

EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Netherlands

1 INTRODUCTION

Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

Although since 1991, the government has been talking about the 'participation society', it was in 2013 that for the first time 'the participation or the do society' was presented to the Dutch citizens as the official government policy (in contrast to the welfare state).

2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES:

Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.

The 2015 law on Citizen participation, active citizenship and civic initiatives (Wet Maatschappelijk ontwikkeling -WMO) obliges municipal governments to indicate which measures they take to support and facilitate the work of volunteers. Municipal governments are also obliged to develop the city's volunteer policies in cooperation with the community (local organisations, volunteer centres and representatives of those who are being taken care of or helped by volunteers). Volunteer centres (in mostly bigger municipalities) are financed by local governments. The umbrella organisation of all volunteer centres and organisations in the Netherlands, NOV, has around 350 members scattered throughout the country. Each (big) city has its own volunteer centre (vrijwilligerscentrales).

With the introduction of the 'participation society', the Netherlands has experienced a growth of citizen's initiatives. Some big, but mostly small initiatives, often concentrating their efforts in a small area such as a neighbourhood have emerged. This explosion of initiatives also means that many (informal) organisations, alliances, collaborations have disappeared.



But not all initiatives are new!

In 2007, the Dutch Institute for Social Research (SCP) compiled (local level) initiatives and measures to promote contacts between immigrants and native Dutch. At least 400 initiatives were found. In many cases, these organised multicultural festivals or similar local events. However, at the time, there seemed to be just few initiatives that tried to create long-term ties between migrants and native Dutch. The study¹ also suggested that initiatives and measures based on shared or common interests, such as mentoring projects, language lessons, sports activities, culinary experiences or gardening, had the highest likelihood of success. As immigrants and native Dutch frequently come in contact at schools and community centres, initiatives around the upbringing and education of children are also a good basis for mid- and long-term contact between the groups. In other cases, a proactive approach is required, such as house-to-house visits.

Language and education

1. Vluchtelingenwerk

This NGO is one of the biggest NGO's in the Netherlands that helps newcomers, specially refugees, in their integration process in the Netherlands. One of their main activities is providing Dutch lessons. They use a combined force of (permanent) employees and volunteers. In 2014, they worked with 7,516 volunteers, in addition to their 663 permanent employees. Vluchtelingenwerk receives financial support from the national government; around 53 million euros per year².

Statistics from:

2. Taal doet meer

With its 500 volunteers per year, Taal doet meer (Language does more) helps new inhabitants of Utrecht participate in the society by learning the Dutch language. Voluntary coaches offer language coaching to individuals whose mother tongue is not Dutch. They also help foreigners become active agents of their integration. In 2014, Language does more had a budget of €661,498, funded by the city of Utrecht, corporate sponsorships and private donations. These means financed a variety of projects:

With the initiative **Taal op School** (language at school), pupils at risk of leaving basic education get extra help in their first year of junior high school. With **Taal en Gezondheid** (language and health), refugees and migrants from Utrecht who have health issues are accompanied in Dutch. Coaches combine language classes with information about health, illness and care. Without Dutch, it is difficult to visit a doctor independently, understanding written information about medicine or discuss personal health. The initiative **Live and Learn** (L & L), in partnership with the Library of Utrecht, the Foundation Reading and Writing, Digital Point, Mira Media, is meant for individuals with low literacy, low-skilled migrants and elderly people. For this target group, the increasing digitisation of society makes it increasingly difficult to participate in daily life activities. Life and Learning helps them acquire digital skills as well as maintain basic skills such as the Dutch language, math, etc.

3. Het begint met taal

This is the national umbrella organisation for volunteers who teach Dutch to foreigners. Since 2014, Het begint met taal (it starts with language) supports organisations and language teachers and coaches with material, training, expertise, advice and information. The organisation also brings coaches (offer) and foreigners (demand) together. With about 8,000 volunteers, it reaches approximately 12,5000 foreigners each year through local organisations.

¹ http://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Alle_publicaties/Publicaties_2007/Interventies_voor_integratie/Persbericht_Interventies_voor_integratie

² <http://nieuws.tpo.nl/2015/10/05/vluchtelingenwerk-nederland-sjoemelt-met-miljoenen-en-verstoort-marktwerking/>

4. LeesPaleis de Pupillen

LeesPaleis de Pupillen (Reading palace the Pupils) is a neighbourhood initiative in the Rotterdam district Delfshaven. It aims to reduce language deficiencies of children and youth. At the same time, it focuses on preventing isolation of vulnerable people through involvement in the neighbourhood. After the closure of the local library, the inhabitants of the area wanted a reading place: an accessible facility, run by volunteers, with activities such as reading sessions for children and elderly, a story corner where children can get creative, book exchange afternoons, language and computer lessons, etc. An association of Moroccan fathers now runs the Reading Palace with a vibrant set of activities for children (homework, football and other sports), adults (meeting, information, thematic meetings) and residents in general (a neighbourhood vegetable patch). The board consists of young students of mainly Moroccan origin. The Orange Foundation supported this initiative in 2015 with a contribution of € 30,000³.

5. Samenspraak voor anderstaligen

Samenspraak voor anderstaligen is an initiative by the foundation Welzijn Castricum, which works with residents to improve the living environment everywhere in Castricum. The 400 volunteers of the foundation and professionals help answer residents' questions and develop a wide range of services and activities that improve the well-being of the inhabitants. The Language working-group 'Samenspraak voor anderstaligen' (Consultation for foreign-language speakers) consists of volunteers who help foreigners familiarise with Dutch. This takes place in an informal atmosphere, after the tandems have reached agreement about the details of the language support.

6. Stichting 'me & society': Rotterdam mothers for each other

Foundation 'me & Society' brings together 40 Rotterdam's mothers of children with disabilities together. 20 mothers who speak Dutch well are linked to 20 mothers who do not speak (sufficient) Dutch or who are illiterate. The latter group of mothers are often foreigners or naturalised Dutch. Together, they explore better ways of accessing the health care and learn to have time for themselves, as looking for a child with disabilities can take up most of their time. Mothers who are language volunteers receive training from the Foundation Lezen en Schrijven (Reading and Writing). During 12 weeks, tandems come together once a week for their language activities and to 'have fun' together. The initiative is organised in cooperation with the City of Rotterdam, the Foundation Reading and Writing, and De Piloot.

7. Stichting Meetingz Unlimited!

Foundation Meetingz Unlimited! in the city of Haarlem wants to improve the quality of life in the Haarlem district of Schalkwijk. This is done by developing a sustainable educational community of (migrant) parents and youth. Parents from the district develop their own agenda to discuss any education matters they would like to address. They, thereby, define the moment and theme for interaction with educational institutions. Parents and youth also support each other: Dutch learning fellowship. The goal is to reach at least 100 parents in two years (2015-17) and to achieve sustainable cooperation with at least three organizations or institutions in the district. The Orange Foundation supports these activities with a contribution of € 40,000, during a period of two years⁴.

³ <http://www.oranjefonds.nl/project/vereniging-marokkaanse-vadergroep-nieuwe-westen-rotterdam-0>

⁴ <http://www.oranjefonds.nl/project/stichting-meetingz-unlimited-haarlem>

Access to the labour market

1. [K!X](#)

K!X wants to help youngsters (with a migrant background) prepare for the labour market during their vocational education training. Youngsters form a K!X-team with other students in their school. In these teams, they organise activities and training that will empower them and help them network. They visit companies to connect with potential employers. Indirectly, K!X combats stereotypes employers might have about potential migrant employees and vice versa.

K!X has existed, in a different form, since 2002. Each year, around 50 schools with 5000 youngsters participate in K!X throughout the Netherlands. However, the main K!X activities are concentrated in the Randstad (West Netherlands) where most migrant youngsters live, go to school and will probably work in the future. K!X is now embedded in Movisie, an important Dutch NGO working on the integration and participation field. The organisation is funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and around 70 companies participate as volunteers.

2. [The other network](#)

“The Other Network” (TON) exists since 2004. TON is an organisation that brings together multicultural professionals, specialists and entrepreneurs. In an informal setting, these individuals get to know each other, and network to access potential business partners and clients. Aside from the meetings, “invitation only” monthly dinners and a yearly award for 'the [other businessman of the year](#)' are organised. In ten years' time, TON has reached over 500– 800 multicultural professionals and over 10.000 ethnic young professionals who are looking for role models. TON is financed by Foundations, membership fees and corporate sponsors.

3. [Foundation 'me & Society'](#)

Foundation 'me and society', in partnership with a number of social institutions and funders, train and assist newcomers in the Netherlands create their own companies.

Discrimination and access to Justice

1. [Vreemdelingenrecht blog](#)

This blog provides information on Dutch immigration law, foreigners in the Netherlands, residence permits, asylum seekers, recognised refugees, skilled migrants, integration, family reunification, language analysis, visa, human rights, etc. Other information, such as (international) vacancies for lawyers, or questions and debates on Dutch immigration can be found here. This blog is the initiative (and is maintained by) Mrs Wytzia Raspe (Lawyer, Leiden University), an immigration specialist with over 15 years' experience in the legal profession.

2. [Collective Against Islamophobia and discrimination](#)

The Collective Against Islamophobia and discrimination is a very active project of the Foundation EMCEMO (Euro-Mediterranean Centrum Migratie en Ontwikkeling). It brings different individuals and (migrant) organisations together to take action against Islamophobia and discrimination. In addition, they developed a complaints-point where every victim of discrimination or islamophobia can file complaint. They also provide a weekly free consultation hour when migrants can ask questions and seek advise on how to access social benefits, for example.



Well-being

1. Stichting De vrolijkheid

The National Foundation for the Promotion of Happiness (“the Happiness”) is a multicultural, not-for-profit network of artists, actors and volunteers who invest in children and teenagers in asylum centres. The Happiness organises creative activities - music, sculpture, theatre, and games - on a regular basis in 30 centres in the Netherlands. The Happiness is an independent organisation supported by individuals and private funding.

2. Kerk in Actie

Church in Action has various programmes for asylum seekers living in centres. In The Hague, children from asylum centres are welcomed in the Kinderwinkel (children's store) for sports, games, music or to speak to someone who will listening to them. Kerk in Actie also works with Stichting De Vrolijkheid. It is a private organisation funded by donations given by members of the Protestant church. In addition, individuals are encouraged to donate directly to the foundation.

3. TalenTonen

TalenTonen Foundation is located in the Kanaleneiland district of the city of Utrecht. This district is home to people from a multitude of countries and religions. TalenTonen aims to help immigrants and refugees, who are less self-reliant, find their way in the Dutch society. It encourages them to actively participate and, most importantly, to discover and nurture their talents. TalenTonen is a small organisation created in 2007 which consists of socio-culturally diverse professionals, volunteers, trainees and experts with a high level of education. The foundation depends on grants and donations; although for years, they ‘have used their own financial resources’. One of their projects, **Youth in balance**, supports the second or third generation Moroccan youth (about 18 to 21 years) who feel isolated and have indicated the desire to have more contacts with the Dutch native population.

4. Foundation Secret Garden

Foundation Secret Garden (Amsterdam) promotes dialogue about homosexuality and bisexuality within the Muslim community, through information sessions and consultations. Volunteers are trained to organise activities that attract the target group. An active group of volunteers have ties with the Amsterdam organisation for homosexual persons (COC). The Orange Foundation supported the Foundation Secret Garden in 2008 with € 30,000.

5. Wilskracht Werkt

Wilskracht Werkt (Willpower Works) is a social initiative organised through residents’ support. Wilskracht Works acts as a link between volunteers and those who need assistance (often of foreign origin) ‘with their home administration, language skills development and cycling lessons.’ Will Roode, a nurse, founded the organisation in 2007.

Media

1. Voorbeeldallochtoon

Voorbeeld-Allochtoon (Alien role model) is a media platform for writers and columnists with multicultural background. It has 8 migrant writers and 2 editors trying to change the perception of migrants in the Netherlands, as well as **13,000+ Facebook fans**. Voorbeeld Allochtoon has no income and no expenses, and it is solely run on volunteers.



2. [We blijven hier](#)

(We'll stay here) is a foundation that has produced an online stage wherein the stories, opinions and views of a diverse group of Dutch (mostly Muslims) are placed. This online platform allows them to take a proactive role in the public debate.

3. [Republiek Allochtonie](#)

Republic Allochtonie is the initiative of an individual, Ewoud Butter. This online platform presents different articles, opinions and background dossiers on integration and being Dutch of migrant origin. The platform is maintained thanks to volunteers, without subsidies. Individuals are welcome to make contributions.

4. [Nieuw W!J](#)

Just like voorbeeld allochtoon, we blijven hier and Republiek allochtonie, Nieuw W!J (new 'us') is an online platform for individuals with diverse (ethnic and religious) backgrounds. At least 17 different writers present their views in this online platform. The mission of Nieuw Wij is to bring differences to light but seek connections between these differences. It is financed mostly by private organisations, such as churches and other religious organisations. In addition, individuals are welcome to donate directly.

3 NEW VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.

Language and education

Although new initiatives have emerged, the trend most noticeable trend is that some municipalities have increased funds for existing initiatives that support integration efforts of the newcomers. For instance, Rheden has freed 50,000 euros to support initiatives that contribute to a rapid integration of refugees and other residence-permit holders. Civil society organisations that help newcomers (or their children) in need of education, day care and assistance in finding work can request this financial support. In Apeldoorn, a group of volunteers asked Syrian refugees to work side-by-side with them on the public green spaces. In Arnhem, the group ['Arnhem for Refugees'](#) is striving to bring together all offers of help to refugees.

Access to the labour market

1. [K!X for refugees](#)

Between October 2015 and December 2018, K!X will also be available for refugees with a residence permit. This was made possible through the AMIF funds.

2. [New Dutch Connections](#)

New Dutch Connections in Utrecht, is an organisation that brings newcomers and Dutch native people together to create new perspectives and methods for a successful multicultural and multireligious society. 'Ondernemen in je Eigen Toekomst' (Become an Entrepreneur in Your Own Future) inspires and motivates refugees to believe in themselves and to involve others in pursuing their dreams. They mobilise people and companies, and create a community that supports and empowers refugees. The organisation has just started a coaching-support programme for refugees in various areas in the Netherlands, including Overberg, Deventer en Drachten.

Asylum seekers aged 15-25 years old will be coached by buddies (aged 18-25 years) to set up a network in their localities and help them use their network. Using individual conversations or undertaking visits to companies that offer workshops, the buddies help young asylum seekers step by step towards their future. The organisation is financially supported by Fonds21, VSB fonds, Orange Fonds, kinderpostzegels and European funds.

Social Services

The Netherlands saw an explosion of voluntary initiatives to collect winter clothes for the recently arrived refugees (or those still making the trip). Interestingly, some initiatives have been more entrepreneurial than others. Owners of cafés, bars and clubs in the city of Tilburg have collected the forgotten (longer than 3 months) winter coats, jackets, sweaters, etc. and donate these to refugees through the Red Cross. A WhatsApp group has also been created to disseminate information about the initiative and anyone who would like to donate (their old) winter clothes, may do so.

Apart from these humanitarian initiatives, others have emerged in the field of integration.

1. Ruimte om the women

The website allows those seeking housing, owners of buildings, investors and authorities to reach to and inform each other about existing buildings that can be (transformed and) used as (temporary) homes for refugees. The financial crisis of the past years has meant that many (office) buildings have become empty. These are now being transformed into (self-sufficient) living spaces for refugees and sometimes other people seeking housing. This website is an initiative of the Wijkplaats, in collaboration with Bouwstenen voor Sociaal, Opnieuw Thuis, the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), Aedes housing associations and the MOgroep.

2. U voor Vluchtelingen

This website launched in October 2015 serves as an umbrella website for all refugee-related initiatives in the city of Utrecht. Everyone (refugee, organisation and individual) can find information in how to get help or how to provide it.

3. Refugee Buddy App

This is an awareness app for migrants giving information about asylum, residence and facilities such as supermarkets and mosques. The Dutch app also provides information on traffic, transportation, medical facilities and the Dutch culture. Available since November in Arabic, Tigrigna, French and English, the app is an initiative of the Red Cross, in cooperation with the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), Netherlands' Refugees and migrants themselves. The app previously existed in other countries, such as the InfoAid in Hungary or the WelcomeApp in Germany.

4. Children's books for refugees

The Amsterdam Public Library (OBA) is compiling a selection of children's books for refugee children. They have invited the broad public (everyone in the Netherlands) to donate children's books with a personal message within these for refugee children. The OBA will also open 3 pop-up libraries where these books can be brought to and read.

5. Couples project in Breda

The (Global Centre Breda) 'Mondiaal Centrum Breda (MCB) has started a couples project to help refugees integrate into the society. Refugees are paired to Breda citizens, individuals or families. The refugee gets an insight into the Dutch way of life through a weekly meeting of approximately two hours.

4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.

Long-standing initiatives were designed as help from the receiving community to the newcomers; where the receiving community was often composed of native Dutch volunteers. The new initiatives have mobilised Dutch native volunteers as well as a larger number of volunteers with a migrant background.

5 INNOVATION ASPECT

Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.

Most of the newer initiatives have used comparatively similar strategies as in the past. The huge number of old and new initiatives makes it difficult to make a concrete and factual statement on the differences between these. The big emergency organisations such as the Red Cross, vluchtelingenwerk, COA, etc. have been the main organisations to receive voluntary support. These have also worked as the main avenues for collection of goods, materials, (extra) money, etc. But new initiatives have caught most media (and public) attention thanks to their entrepreneurial and technical aspects.

6 ADDED VALUE

Description of the added value of such initiatives (both long-established and new), including the uniqueness of their activities compared to the existing practices of the (1) state and (2) NGOs.

The Dutch government's policy makes it mandatory to provide shelter with adequate utilities for a dignified (temporary) reception during the asylum procedures. This policy is called 'bed, bath and bread' (bed, bad en brood). The government is also responsible for providing permanent housing, after the granting of a residence permit. While these policies are made at the national level, they are implemented at the local level.

As stated above, Vluchtelingenwerk receives a bit more than 50 million euros per year to help refugees with a residence permit learn Dutch and integrate in the Dutch society. A high number of other non-governmental initiatives show that:

1. many people want to support newcomers;
2. the support provided by big NGOs (financed by the state) are insufficient in meeting the needs of all those who arrive in the Netherlands:
 - a. Not all newcomers are refugees, therefore the work of Vluchtelingenwerk does not reach them. Other initiatives help these groups pass their civic integration exam, achieve the level of Dutch required to get a job, access social services, etc.
 - b. Most but not all refugees are supported by vluchtelingenwerk, as their offer is sometimes not sufficient: for certain individuals, additional (Dutch) schooling or specific support can be needed;
3. more support is needed for niche groups even many years after arrival.

At the moment, the clearest added-value of citizen's initiatives is their capacity of rapidly mobilising a high number of people through the use of technologies such as Facebook and or apps, but also to look for financing and resources where there is abundance.



Having said that, one should not overlook the fact that many voluntary initiatives are supported by local voluntary centres that promote the initiatives and actively match initiatives to volunteers.

7 IMPACT

Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.

Given the unavailability of evaluations, it is difficult to define the impact of these initiatives. Some, such as LeesPaleis de Pupillen, have proven to be successful, at least in the short-term. Other initiatives such as Live and Learn (L & L) or Taal doet meer have received prizes, which provides an indication of their success (and impact).

Some others have, due to their uncoordinated nature or the fact that they were not thought through, have proven unsuccessful. For instance, on two different instances, the refugee [centre in Assen did not accept food, nor clothes donated by a town's initiative and individuals respectively.](#)

Due to the great amount of public support and willingness to help asylum seekers, the COA had to ask citizens through national television to stop bringing or donating goods without contacting the COA first. Another example of mixed success was one of the initiatives mentioned in the TV programme 'Gimme shelter' where a woman who asked shoe stores to donate new merchandise (tennis shoes) for asylum seekers in Calais filmed the distributed the collected shoes despite asylum seekers requesting her not to.

8 ANNEX

Additional sources on volunteering in the Netherlands:

1. <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4500/Politiek/article/detail/4142505/2015/09/15/De-participatiesamenleving-wat-is-daar-al-zichtbaar-van.dhtml>
2. <http://www.socialevraagstukken.nl/site/2014/09/07/kunnen-we-dat-niet-aan-vrijwilligers-over-laten-2/>
3. <http://www.socialevraagstukken.nl/site/dossiers/participatiesamenleving/>
4. <https://vrijwilligerswerk.nl/organiseren/overheidsbeleid>
5. https://www.movisie.nl/sites/default/files/alfresco_files/Danken%20succesvolle%20allochtonen%20hun%20succes%20aan%20vrijwilligerswerk%20%5BMOV-517039-0.1%5D.pdf
6. <http://www.binnenlandsbestuur.nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/nieuws/integratie-vluchteling-vooral-lokale-uitdaging.9496009.lynkx>