



Summary Annual Report 2020

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Photo front page - Aziz from Eritrea with her neighbour Diana. Because of Aziz Diana became a volunteer with the Dutch Council for Refugees.

Who we are and what we do

The Dutch Council for Refugees is an independent organisation that advocates for the interests of asylum seekers and refugees. We are committed to ensuring fair treatment for these people who find themselves in a vulnerable position. They have fled their homes because of war, political violence, sexual orientation, background or religion.

We support refugees in their asylum procedure. If they are granted protection, we also support them in building a new life in the Netherlands. With an intricate network of locations, staff and volunteers throughout the country, the Dutch Council for Refugees is the only organisation in the Netherlands that assists refugees in all stages of their stay in the Netherlands. We are able to dedicate ourselves to refugees in the Netherlands thanks to the support of our donors, companies, funds, contributions from the National Postcode Lottery, government subsidies and contributions from municipalities.

Number of asylum seekers assisted during the asylum procedure



* This number is lower than in previous years because fewer asylum seekers came to the Netherlands

Number of refugees assisted in municipalities



*This number is lower than in previous years because fewer asylum seekers came to the Netherlands and because waiting times for the asylum procedure have increased.

Number of volunteers



In 2020...

- We assisted 50,000 asylum seekers with their asylum procedure;
- We had 12,500 volunteers supporting refugees;
- We supported 15 organisations in Greece, Italy, Croatia, Spain, Curaçao and the Western Balkans in improving the situation for refugees there;
- Our five regional foundations operated in 80% of all municipalities, and we assisted 62,000 refugees there with their civic integration process;
- We started nearly 2,800 family reunification applications and assisted thousands of other refugees with their pending applications;
- Our Helpdesk handled nearly 6,100 queries.

Our services for refugees

The Dutch Council for Refugees assists asylum seekers during their asylum procedure and helps refugees in municipalities to become independent in society. We also run projects for employment, financial independence and return migration, and we provide civic integration courses.

Volunteers are the heart of our work

Our dedicated volunteers offer personal support to refugees as they build their new lives in the Netherlands. They are trained in-house so they can advise and assist refugees during this uncertain time in their lives.

The Covid measures require additional flexibility, a solution-oriented approach and persistence from our volunteers. Their efforts made an even bigger difference for refugees in 2020.

Results

- 👍 12,500 volunteers dedicated themselves to personally assisting refugees in the Netherlands.



Family reunification – Muhamad was reunited with his wife and two young sons from Yemen after almost two years. 'My dream was that we would be safe and together again. We are now. Now I dream that one day I will be a doctor again.'

Information and advice about the asylum procedure

Almost all asylum seekers applying for asylum in the Netherlands are advised and assisted by volunteers from the Dutch Council for Refugees during their procedure. Our volunteers also analyse refugee claims and, in some cases, attend hearings with the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). During the asylum procedure, asylum seekers can turn to us with (legal) questions and for a listening ear. Due to the Covid pandemic, meetings and information sessions were often held online or remotely.

Results

👍 We assisted 50,000 asylum seekers in their asylum procedure.

Family reunification assistance

Refugees who are separated from their families because they fled their country have the right to family reunification. The Dutch Council for Refugees assists them in the often-complicated procedure that precedes reunification.

Results

👍 We started close to 2,800 applications for family reunification and supported many refugees with family reunification applications submitted in previous years.

Social support

We provide social support to refugees in 80% of Dutch municipalities. Our volunteers help refugees find their way in the community, assist them with their paperwork, and help them find the right healthcare and education. Our volunteers also play a vital role in identifying and referring in case of psychosocial problems and war trauma. All this helps refugees make a good start in the Netherlands.

Results

👍 We assisted 62,000 refugees in 286 municipalities.

Civic integration

The Dutch Council for Refugees offers civic integration programmes throughout the country. We do this so there is good access within short travel distance for refugees everywhere, and sometimes at the request of municipalities. The temporary restriction on in-class lessons due to Covid had far-reaching consequences, as not every refugee has sufficient digital skills and equipment to attend online classes. Extra volunteer efforts have kept the (partially) digital lessons accessible to everyone.

Results

👍 Nearly 3,100 refugees took a civic integration course with the Dutch Council for Refugees.

Emergency fund as a last safety net

The Emergency Fund of the Dutch Council for Refugees provides a last financial safety net for refugees. The (travel) costs of family reunification, for example, are a problem for some individuals. Expensive loans can create financial difficulties for them, and a contribution from the Emergency Fund can prevent that from happening. A refugee can apply to the fund in consultation with our staff. Most contributions are for ticket expenses for family reunification. There are also contributions to the cost of residence permits and for special needs, among other things. In December, we launched a successful crowdfunding campaign to help more refugees reunite with their families.

Resultaat

👍 Our crowdfunding campaign in December raised nearly € 150,000. This allowed us to facilitate about 150 family reunions.

Towards employment for refugees

Finding a paid job is a major step towards independence for refugees, yet they often face limited access to the labour market. Covid has also hit refugees even harder in this area. Many of them start at the bottom of the labour market in the kind of work that is quickly cut back on in times of crisis. Nevertheless, we also prepared refugees for the labour market in 2020.

Results

👍 In 2020, we assisted nearly 1,000 refugees in their steps towards or into the labour market. We worked together with 126 employers to provide work experience for refugees.



Bicycle mechanic – Mahmood from Iran works as a bicycle mechanic in North Holland. Store owner Sander Roest is one of the employers we partner with to provide refugees with work experience.

Sharing knowledge

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

Helpdesk support

In 2020, our Helpdesk experts handled 6,088 queries from lawyers, staff and volunteers. That's less than 2019, when we handled 7,722 queries. This lower number can be explained by fewer people applying for asylum in 2020.

Results

We handled 6,088 queries, of which:

- 👍 1,693 were about the asylum procedure
- 👍 2,376 were about countries of origin
- 👍 2,019 were about integration or family reunification

Training for asylum lawyers

We support asylum lawyers, staff and volunteers not only through our Help Desk, but also with our *VluchtWeb* online knowledge base. We also discuss and clarify case law in *UPdate*, a digital newsletter published every two weeks.

Additionally we organise meetings for lawyers and provide theme-specific expert sessions. Due to Covid measures, these were held online in 2020.

Results

- 👍 Our support and training help asylum lawyers, staff and volunteers increase their knowledge so they can better represent the interests of their clients.



Helpdesk – The asylum procedure is complicated. That is why we have a Helpdesk: so our volunteers and paid staff have someone to contact with all their questions. Here, a Dutch Council for Refugees staff member explains what awaits this asylum seeker.

Defending refugees

The Dutch Council for Refugees advocates for the interests of refugees and their families. We do this by consulting with ministries, lobbying parliament, conducting our own research, contacting the media and mobilising our supporters.

Long waiting times

As in previous years, asylum seekers in 2020 sometimes waited over a year and a half for their asylum procedure to start. The waiting is disastrous for their resilience. We use means such as an email campaign to draw attention to the problem. Under pressure from the House of Representatives and the Dutch Council for Refugees, the government set up a special task force to resolve waiting times. Unfortunately, 7,000 of the 15,000 asylum applications were extended into the new year.

Results

- 👍 Through our email campaign, more than 10,000 Dutch citizens urged the House of Representatives to put an end to long waiting times.



Petition for Moria refugees –Close to Dutch parliament in The Hague we placed 500 empty chairs to symbolise the 500 children who were not welcome here as far as the cabinet was concerned. In front, our #500children petition is presented to several members of parliament.

Refugee children in Greece

Together with Defence for Children and the Refugee Foundation, we launched the #500children campaign. The campaign appealed to the government to take in over 500 unaccompanied children from the Greek camps. The campaign struck a sympathetic chord. Over 100,000 Dutch citizens signed the petition. Churches, doctors, party promoters and well-known Dutch celebrities also made their voices heard. More than half of Dutch municipalities supported our appeal. But we failed. The cabinet presented a disappointing compromise: 100 refugees from Greece were allowed to come to the Netherlands, but this came at the cost of the same number of invited refugees.

Results

👍 106,160 individuals and 184 Dutch municipalities supported our campaign.

Legal aid remains in place

Since the start of its coalition period, the government has wanted to abolish asylum seekers' rights to legal aid. The proposal was even recorded in the coalition agreement. This legal aid is necessary for a careful asylum procedure and to check decisions made by the IND. We warned before and behind the scenes about the consequences, and we were relieved when the cabinet abandoned this proposal in April 2020.

Results

👍 Asylum seekers retain the right to legal aid from the start of their asylum procedure.

Strategic litigation

When asylum law negatively affects a large group of refugees, our strategic litigation committee submits the case to the highest Dutch or European court. In 2020, we successfully supported several court cases, including those of two refugee families who had been living in detention on the Hungarian border for more than a year and a half. We did this together with the Hungarian human rights organisation Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC).

Results

- 👍 Hungary may no longer detain refugees at the border. The detention of the two families as well as that of 300 other refugees was immediately lifted.

International solidarity

We also advocate for the protection and civic integration of asylum seekers and refugees at a European level. We work together with umbrella organisation the European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) to raise awareness for the degrading conditions, lack of basic necessities, pushbacks and violence at the borders of Europe. We support local organisations in Greece, Italy, Croatia, Spain and in Curacao and the Western Balkans. This enables them to professionalise and expand their work in helping boat people, combating border detention and supporting volunteers, among other activities.

Results

- 👍 Hundreds of refugees and unaccompanied minors in Greece received legal assistance during their asylum procedures and support during the Covid crisis.
- 👍 Venezuelan refugees in Curaçao received information about the asylum procedure.
- 👍 Our STEP UP Fund helped eight organisations in Italy, Croatia and Spain to improve the situation for refugees there.



This Afghan woman reached the Greek island of Lesbos after a horrific journey with her husband, daughter and infant son. But the island brought none of the peace and relief they so desperately needed. 'When we saw all those tents on our first day, all we could do was cry.'

Compassion for refugees

The Dutch Council for Refugees is committed to increasing social support for refugees in society through initiatives, campaigns, information and (digital) encounters. A better understanding for refugees makes it easier for them to participate in our society.

Campaign: *Niemand vlucht vrijwillig* (Nobody flees voluntarily)

In 2020, the Netherlands marked 75 years of freedom, a special anniversary. Through our campaign *Niemand vlucht vrijwillig*, we connected the stories of refugees in the past with those of the present, and we raised awareness of the millions of people fleeing their homes today. Due to the Covid measures, many activities could not go ahead. However, we did air a TV ad and we ran the campaign exclusively online.

Results

- 👍 15,000 people visited our website to read stories of refugees past and present.
- 👍 Our TV ad reached 4 million people.



Help across the borders – The situation on the Greek islands in 2020 worsened by the day. Covid made the situation in Greek refugee camps even more intolerable than it already was, and there was barely any way to curb the virus in the camps. Catastrophe was on the horizon.

Bekend maakt Bemind (Familiarity breeds compassion)

Our education and exchange project *Bekend maakt Bemind* offers schools, companies, associations and churches the opportunity to invite a refugee and volunteer to speak. During the education session, the refugee tells their own story: what it was like to flee their country and build a new life in the Netherlands. This low-threshold interaction increases understanding for refugees in society.

Results

- 👍 We held 251 education sessions. Due to Covid measures, some of these sessions were held online.

Social media

We shared personal refugee stories, news, background information and facts through our social media channels. This allows us to digitally introduce followers to refugees and clarify the sometimes overheated debates about refugees.

Resultaat

- 👍 We now have 119,163 followers on social media.



64,927



31,031



16,397



3,328



3,480

Support for refugees

The Dutch Council for Refugees can commit to helping refugees in the Netherlands thanks to the support from our donors, companies, funds, contributions from the National Postcode Lottery, government subsidies and contributions from municipalities.

Results

- 👍 In 2020, we received €7,490,000 from our 76,000 donors, an increase of 14% compared to 2019.
- 👍 The Dutch National Postcode Lottery has committed to contributing €10 million each year for the next five years. This will allow us to continue and expand our work for refugees.
- 👍 We also received support from several funds in 2020. We received a total of €3.3 million from Oranjefonds, Adessium, Rabo Foundation, Dioraphte and the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).
- 👍 In 2020, we received nearly €9.9 million in grants from various ministries. These funded activities such as our work with asylum seekers in reception centres, interpreter services, and training and coaching volunteers and employees who support refugees in their civic integration process.

Number of donors



Income from our own fundraising



Colophon

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<i>Photography</i>	Goedele Monnens (cover, page 6, 10, 12) Frank Jansen (page 14) Sayed Ahmadzia Ebrahimi (page 17, 19)

**The Dutch Council for Refugees stands up for
the rights of refugees and helps them build new
lives in the Netherlands.**



PO Box 2894
1000 CW Amsterdam
T +31 (0)20 346 7200
info@vluchtelingenwerk.nl
www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl

