

Report of exchange programme in The Netherlands



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INTRODUCTION

The Minister of Integration and Aliens affairs is in charge of the policy of immigration in Netherlands throughout the Justice Department.

The IND (Immigration and Naturalization Service) is an agency within the Justice Department and is responsible for the legal procedures regarding asylum seekers in the Netherlands.

COA is the reception organization. Asylum seekers start their procedures in an Application Centre (AC), and within 48 hours people are screened to determine if they have access to the Dutch asylum procedure. If the asylum seeker does not have access then they are placed on the street, out of COA's care and asked to leave the country in 24hrs.

People with refugee status or permit to stay are finally housed in the municipalities after their initial stay in an orientation and integration location. People that receive a negative or final negative decision are transferred to an orientation or a return location.

COA has a very flexible system. It has the ability to expand and contract the amount of accommodation available to the service user, depending on demand. This is because COA can negotiate with municipalities about establishing reception centers.

INITIAL RECEPTION

This centre is where the asylum seekers first arrive (**initial reception**). This centre is only for people who arrive by the port or overland. There is another centre for people whom arrive by the airport (Schiphol).

This is an IND property and they first report to the AC to say they wish to claim asylum. At the AC they take the initial information from the asylum seeker. They are then sent to the TNV center in Ter Apel. This is temporary accommodation while awaiting the reporting interview at the AC. This wait can be between 3-8 weeks in the TNV centre. The site is owned by IND however COA staff it.

If people arrive at the weekend they are admitted for accommodation in the TNV, but they are unable to make an appointment in the AC until Monday (8am).

Whilst accommodated at the centre the Asylum seeker will be given an information pack. This will state that what is expected of them whilst they are there. (House Rules). It will include time for appointments (eg, Tuberculose Control, AC and Medical screening).

This pack also informs them that there is a penalty system in place, and they will be sanctioned for any infraction of the rules. If they fail to attend these appointments, then they can be fined or even removed from the centre.

The Penalty System is legally approved and comes from the Ministry of Justice. It has a Sliding scale which increases in line with the severity of the infraction. There are Eleven stages to the system, Starting with financial clauses to time of the centre, and finally total exclusion from COA accommodation. The Asylum seeker can appeal against the penalty and if upheld, the decision can be overturned.

MEDICAL SCREENING

Medical services

All the medical services in the Netherlands available to Asylum seekers seem to be uniform in design. I feel that this is good practice, as the service user move from centre to centre, and this promotes confidence through a familiar medical system. All medical costs are covered by Health insurance. This is paid for by COA, and then recovered from Ministry of Healthcare. (Tax payers).

Medical procedure

The refugee will be given a time to see the nurse for a full medical questionnaire. They will have a translator on the telephone to help with completion of the form. A medical will be set up for every refugee, and the nurse will take blood pressure, weight, pulse and speak about any past or present medical worries. This procedure will take about 1 hour. The nurse then refers about 80% of the patients to the Social Doctor.

The Social Doctor will do a full medical screening. This also will take about 1 hour. The Doctors main role is with preventive medication and looks at things in a very proactive manner. If they discover that the refugee needs further medical attention, then the patient is sent for an appointment with the Family Doctor. This Doctor will then make the referral to the required specialist. I was informed that it would take about 2 weeks for an appointment with the specialist.

At the centres they also have House Doctors. They come to the centre twice a week (for 6hrs). Their role is to cover the general health needs. (Minor ailments)
If any of the refugees require medication, then they are giving a prescription. This can be collected daily (Monday- Friday) when the Pharmacy van comes to the centre.

Doctors and Dentist

If the refugee needs emergency dental or optical services then the nurse at the initial appointment can take care of this problem.

The Opticians are on a private basis. The initial eye check is free and medical insurance will pay for any optical aids that may be required.

The Dentist is also on a private basis and covered by medical insurance. If emergency treatment is required it will be done as soon as possible. But any other treatment will be given a follow up appointment at a later date.

Tuberculoses control

All refugees are screened for Tuberculosis. They are given an appointment card that will state the time and date that they must attend the clinic. They go to the council health center by bus. (If they refuse to attend screening, then their financial allowance is withdrawn). When they arrive, the patient will be x-rayed. This will give an immediate diagnosis. If they have the infection then they are isolated for up to two weeks, (when the infection is open TB) and

given very strong medication (It will be 6-9 months for TB to totally clear). Whilst in hospital the patients are also monitored for problems with eyes and liver, as TB also affects these areas. After two weeks they should be given the all clear to rejoin their peers in the center. All COA staff is given the option to have annually TB tests. They are given the Mantoux blood test, and the results are ready in 3 days.

Mental health needs

At all the centres they have the facility to access mental health services. At the return centres I feel this is an imperative service. The refugees here seemed to be very subdued and resigned to fact they could be returning at any stage. This was a fact pointed out by the COA staff on the centre. At the Orientation centre they have two Psychologists that come twice a week for two hours. They run self-help classes for the refugees. The classes consist of 10- 15 people and they try to give the refugees the mental skills to deal with their daily stresses. (One of the Psychologists is an ex-asylum seeker). At the Minors centre they have a system that allows the Guardian, Coach (key worker), and the mental health officer to have a meeting. This happens every two weeks to look at the mental health needs of the children in the care. (Good practice).

Sexual health

At the Orientation centre they have a sexual health nurse that visits twice a week, but she can be called out in an emergency. She gives sexual health talks and information. Condoms are available from the medical centre and the security office, free of charge.

Drug problems

Groups are run on a voluntary basis. A refugee can request help and the doctor will provide this support. If the drug problem leads to criminal behavior then it is no longer voluntary and the refugee can be placed in rehab unit.

Disabled facilities

All the centres I visited seemed to an adequate disabled facilities can only says this from an able bodied position. They have separate accommodation with wheel chair access, showers and toilets. In some of the centres I feel that the needs of the disabled was a reactive response, rather than being proactive. In the Minors centre they have no accommodation for disabled children, and they must be accommodated in the adult section. (Bad practice). This is now being re-addressed with small units being set up to accommodate children with special needs. (I hope this accommodation is set up for disabled access).

The COA has access to medical healthcare, and is able to obtain funding for disabled equipment such as walking frames and electrical wheelchairs.

Additional medical information

During the evenings and weekends the security become the first port of call for any sick refugee. The security will try and deal with the situation (first aid). If it is a more complicated matter or they have any doubts they have to call ANW (evening, night and weekend service).

This is a 24 hours service and they will give advice and instruction on what to do next. The security has a set procedure to follow and will record all communication in a digital report, and give it to the medical centre and the residential staff as soon as possible.

INFORMATION

In the first reception centre asylum seekers receive a small amount of information about the legal procedure. They receive information after their requests have been submitted and they are sent to an Accommodation Centre.

In the Orientation & Integration Centre and in Orientation Centre asylum seekers receive a general information about Asylum laws, the organization of COA, services, bureaucracy, education, the situation in case of return, how to deal with official letters, the realistic view of the future, how to find the right information, etc.

In all centres asylum seekers receive an induction pack. This induction pack contains information about the facilities, financial aids, services, staff, roles, sanctions, etc. It is given in the most of their languages.

All centres emphasis in the returning information during the procedure. We think there is a general policy to stimulate people in returning to their country.

LEGAL SERVICES

All asylum seekers can get a free lawyer from an official office. In the reception centre the IND supply all the lawyers. Some centres have volunteers who are trained in laws but they are not professionals. In case that somebody needs a lawyer these volunteers contact the appropriate people. In the phase of the appeal COA pay the lawyers. (Only two appeals).

INTERPRETERS

COA pays for the interpreters. They come from an official office of interpreters. Sometimes there are not available in all languages.

In these case staff of the centres sought the use of others asylum seekers. (Bad practice).

WAITING TIMES

We have not received a clearly information about this point. The time of every phase is different. Before the first Asylum request people wait between 3-8 weeks. All people wait a maximum of 48 hours in the AC. (Asylum request). When the request has been submitted the overall waiting time is 9 months for the first answer. In some cases this waiting time is more. It depends on the amount of the asylum seekers, how good your lawyer is, and the IND's speed. .

When somebody appeals for a second time, it can be extended into a longer waiting period. This period can endure from the first answer to 5,6...10 years.

DISPERSAL

When asylum seekers receive a permit to stay in the Netherlands, they are dispersed all over the country. It is the obligation of all local councils to take a certain quota of refugees, on ratio basis. This is based on the population of the city or village.

If the council do not reach their quota then the ministry of housing will place the refugee, for example, in hotels, and the council will have to pay the bill until they are accommodated. The council will get a years warning of the incoming refugees, but not whether they will be single or families.

In many cases the COA will find housing in cooperation with the council. But they now have a system where the refugee can take an active part in selecting where they live. They get a personal code and can look on the Internet for available housing. The Internet is available at all of the centres.

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DETENTION

When the asylum seekers claims have been declined for a second time, they must return to their own country. If they refuse to participate in the return program they can be placed in detention. They can only be contained at the detention centre for a maximum of eight months. If there is no possibility to return the person to their own country, then they will be released with a Message to say you must leave the country within 24 hours. If caught again the whole process will start again.

Whilst at the detention centre the Alien is not entitled to financial help. But there is a possibility to work for a small amount of money. Also they have the chance to get job-related skills in relation to the job they do. This may aid them when they return to their own country. At the centre they have all of their meals provided, there are recreation facilities and it is a secure location.

STAFF

The staff at COA has a lot of experience in working with asylum seekers. But the turnover rate of members of staff has been high last 3 years. The reason for this is that fewer Asylum seekers came into Holland and, a lot of locations were closed throughout the country.

Members of staff in all COA's locations: Location Co-ordinator, Accommodation Manager, Programmers Manager, Case Manager and Caretaker have been effective.

All others employees in the location have been on an external contract basis. Such as security, medical office and cleaning.

Most of the staff at COA's locations are trained in social work, but in the past when COA was expanding rapidly, staff without social work education were accepted. Staffs without social work education are not accepted now.

There are two offices in COA that are in charge of the refugee's administration and financial records. They are located in Den Bosch and Meppel. They are called "satellites" and cover the south and the north provinces of the Netherlands.

CLIENT INFORMATION

The staff gets the information that it is necessary for their own job. They do not get any extra information about their asylum case except when the asylum seeker tells the staff themselves. They get information about their personal situation through individual conversations, interviews, questionnaires, workshops, etc.

All information is registered in computers in daily digital reports, and there are two national computer systems that are used by the COA's staff (IBIS and BIS).

COA staff has different authorisations to these systems related to their tasks and functions.

SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION

Children from 4 to 12 are mostly educated in their own centres. Children from 13 to 18 tend to go out of the centres. Schooling is different for children of less than 4 years. Centres have kindergartens that are run a few times a week. They receive financial aids for several materials and the school gives them their schoolbooks (when they go out of the centre). The educational system is the same as the Dutch people, but there are specific classes for Dutch language skills. Classes are organized in relation to the different levels of Dutch language.

In the centres of unaccompanied minors there are options either to learn academic or practical based subjects. Some centres have introduced computer classes in order to stimulate the attendance to the other classes. All asylum seekers receive Dutch classes after a first orientation course. These orientation courses take 3 weeks. This training is organized in groups of 15 people. There are a lot of people who cannot receive these courses because they are full, and when they get a place they must go to the next centre. Sometimes there are people who do not receive it because they get a negative decision. They are then transferred to a Repartition and return centres. At these centre they cannot follow Dutch classes, but they can follow English classes, computer classes, etc. This is due to the fact they are not integrating into the Netherlands.

FOOD

In two of the centres there is one hot meal in the evening, and two full board centres. In these centres the Pork diet is respected. In all the other centres they are self-catering, with cooking facilities available.

Asylum seekers receive financial aid to buy their own food for in self catering centres, and money for breakfast and lunch only in Half board. Cooking is forbidden in the half/full board centres.

ACCOMMODATION

The stay at the centres runs analogously to the asylum procedure. After submission of the request for asylum to IND, asylum seekers will go through several reception stages.

Temporary accommodation:

This is a temporary accommodation between 3-8 weeks. After reporting and registering at the AC (Application Centre) there is a chance that people must wait for some time before the IND (Immigration and Naturalisation Services) start handling the application for asylum. This period is tidied over at the Temporary Accommodation.

Application Centre (AC):

The Application Centre is the place where the IND determine whether the request is rejected or whether further investigation is required. If the IND do not reject the request, asylum seekers will be sent to an Orientation or Orientation and Integration Centre after 48 hours at the Application Centre.

Orientation & Integration Centre and Orientation Centre

After the IND take the application for asylum into consideration, asylum seekers will enter the orientation stage. The stage will continue until they receive the first decision from IND or when they finish their first stay of 3 months in Accommodation Centre. If they live in a Accomodation Centre and they have not receive the answer of their application for asylum they will be sent to an Orientation and Integration Centre.

Repatriation Centre

If the IND rejects the application they will start the repatriation stage. They will be transferred to a Repatriation Centre where they will start preparing the return to their country of origin. Once the request for asylum has been rejected definitively, the return stage is terminated, along with entitlement to COA's accommodation. In this centre they can use the possibility of guidance and of a programme to support the return. At the beginning 2007 a new project has started.

This project belongs to the Repatriation and Departure Service. The implementation has started 2 months ago. The mission of the R&DS is to advance the actual departure of aliens without right of residence. The R&DS focuses on 2 targets groups: illegal aliens brought in connection with aliens surveillance or border control. The stimulation of the the voluntary departur comes first. In case that an alien does not leave voluntarily, the R&DS conducts the forced departure. Staff of this department work in the Repatriation Centres in order to give aliens all the information about their repatriation and to contact with the IOM which is the organization to help them return to their own country. Aliens have 28 days for the voluntary return.

Integration Centre

If the IND give a positive response to their application for asylum and they are allowed to stay in the Netherlands, they will start the integration stage. They can continue in an orientation and Integration centre where they can start their integration programme until they can accommodated outside the reception centre. They have to look themselves for a place to live in the municipality of their choice. However, accommodation is scarce in the Netherlands, and it may be difficult to find a self-contained accommodation. Therefore, the COA sill mediate for them only once in finding a self-contained accommodation. Depending on the composition or their families and the available accommodation, they will be offered a room, an apartment or a house.

Asylum seekers can suggest which centre they prefer, but in practice COA chooses the location. We think that the quality of accommodation is good once they have received a positive asylum decision. However those who receive a negative claim are housed in less than desirable.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

During the refugees stay at the reception center they receive a fixed amount every week from COA. The amount is statutory and is controlled by the Rva (Regulation for allowances for Asylum seekers). The amount varies depending on your situation. A bank account is open with Robobank, the money is deposited weekly, and every refugee has his/her own bank card. They can either use the card to withdraw money from an ATM, or to purchase items in a shop. The account has no credit facilities and does not go overdrawn.

Refugees can all work on the centres for a little extra money. This is called job club, the asylum seeker has a working contract, a rota, work appointments. This amount is set at the maximum of 12.50 Euros a week, and can not be exceeded due to Dutch tax laws. Money can also be stopped out of their account for non-compliance of the rules. (penalty rule). This amount can vary due to the severity of the infraction. (maximum amount of the fine is 15.89 Euros (Adults) and 5.45 Euros (Children) and can be enforced for up to eight weeks.

Weekly Allowances

Self catering.

adults	€43.02
Children. (up to 11)	€13.16
Children. (12-17 yrs)	€19.22
Extra. Single parent	€36.94
Unmarried and underage Asylum seeker	€26.65

Self catering. (breakfast and Lunch)

Adults	€30.32
Children. (up to 11)	€ 7.51
Children. (12-17 yrs)	€10.12
Extra. Single parent	€26.94
Unmarried and underage Asylum seeker	€21.15

No Self catering.

Adults	€16.08
Children. (up to 11)	€ 3.68
Children. (12-17 yrs)	€ 5.52
Extra. Single parent	€12.87
Unmarried and underage Asylum seeker	€10.57

If the child is over 18, then they do not receive single parent bonus.

Extra Allowances. (one off payment.)

Baby allowance	€114.89
Personal	€ 10.73
Clothing	€ 36.30
Funeral Adults	€2800.00
Child	€1460.00

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

The refugees are able to leave and return to the center as she/he wishes (**freedom of movement**). They must register once a week with the biometrics system. If they fail to do so then money will be deducted from their allowance (€15). If they fail to register for two weeks then they are reported as missing person and removed from the COA accommodation process. They will have to then go back to Ter Apel to reapply for accommodation. It is noted that many of the centres are situated very far from local amenities.

Their time at the center finishes when the refugee receives the answer to their request for Asylum (whether they can proceed further with their asylum claim). If the request is submitted asylum seekers are sent to an Orientation Center. If the request is negative they must leave the country in 24 hours. They are free to go where ever they like.

RECREATION

The amount of activities available on the centres varies greatly. There are Kindergartens available for children at many of the centres. Volunteers and female refugees run them from the center (Job shop).

People can do sports at their own leisure. This includes football, basketball, table tennis, darts, pool and board games.

At the centres they also run a sanction and reward scheme. If the asylum seeker behaviour has been of a good standard and has had no reported infractions, then he/she can reclaim €10 a month towards recreational activities. (Gym, Swimming, Cinema). (**Good practice**).

At one of the centres (Gilze) they have a very motivated volunteer. He is a retired Military fitness instructor. He seemed to command a lot of respect from the people using the center and the staff. He also used trainee fitness officer (Dutch Army) at the center. One for extra services for the Asylum seeker and secondly to help the trainee when they go to Afghanistan. He/she will have a better understanding of the cultures they are going to work with. (**Good practice**).

In one of centres (Vught) they had an extremely well equipped gym. But it has not been used since the minors moved from this center. (Over 3yrs ago). This equipment could have been used at another center, or even loaned to the schools. (**Bad practice**).

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

The service users at the centres are free to practice their own religion. But they must do so in the privacy of their own room. They do not have any facilities on site and are not permitted to pray in public areas. They must respect other people's feelings.

They can go out and pray at their chosen religious destination. A bus will take people to the Mosque/Church once a week.

They respect the Religious dietary needs and have no pork products in the half/board meals provided.

All this information is given to them in their induction pack when they first arrive on the centre.

HOST COMMUNITY

Due to the positioning of most the center, it is very difficult to promote interaction. The Asylum seekers tend to interact when they are shopping, using the local sports centres, religious organisations and for the children who attend local schools. But on the 3rd November 2007 all of the COA centres will be opening their doors for a public open. This is to show the community the work COA does and to hopefully break down the barriers between the two communities.

WITHDRAWAL OF BENEFITS

Money can also be stopped out of their account for non-compliance of the rules. (penalty rule). This amount can vary due to the servarity of the infraction. (maximum amount of the fine is 15.89 Euros (Adults) and 5.45 Euros (Children) and can be enforced for up to eight weeks.

They must register once a week with the biometrics system. If they fail to do so then money will be deducted from their allowance (€15).

COMPLAINTS AND PARTICIPATION

Asylum seekers have the opportunity to make official and/ or informal complaints against practices in the residence facilities. All centres have a complain form. If they receive any sanction it will be given through a letter, and they have to sign it. If they do not sign it they do not receive this letter, but the sanction will still be imposed. This letter does inform the asylum seeker about their right to appeal. If they appeal and their appeal is upheld, then they will be reimbursed. All staff have to make sure that any sanction are lawful and agreed by the team.

Asylum seekers can participate in voluntary activities in the centres. These activities include cleaning, kindergarden, and kitchen servicies. They get a financial incentive. This amount is set at the maximum of 12.50 Euros a week, and can not be exceeded do to Dutch tax laws.

COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

All asylum seekers have TV in their room. these contain a in-house information system. This is updated weekly and informs the user of all relevant information. COA's organization has bought a pack of digital TV's for all centres. Most of the asylum seekers have mobiles and they can find phoneboxes in the centres too. All of the COA centres have access to the internet and provide IT lessons for those who need it.

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS CENTRE

The Minors centre is staffed 24hrs a day/ 7 days a week. They have higher staff ratio than the adult units, and two staff covers nights. The staff are called Coaches and are the equivalent of residential social workers. They are responsible for all the minors, but they have their own key children. They look after the child's social and emotional well being, as well as preparing them for integration or repatriation.

Children have an individual program plan that looks at their strengths and weaknesses. This is then tailored to fit the child's needs. This includes mental health, education, and independent living skills. Each child has a medical screening like the adults, but includes immunisations and regular mental health checks.

The child also has a Guardian (Social worker) that makes all the major decisions. This includes home visits, changes of accommodation and authorising sanctions.

The centre has accommodation for up to 100 children. They are split into female and male areas. The whole complex is covered by close circuit television. This has an electronically controlled system that records when a child leaves or enters their accommodation when they use their key cards. Each child must report to biometrics twice a day. If they fail to do this the centre is then searched, and if they are not found the police are informed. The centre has a curfew; all visitors must be off the site by ten o'clock. It is a goal of the centre to provide a safe environment for the children to live in.

The centre runs an incentive program that has four phases. As the child progresses through the stages, they are rewarded with further incentives. E.g. Weekend visits, able to do the jobs for cash program. Non compliant and trouble making child can be financially sanctioned or even removed to other centres.

The COA deems a child to be a person under the age of eighteen. They assess the person using interviews, bone scans, wisdom teeth and observations.

When a child reaches the age eighteen they are treated as an adult, and transferred to either an integration or reintegration centre depending on their claim.

The COA is now implementing a new accommodation plan for minors arriving in the Netherlands. This plan will be reviewed over a period of four years.

Unaccompanied minor enters the Netherlands. (AC)

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AC (Small house) Waiting up to 10 weeks

Who are you?

What can you do?

What do you need?

(Under 12's to foster care)

-

Board then decide child's future

-

-

KWG

10-12 children

Small living group

12-15 yrs

24/7 staffing

Children with special needs

(Including 15/16/17 yrs)

KWE

5-6 children

small living group

15-18 yrs

12 hrs a week

Good independence skills

Centre

100 children

15 – 18 yrs

These homes are under COA's umbrella, but are sub contracted out to private firms to provide the residential care. Children can be moved from settings, depending on their needs.

GOOD PRACTICE

- **Healthcare** in the centres, because it alleviates the pressure on the local community services. Due to its locality it has good access for the service user. It also has close communication with links with COA staff.
- **Recreations activities, kindergarten, Voluntary system and sports.** These activities allowed them to be occupied and lower stress level.
- **Communication and media** is a good practice too because it allows them to access information, and maintain communication.
- **Fitness programme at Gilze.** See recreation
- **Financial incentive programme.** See financial section
- **CCTV (closed circuit television) in UAM's minors centre.** Electrical key entry activates CCTV to allow staff visual confirmation of who is entering the room.
- **Disabled facilities in the rooms.** But this varies from centre to centre. Some are proactive and others have reactive approach.