettlement or other judicial options.

For a more extensive overview of the different options, see the GRSI policy design handbook, for example. Available at: https://refugeesponsorship.org/uploads/60315288614ef.pdf

⁹ See https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163177/TEM 2021 37.pdf?sequence=1, p.22.

Fratzke, S. (2017). Engaging communities in refugee protection. The potential of private sponsorship in Europe. mpi Europe Policy Brief Issue, (9).

knowledge and experiences with each other.

Benefits of community sponsorship

Community sponsorship offers refugees, the receiving community and governmental bodies different benefits: Firstly, research on Canadian experiences shows that sponsored refugees experience fewer (mental) health problems due to lessened pre- and postdeparture stress. 11 Additionally, sponsored refugees in Canada show better integration results than refugees supported by the government. Studies on pilots in Europe show a similar trend: sponsored refugees are more likely to become self-sufficient and financially independent.¹² With the help of the groups' networks, they can find a job more quickly and they make less use of social funds from municipalities. Community sponsorship also has a positive effect on the language acquisition of refugees: In Belgium, sponsored refugees learn the language faster than government-supported refugees because they come in contact with the local population immediately. 13 Rapid language acquisition is essential for finding a job, accessing public facilities and social participation. This also plays a role in increasing support for the arrival of refugees: Research from the Netherlands and Great Britain shows that migrants are perceived more positively when they speak the language fluently, have friends within the local community and are socially involved.¹⁴ Finally, community sponsorship gives the opportunity to build meaningful relationships between refugees and the receiving community.15

Sponsorship through the community creates opportunities for relationships that otherwise might not exist and contributes to greater social cohesion.

Community sponsorship also offers a **concrete perspective** to anticipate future refugee movements **structurally** rather than ad hoc. To ensure the capacity of countries in the region, it is crucial that there are more legal, safe routes in the EU that provide protection.¹⁶

Resettlement saves lives. According to the UNHCR, the number of people in need of

See Bakker et al. (2014), "The importance of resources and security in the socio-economic integration of refugees. A study on the impact of length of stay in asylum accommodation and residence status on socio-economic integration for the four largest refugee groups in the Netherlands."

Solano, G., & Savazzi, V. (2019). Private Sponsorship Programmes and humanitarian visas: a viable policy frame work for integration. ReSOMA Policy Brief.

Sant'Egidio (2018), "Humanitarian Corridors in Belgium: Europe that Welcomes". Available at https://www.sante-gidio.org/pageID/30284/langID/en/itemID/26000/Humanitariancorridors-in-Belgium-Europe-that-welcomes.html.

Sobolewska et al. (2017). The public view of immigrant integration: multidimensional and consensual. Evidence from survey experiments in the UK and the Netherlands. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 43(1).

¹⁵ Fratzke, S. (2017).

Letter from the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (January 2021). Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaat van Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (XVII) voor het jaar 2021.

resettlement has risen to a record high of 1.45 million.¹⁷

The resettlement quotas in Europe must be increased: Not only to offer people with the right to protection a future perspective but also to better prepare their reception. Residents can and want to play an active role in this.

Community sponsorship in the Netherlands?

While developing the first Dutch pilot of community sponsorship under the name of Samen Hier, Justice & Peace chose to start within the existing resettlement practice, in which the government annually invites refugees for resettlement on the recommendation of the UNHCR. The Netherlands does not have **judicial possibilities** for residents themselves to invite a refugee (family) to settle in the Netherlands. Some aspects of community sponsorship, such as identification, selection, grounds for admission and invitation on top of the existing quota are thus not yet feasible in the Netherlands. However, experience can be gained for other aspects, such as safe and legal arrival, direct settlement in a local community and public-private collaborations.

Municipalities in the Netherlands can indicate per mission if they want to house resettled refugees. These refugees count towards the so-called **target** of the municipality: the number of permit holders that a municipality must house. Participation in Samen Hier within the existing resettlement practice does not require additional capacity from municipalities.



Samen Hier

Samen Hier is an initiative of The Hague human rights organisation Justice & Peace, that introduces the first variant of community sponsorship in the Netherlands. Programme Coordinator Liselot van Zantvoort says: 'By giving residents a larger role in the arrival and reception of refugees in the Netherlands, we want to contribute to safe routes and refugees having a good start from day one.' Samen Hier starts from the existing support and capacity on a local level – groups of residents who want to commit themselves to contributing to safe havens for refugees where they can quickly build a new life.

The starting point of the Samen Hier-groups are five residents who commit their time, network and resources for a year. The community approach of Samen Hier is based on the importance of *bridging*, *bonding and linking* social capital and makes use of careful matching to give refugees faster access to the relevant networks of Dutch people. Groups and refugees are facilitated and supported before and during their participation in Samen Hier through training, joint activities and a contact person. This Samen Hier-curriculum is built around five pillars: equality, communities of care, positivity, intercultural sensitivity, connection.

Samen Hier is organised like a **network**: every municipality can join as a Samen Hiercity or -town. Active local partners implement Samen Hier and support and guide the Samen Hier-groups. Justice & Peace acts as a national secretary and coordinator of this network and ensures the further development of Samen Hier as a Dutch sponsorship model for safe routes and safe havens.

The Five Pillars of Samen Hier:

- 1. Equality
- 2. Communities of Care
- 3. Positivity
- 4. Intercultural sensitivity
- 5. Connection



Samen Hier Rotterdam: resettlement

Set-up

In December 2020, the Samen Hier pilot in the Municipality of Rotterdam started, in which two sponsor groups welcomed one resettled refugee each. The Municipality of Rotterdam, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), Foundation Rotterdam Verwelkomt Vluchtelingen (Rotterdam Welcomes Refugees), VluchtelingenWerk (the Dutch Council for Refugees) and Justice & Peace joined forces for the guidance of both groups.

Participants

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The two participating refugees, Yassin and Abdalla¹⁸, were invited to the Netherlands for resettlement on the recommendation of the UNHCR. The Municipality of Rotterdam offered the newcomers housing in Rotterdam. **To prepare for their participation in Samen Hier...**

- they received training in cultural orientation from COA employees while still in Egypt.
- Justice & Peace held intake interviews in the Netherlands to match them to a group.

Justice & Peace recruited two sponsor groups based on the general, anonymous profiles of Yassin and Abdalla.

It continued with people that already formed a complete group. Justice & Peace approved their participation based on an interview, a signed participant statement and a Certificate of Conduct (VOG). Both sponsor groups consisted of 3 – 5 people. To prepare for their participation in Samen Hier...

- they received information about Dutch resettlement practices from the COA.
- Justice & Peace held intake interviews to match them to the newcomers.
- they received a **Samen Hier-start training**¹⁹ from Justice & Peace.

The match

A good match between a sponsor group and a newcomer is essential for the durable impact of community sponsorship. Backgrounds and preferences were compiled through the intake interviews. Justice & Peace made a match using criteria of earlier experiences of Samen Hier. Because there were only two resettled refugees participating in the Rotterdam pilot, there were fewer possibilities to match. The *pre-departure phase* could not be implemented during the pilot: there was no time before arrival to meet (online) and prepare based on the information of the match.

For community sponsorship at a larger scale, Justice & Peace recommends matching in **two phases**:

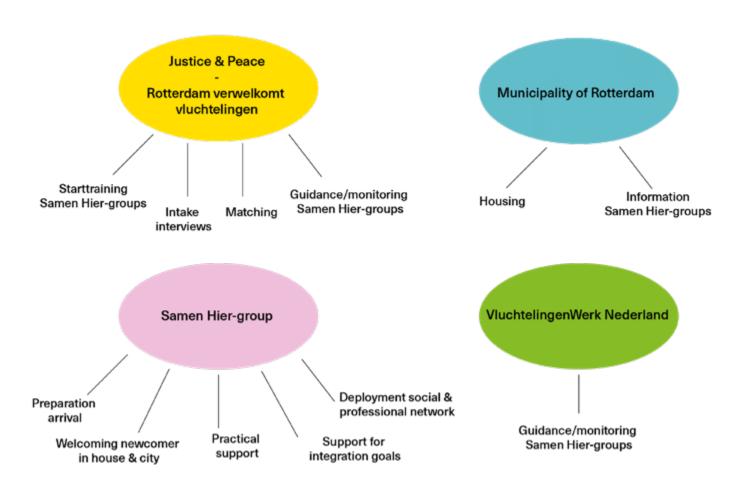
- 1. Decide who qualifies for community sponsorship based on the general profile (after identification by UNHCR of people that qualify for resettlement). Take into consideration **available housing** (in relation to family size) and the **capacity and willingness** of sponsor groups to deal with specific vulnerabilities.
- 2. Ensure that intake interviews with group members and refugees are concluded in the pre-departure phase. Match groups and refugees based on intake-data prior to the latter's arrival in the Netherlands. Ensure that the match is submitted for approval to the municipality responsible for resettlement.

The Samen Hier-start training covers topics such as expectation management, equality and intercultural sensitivity to prepare groups for the Samen Hier year

The Samen Hier matching method considers the geographical distance between the group members and the newcomer(s), priorities and expectations, shared interests and the connection of the newcomer(s) to the existing social and professional networks within the sponsor group. These criteria are enforced on basis of international examples and experiences of Justice & Peace within the Dutch context.

Implementation

In consultation with all parties, the support of sponsor groups and the division of roles in the areas of housing, income, language and integration, health, work and education were recorded. Financial support by the sponsor groups was, unlike in other countries, not a component of this pilot.



Municipality and partner organisations

For the municipalities and partner organisations, **capacity** and **public support** of the groups were the most important factors to participate in Samen Hier. They indicate that they mostly do office work and have limited capacity to physically show a newcomer around in Rotterdam, to support with the move and furnishing of houses or to attend certain appointments. Samen Hier-groups were seen by the partners as a **welcome addition to the existing assistance**. As said by an employee of the Municipality of Rotterdam:

"A group is generally quite agile because there are five of them. For example, with matters where someone really needs to be physically accompanied such as registering by a general practitioner, there is a larger chance someone is available to help. Additionally, I find increasing public support and bringing residents into contact with refugees very important."

All partners emphasised that the **added value of the group** goes further than just practical support. Sponsor groups can also increase access to cultural and social facilities in the city. Partners recognize the 'bit of security and warmth' that residents give the newcomers. An employee VluchtelingenWerk says:

"A practical example is the furnishing of the house. VluchtelingenWerk can give someone tips on where to buy furniture. The added value of the group is that they can really support furnishing. They can take on things that VluchtelingenWerk cannot do and more than that: they give a bit of security and warmth. That is of course very important if you just arrived here."

For partners, Samen Hier is an important way to increase public support long-term. They say that embedding in the local community serves to create a more positive image of resettlement. One of the partners says:

"Support in society can only be increased by bringing Rotterdammers into contact with refugees. Something that works very well in Canada, while in the Netherlands barely anyone knows a refugee."

The **sponsor groups** say that they participated because they want to make someone feel at home from day one of arrival in the Netherlands and to support with practical matters. Recognition in the profiles of Yassin and Abdalla, which made both newcomers eligible for

resettlement, was also an important factor for the groups to join Samen Hier. One of the group members said they signed up because they were unsatisfied with the current way the Netherlands welcomes refugees.

Coordination, collaboration & added value

Good coordination was crucial, especially because the community sponsorship model of Samen Hier is new. Shaping a public-private collaboration together requires an open and flexible attitude from all parties involved. According to the partner organisations, adjustments could be made quickly due to everyone's proactive attitude. They look back on collective meetings positively during which priorities could be discussed using a **clear timeline and checklist**. In the beginning, it took some time to find the most effective way to share information with the groups but after a month the contact persons knew where to find each other. The partners were also positive about how active the groups were. People showed enormous enthusiasm and great involvement during the conversations. An employee from VluchtelingenWerk says:

"The members of the group are greatly involved and they want to know every detail about our way of working and any developments. This is very nice to see, they are incredibly committed. I am part of a collective WhatsApp group so you see that they are very active."

A representative of Rotterdam Verwelkomt Vluchtelingen adds:

"The fire between groups and refugees inspires very much and gives a lot of energy. In the beginning, everyone was confused at times, a bit overwhelmed by all the new things and all the organisations involved. I admire it, the groups were very open and willing to help in a friendly, humane way."

The Rotterdam sponsor groups received a checklist with tasks before arrival. Both groups said it was quite challenging to keep an overview of the task division and responsibilities. In particular, the financial situation caused a lot of confusion and questions for the groups and newcomers. One of the group members says:

"It turned out that the Municipality of Rotterdam arranged this but we didn't know, hence creating problems where there were none."

An explanation for the complicated financial situation is that the residence card of newcomers is often not ready when they arrive, which means there are no financial benefits yet: This is solved with advanced payments. It is thus important that the newcomers are made aware of financial arrangements and that the groups know where to

find this information. An overview of all involved organisations is recommended so that the groups immediately know who to refer to. Groups also ran into issues with things that were arranged well on paper but turned out to be more challenging in practice. These insights can provide valuable information for partners to adjust existing services or processes. One of the group members says:

"There are truly a lot of letters. The letters are well-written and clear, that's not the issue, but there are a lot of them and a newcomer cannot understand them."

All partners see the benefit of collaborating with each other and with the groups. The municipality and VluchtelingenWerk both expressed that a lot of work was taken out of their hands by the groups. As an employee of the municipality states:

"In the past, I was constantly called about all kinds of things. This time I was not even approached during the move, that was very unique."



David and Abdalla lay the flooring in Abdalla's new home.

Housing

The resettled refugees spend the first few weeks together in an 'in-between home' provided by the Municipality of Rotterdam. This gave time to find a suitable individual house. The groups requested the municipality to find a house near their neighbourhood. The fact that the Municipality of Rotterdam was prepared to do this was of great added value: the group members could easily (and spontaneously) meet up and help with refurbishing the home and moving. The groups also know their own neighbourhood well and they could introduce Yassin and Abdalla more easily to the social facilities. Both newcomers are satisfied with the houses that were offered: the in-between home and current apartment both meet all their needs. When working with an in-between home, it is of interest to involve and inform the newcomer about possibilities for a house so that they know when to expect a permanent home.

The groups played a large part in **the move**. For the groups, practical involvement was a concrete way to bond with the refugees. Multiple group members look back on the move as one of the most intense periods, but also a fun period. The move immediately showed the importance of the group's network: contacts outside the immediate group were called in for help and materials.

"The move cost a lot of time, but that also creates a bond."

In the beginning, Yassin and Abdalla found it hard to get an image of the city because everything was closed due to COVID-19. The language barrier also made it hard to do things on their own. Now they feel at home in the city, thanks to the group. Abdalla says:

"For a long time, I knew nothing about Rotterdam, except the name of the city: Rotterdam. ... The group took me outside, told me about the city, as a sort of teachers of the city."

In-between house as good practice

Resettled refugees do not go to an asylum centre upon arrival in the Netherlands but directly to their new municipality, so a 'camping-ready' house must be available. The Municipality of Rotterdam approaches this differently and works with an 'in-between house.' Justice & Peace sees this method as **good practice**: in this way the newcomer has control over the furnishing of their new home and the Samen Hier sponsor groups can support with the move. Justice & Peace will explore ways to organise temporary housing in more municipalities.

Contact and bonding

Both the newcomers and the group members mentioned that the atmosphere was immediately joyful. In the words of Abdalla:

"It was a small party, everyone was smiling a lot, I got the feeling that everyone was happy to see us. There was also a lot of stuff. It was better than I could have expected, I expected the basics, but there were a lot of groceries and everything was taken care of. That was nice."

Yassin and Abdalla indicate that during the year, the bond only grew stronger. Abdalla notes:

"The group feels like family and like friends: like family because they always ask how I am doing, what I did today, what I ate. They give me attention like family does. And also like friends because we do fun things together, laugh together, they give me tips about the language."

Both newcomers say that they feel comfortable in the group and that they can say and ask anything. The sponsor groups note that they are having a lot of fun with each other. There is hardly a language barrier: although Yassin and Abdalla are not yet fluent in Dutch, they always find a way to communicate, sometimes using English, Google Translate or their hands and feet.

The possibilities for social activities were limited during the year due to COVID-19 restrictions. The groups say that they had planned to initiate many more activities, such as going to the pub or a day at the Veluwe. This was not possible. Instead, they drank many cups of coffee, had dinner together and walked through Rotterdam. One of the groups did take Yassin and Abdalla to Delft, The Hague and the Scheveningen beach.

The newcomers and group members say that the pandemic had a big impact on building a social network. They overcame this through the personal approach of the group: Yassin and Abdalla emphasise the importance that, next to different organisations, there was a group of Dutch people to help them. Yassin says:

"When I arrived in the Netherlands, I felt insecure. As a newcomer, you spend most of the day at home. Especially during corona."

Throughout the year, Yassin and Abdalla expanded their networks by making friends at the language school and with neighbours. A lot of contact with Dutch people remains difficult, but through the group, they get to know a lot of people. Vice versa, the group members met the newcomers' friends.

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Abdalla:

"I mainly have friends that I already knew from Egypt and Sudan, aside from the group members and their friends that visit me and who I visit.'

One group member says:

'He introduced a lot of friends to me, most of which he knew before arriving in the Netherlands. During Ramadan, we all ate together and we were all sitting at the table together and I just belong. Yes, that was very fun."

Both groups look back positively and indicate that it would be great if more refugees could be welcomed in this way. All groups want to stay in contact after this year:

"We will definitely keep in contact with each other. If everything goes right, we want to form a new Samen Hier-group with Abdalla as the fourth group member."

Use the pre-departure phase

Would the groups and newcomers have liked to get in contact prior to arrival in the Netherlands? Both indicate yes. Thereby it is expected that this will be nerve-wracking: 'You don't know anything about the Netherlands yet which makes it difficult to ask about it,' says Abdalla. The presence of a **moderator** could provide solutions. It is important to consider the (practical) **situation** of the refugees as they might not want to have this contact yet.

Commitment & flexibility

Sponsor groups indicate that the time investment necessary to welcome the newcomer requires flexibility. In the beginning phase, one of the group members visited the newcomer every day to introduce themselves. The newcomers say that due to this attention they immediately felt comfortable. After the acquainting, contact varied from daily to once a week.

Especially the first months were time-consuming. A lot has to be arranged and the newcomers receive a lot of information. The groups offered practical help, such as joining appointments with the municipality, pharmacy and dentist, opening a bank account, applying for DigiD and organising the move. For the groups, it was sometimes a challenge to provide all the necessary support, especially because a lot of different organisations were involved so most things had to happen during office hours. As a suggestion for future groups, they say that it is necessary to have one person that can sometimes take a day

off or has a flexible work schedule. The groups worked together to see whose schedule fit best or what matters could be taken care of simultaneously for both newcomers. The collective WhatsApp group was a solution. Lastly, unexpected things came up, such as organising an acute jaw surgery. Still, both groups look back positively on this time, and indicate that Samen Hier did not cause them stress:

"It costs a lot of energy, but it also has a lot of value. It is truly an enrichment for our lives. We do it with a lot of pleasure."

The groups mention that after the first few months there was a clear shift in time consumption and activities. The newcomers and the group members still saw each other multiple times a week, but the dynamic changed. One of the group members says:

"As a group, we found the first three months very intense and we mainly had to help, for example with the move and taking care of administrative tasks. After these months it depends on the dynamic you have developed with this person. We only do social things now.' Another group member agrees: 'The second half of the year was mainly social, doing things together as friends. And of course you still help, like with learning the language or explaining the mail, but the emphasis is not on this anymore."

Equality

Within Samen Hier, equality is key: Building equal relations, safeguarding newcomers' agency and preventing dependence are important topics in the **training and supervision** of the groups. This deserves attention because sponsor groups state that they found it challenging to set bounderies to the help they offered. They say it was a balancing act to offer sufficient support without creating dependence. As a solution, they discussed with the newcomers what appointments they will accompany. For example, one of the groups does not attend certain meetings because Yassin prefers to go alone, but the other group does attend these meetings to discuss afterwards if Abdalla understood everything correctly.

They all regard their relations as equal and friendly. They also mention that they learn a lot from each other. Yassin says:

"I told the group about my past, but also about my culture, the music I like to listen to. The group has also told me a lot about the Netherlands: about the habits and customs in this country and where I need to go if I need to arrange something."

Development of personal goals

Yassin and Abdalla emphasise how important the groups are for them: through support in figuring out Dutch bureaucracy, but also in feeling seen and not alone. After the move, they started integrating and learning the language. Choosing the right language school was an important moment in which the groups helped. They made a well-considered choice after going through the schools together. On top of this, one group member helped both with extra weekly language classes. He used to be a teacher and enjoyed putting this knowledge into practice again. At the moment, Yassin and Abdalla are studying for the exam at level A2. An employee of VluchtelingenWerk explains:

"I think many of the group's benefits come later, for example with finding an internship and paid work. I can barely imagine how someone does this without a group."

When Yassin and Abdalla speak the language enough they want to continue studying and working. One of the group members sees a chance to help:

"We have the idea to introduce him to people from our network when he is further in the process. For example, someone from the group works in ICT and his employer has previously helped people with a refugee background. We want to do this later in the process, currently, he is still learning the language and I don't want to overwhelm him with work-related questions."

The 5 conditions for success

Justice & Peace formulates five conditions for the success of **community sponsorship in the Netherlands** based on the Rotterdam Samen Hier pilot. These conditions, together with the instructions and supervision of Justice & Peace, form a practical guideline for municipalities to set up Samen Hier in collaboration with organisations and residents:

1. Ensure an open and flexible attitude of everyone involved, regularly organise moments for coordination and give the opportunity to learn, adapt and adjust during the process

Community sponsorship assumes **public-private collaboration**, in which some actors are active as professionals and others as residents. This type of collaboration is only possible when those involved are flexible, ready to work differently than usual and can anticipate unpredictable situations. According to partners, the success of Samen Hier in Rotterdam can mostly be attributed to the flexibility of the Municipality of Rotterdam. A prime

example of the out-of-the-box thinking of the municipality was the readiness to search for a house near the group members. This example also shows that a group can fulfil a **signalling function**: challenges that the groups face can offer important information to show what can be improved.

Through the flexible attitude of all involved in Rotterdam, it became possible to succeed in the collaboration.

2. Create a clear task- and role division between the stakeholders beforehand

Community sponsorship requires a clear task- and role division in which there is a distinction between the groups, the supporting organisations, social assistance (VluchtelingenWerk) and the municipality. Justice & Peace developed a **Samen Hier format** with which the parties can shape this public-private collaboration: This format helps give insights on practical tasks.

All involved parties need to have **one fixed point of contact**: one collective WhatsApp group with these contact persons is a good solution. In addition, each sponsor group creates a **resettlement plan** with their own responsibilities, this is especially important for the first months after arrival. Justice & Peace developed a **resettlement plan format** to guide the groups.

3. Utilise the pre-departure phase

The phase between application and arrival offers room for preparation. For groups, it is important to know what is expected of them, what they can expect and which organisations are involved. The newcomer also needs to know what Samen Hier consists of to make a well-considered choice to participate. Therefore, **ensure before** arrival that...

- the task- and role division of all parties are on paper;
- the **resettlement plan** is fixed: a plan of the sponsor group that shows how the group will (in)directly help with the arrival and guidance of the newcomer;
- groups followed a start training about Samen Hier and what they can expect in the coming year;
- there has been a first acquaintance between the groups and social assistance;
- groups are informed about the local social facilities and practical matters (emphasise the financial situation);
- newcomers are extensively informed about Samen Hier and can make a well-considered choice to participate.

The groups and newcomers can also get to know each other virtually in the *pre-departure phase*.

4. Stimulate equality and agency

Community sponsorship takes place in the **context of power inequality**: the newcomer arrives in a new place of residence where they do not speak the language and have little contacts, therefore relying on others for information and other matters. The group offers support, although members are **not social workers, but fellow citizens** who, through their time and knowledge, informally maintain contact and establish networks. It requires a certain **balancing act** to prevent developing a dependent relationship and to ensure the agency of the newcomer.

Within the Samen Hier-start training there is attention on the topics of equality and agency. The contact person of supporting organisations can also keep the group mindful of this. Additionally, agency and equality are stimulated by:

- ensuring that the newcomer makes the choices that influence their life, such as how they furnish their home (by working with an in-between house);
- ensuring that the newcomer has voluntary contact with their sponsor group by offering the choice pre-departure as well as post-arrival. This requires an alternative when the newcomer does not want to proceed with the group;
- asking the groups to explicitly reflect in their resettlement on how they will guarantee equality;
- organise teambuilding and community activities in which the distinction between 'group' and 'newcomer' disappears or is reversed.

5. Support where necessary

Ensure that supervision by organisations and the municipality supports the initiative of the group and does not lead to the groups becoming 'volunteers for' the organisation. Groups are motivated to act as residents, not volunteers, which provides the foundation for equal relations that the groups and newcomers want to build. Where necessary, offer groups support to build such equal relations, make a difference with their network, stay positive and motivated and deal with cultural differences.

The standard **Samen Hier training curriculum** consists of a start training, a training intercultural sensitivity and an e-learning module 'impact with your network.' Justice & Peace is currently exploring the training on trauma sensitivity. In a minimal form, there is additional support from a **Community Builder** who is available as a contact person for questions and can help bridge linguistic and cultural differences.

Conclusion and recommendations

The results of the first Rotterdam Samen Hier pilot with community sponsorship for the resettlement of refugees are very promising. The newcomers, the Rotterdam sponsor groups and the involved partners (municipality, COA, VluchtelingenWerk, Rotterdam Verwelkomt Vluchtelingen) see additional value in this public-private community-based approach and the underlying collaboration. Residents of Rotterdam are prepared to invest a lot of time to ensure a newcomer's arrival. For the municipality and social partners, this offered a concrete solution to successfully receive resettled newcomers in their municipality, strengthen capacity in their city and effectively use and increase public support. With an available group, there is more flexibility and capacity for intensive support in the first months. Samen Hier is continuing its collaborations with partners and is recruiting new groups of Rotterdam residents for the arrival of three resettled families. The lessons learned from the pilot offer a foundation for this continuation.

The developed format of Samen Hier and the insights from the pilot offer the possibility to explore community sponsorship of resettled refugees in **other Dutch municipalities**. Through gained experience with Samen Hier in multiple local contexts, knowledge can quickly be shared through a **national network**.

Justice & Peace makes the following recommendations to municipalities:

- 1. Offer residents a concrete way to actively contribute to the reception and integration of refugees in their city through community sponsorship: use the existing support by giving active residents the opportunity to form a group and welcome a resettled refugee in their municipality.
- 2. Invest in decent preparation and guidance in collaboration with experts from civil society: shape the community sponsorship model as a public-private collaboration that makes use of the experience of civil society organisation and offers them an active role in all phases. Ensure that adjustment is possible based on interim evaluations with involved stakeholders. Sponsor groups can only fulfil their role when they are properly prepared, receive training and can count on support during the entire process.
- 3. Use a careful and multidimensional matching method to make a match between sponsor groups and newcomers, in which preferences and backgrounds of both sides are considered: This fosters the chance for durable contact and the chance that the newcomer can connect with the (social and professional) networks of the group. Use the expertise of Justice & Peace for this: we apply a flexible method based on international examples and experience gained in the Dutch context.

4. Place equality and agency at the heart of sponsorship programmes by guaranteeing that newcomers are well-informed beforehand, can make a well-considered choice and always have the option to stop participation without this affecting their right of residence and/or financial position.

Samen Hier in your municipality?

Interested in community sponsorship for resettled refugees? Justice & Peace offers municipalities, residents and civil society organisations Samen Hier manuals, advice and tailor-made support to develop a local approach. For more information about participating in the Samen Hier network, contact us at info@samenhier.nl

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Address

Samen Hier p/a Justice & Peace Riviervismarkt 4 2513 AM The Hague

Contact

info@samenhier.nl www.samenhier.nl +31 (0)70 763 14 99

initiative of

JUSTICE & PEACE.