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Social Project Higher Educated Refugees

Outline (version November 15th 2016)

SUMMARY

The target group of the project consists of higher educated refugees (refugee-students, refugees with an academic background or other higher educated refugees).

The project concentrates on different aspects of the situation of these refugees in the Netherlands.

The project will have a transdisciplinary character.

Its tentative aims concern a variety of issues, such as *understanding, research, intervention, cultural exchange, cooperation* and *education*. Here follow some of the possible aims:

- *Understanding*: To promote the understanding of the refugees' situation and problems; to hear about their stressful experiences in their homeland, during their flight and after their arrival in the Netherlands
- *Research*: To investigate some aspects of the situation of higher educated refugees in the Netherlands:
 - o The access of higher educated refugees to volunteer work and the labour market
 - o The access to medical aid in cases of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
 - o The access to legal aid
 - o The extent to which the reception of refugees in the Netherlands is decent and fair.

The refugee project will probably be extended with real scientific research: a randomized controlled trial about the effects of MENTORING individual refugees.

We will investigate and quantify the effects of this mentoring programme on the integration and mental well-being of refugees.

The research will start with a pilot study in which each participating student becomes a personal mentor for one refugee(-student).

The London School of Economics and Political Science has shown interest in cooperation with the UCG.

A research proposal will soon be added to this project outline.

- *Intervention*: trying to help improving the situation of the refugees by some forms of assistance – for instance, by a mentoring programme for refugees, see the mentoring programme organized by the Refugee Students Foundation UAF (University Assistance Fund); and setting up a social service centre for higher educated refugees in the northern region of the Netherlands.
- *Cultural exchange*: between student-refugees and students of the UCG
- *Cooperation*: transdisciplinary cooperation and cooperation with other organizations that have ‘know how’ about refugee issues, such as the Dutch Council for Refugees (Vluchtelingen Werk Nederland), the Foundation of Refugee Students (UAF) and Refugee Start Force; cooperation and exchange of ideas with other University Departments and Summer School ‘Migration Matters’.
- *Education*: To make a connection with UCG-courses and to organize seminars on related subjects, for instance, the European immigration crisis, humanitarian law and human rights

The participating UCG-students will get the opportunity to learn directly from real life stories of refugees by means of interviews and by taking part in seminars to which also refugees themselves are invited. The student-refugees and other higher educated refugees are also invited to take part in the project.

The project looks ambitious but in the course of time we will determine which parts are realistic and which parts are not.

We will ask some scholars to become advisors of the multidisciplinary project – for instance a psychologist, statistician, psychiatrist (with interest and expertise in PTSD), sociologist, lawyer (with expertise in humanitarian law and human rights) and an expert in reliable, responsible and valid ways of interviewing and surveying.

The significance of the project may increase if it is extended beyond the first year of study. In this way we can see how refugees integrate in the Dutch society.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. *The European Refugee Problem*

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recently wrote:

We are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. An unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement. Every day, nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution.

In 2015 more than 1.25 million asylum seekers asked for protection in an EU-country. Nearly one-third comes from Syria. According to the UNHCR there are about 90,000 refugees and 30,000 asylum seekers in The Netherlands.

1.2. *Traumatic backgrounds of refugees*

Refugees have often left behind their livelihood, communities and possessions. Many suffer significant psychological distress as a result of their exposure to traumatic events and the hardships due to the life as a refugee. Refugees have often experienced significant traumatic events, such as war, persecution, torture and family separation. Because of these traumatic experiences, followed by hardships and tensions during their flight and migration, refugees often suffer from mental illness including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD (about 80%) and depression (about 60%).

1.3. *The duty to receive refugees in a decent and fair way*

The traumatic backgrounds of refugees make it important that the country where they seek asylum welcomes them in an environment where they can recover from their traumas and fears and where they can rebuild confidence and a feeling of self-respect. This is a question not only of decency but also of fairness and human rights.

Refugees who come under the definition of the 1951 Refugee Convention obtain a juridical status that usually gives them rights similar to those of the citizens of the receiving country. The Refugee Convention enumerates the main rights that must be granted to refugees by the national laws of each country (Arts. 12–34). They are summarized by *The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law*, written by Doctors without Borders. Here follow some of these rights:

- Articles 17 to 19: States shall grant refugees the most favorable treatment granted to nationals of a foreign country, with regard to the right to engage in wage-earning employment, self-employment, or liberal professions.
- Article 21: With regard to housing, States shall treat refugees as favorably as possible.
- Articles 22 and 23: With regard to public education and public assistance, States shall treat refugees in the same way as nationals.
- Article 24: In terms of labor laws and social security, refugees shall enjoy the same treatment as nationals.

Migration may create problems and possibilities. It may cause pressure on, and unrest in, the host country and it may cause uncertainty amongst refugees about their future. Simultaneously reception of refugees creates possibilities for voluntary hospitality initiatives, cultural exchanges and ideas, for the benefit of both the host countries and the refugees.

2. THE PROJECT

2.1. *Target group of the project*

Higher educated refugees (refugee-students and refugees with an academic background) are the target group of the project.

2.2. *Possible aims of the project*

The project may aim at different aspects of the situation of these refugees. It may promote understanding of the problems involved, understanding the stressful experiences of refugees (in their homeland, during their flight and after their arrival in the host country) and it may try to help improving the situation of refugees by some forms of intervention and assistance.

The participating UCG-students will get the opportunity to learn directly from real life stories

of refugees by means of interviews and by taking part in seminars to which also refugees themselves are invited.

Here follows a list of topics on which the project may concentrate. The decision which of these topics will finally be selected for the refugee-project will be made by the supervising teachers in consultation with the students who participate in the project, and possibly with the approached higher educated refugees.

Employment of refugees

Investigating to what extent refugees get the opportunity to look for, and to get, voluntary or paid work.

Refugees are usually motivated to work and to contribute to the society that has received them. From scientific research appears how important it is for refugees and asylum seekers to be active; also already during their stay in an asylum seekers centre. Voluntary work and paid work promote their health and resilience; besides, in this way their talents and skills are utilized. In addition, the chance of integration is enlarged. Useful activities offer a structure of the day and drive away their boredom. The refugees will join in with the society and will build up their own web of relations.

However, in practice it is often difficult for them to find their way on the labour market and to get a job, although they often have a lot of expertise, which they have developed in the country they have come from.

Medical aid to refugees

Probably, traumatized refugees do not always get appropriate specialized medical aid for their mental problems or illnesses.

Investigating the opportunity to seek, and to get, medical aid, especially for mental disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Social service centre for higher educated refugees

Investigating the possibility of, and trying to realize, a social service centre for higher educated refugees in the northern region. The centre has different aims: to help refugees to find a paid job, dependent on the background and education of the refugee; to find possibilities to educate for a specific job; to organize possibilities for voluntary work; to give psychological and psychiatric help to refugees with traumatic disorders; to promote social contacts between refugees mutually and with other people; to give legal aid; et cetera.

The planned social service centre for higher-educated refugees tries to

- ✚ help to find the way and improve access to (continued) higher education
- ✚ create possibilities for voluntary work
- ✚ improve access to the labour market
- ✚ improve access to appropriate medical care, including psychological and psychiatric aid

- ✚ help to find legal aid (for instance, for achieving the status of refugee and/or reunification of the family).

This sort of assistance is already offered in some way or another by other organizations such as the Dutch Council for Refugees and the Foundation for Refugee-Students UAF. Our project is meant to further develop these activities – in consultation with these organizations – for the province Groningen and environment and to concentrate these activities on higher educated refugees.

The experiences of the Dutch Council for Refugees and of the Foundation for Refugee-Students UAF will be very helpful for our project. We will contact them in an early stage. The Dutch Council for Refugees is an independent, non-governmental organization that defends the refugees' rights to a fair asylum procedure, and subsequently access to adequate housing, education, health care and work.

3. POSSIBLE TASKS FOR UCG STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT

A. Making contact with student-refugees and other higher educated refugees

- Visiting an azc (asylum seekers centre) for making contact with asylum seekers and interviewing them. For a list of asylum seekers centres (azc-s) and their location, see *Appendix point 4*.
- *Inviting higher-educated refugees for a seminar at UCG*. Possible purposes:
 - Giving the refugees the opportunity to tell about their experiences in their homeland, during their flight and after their arrival in the Netherlands.
 - Learning the needs, desires and expectations of the refugees.
 - Learning their negative and positive experiences in the Netherlands with respect to assistance
 - Cultural exchanges
- *Interviews with refugee-students and refugees with an academic background*
An interesting person is Abdulkader (34) who has been interviewed in the Magazine of the Dutch Council for refugees. Before his flight he worked as a lawyer in Aleppo. Now he guides Syrian refugees who recently arrived in the Netherlands. He lives in Oude Pekela (not in the asylum seekers centre). We can first contact 'Sineke', a volunteer of 'Vluchtelingen Werk Nederland' at the azc Oude Pekela, who guided Abdulkader.

B. Get in touch with:

- Teachers of the Summer School 'Migration Matters: Understanding and intervening the societal phenomenon of migration' See the *Appendix point 3* for a report of the Summer School.
- *The research team of the VICI-research project on Human Dignity at the University of Utrecht*.
On the 23rd of September the research team organized a Public Seminar on Realizing

Human Dignity in two contexts. One of the contexts was the situation of asylum seekers.

Tamar de Waal (PhD-Candidate at the University of Amsterdam) and mr. Judith Pieters (attorney at Pieters Advocaten). Tamar discussed the position of asylum seekers who have been granted residence rights, while Judith focused on those who seek to achieve such a status. It may be useful and insightful to contact them to get information about their project and to ask them for the text of their presentations.

- The Foundation for Refugee-Students UAF. For their **mentoring programme**, see *Appendix* point 1.
- ‘Job coaches’ from the project ‘Startbaan’ – a finished cooperative project of the Dutch Council for Refugees and the Foundation for Refugee-Students UAF.
- *Azc Veenhuizen (registration centre for reunification of families)*. The registration centre is in great need of volunteers. Contact: Henrike Nijhof.
- Sustainable Society research group: <http://www.rug.nl/research/sustainable-society/> Sustainable Society has a strong focus on societal transitions. The three main areas are Inclusion, Cooperation and Resilience. It aims at contributing to global complex issues and contributes to the creation of new insights with an interdisciplinary approach. Sustainable Society is the University of Groningen’s strong pillar based upon Social Sciences and Humanities.
- Refugee Start Force. This is a community of refugees, locals, organizations & companies. It equips refugees with the contacts and knowledge needed to realize their professional ambitions. For more information, see point 2 of the *Appendix*.

C. Social guidance of refugee-students to improve integration and find employment

- Becoming mentors for refugee-students: see for the **mentoring programme** organized by the Refugee students Foundation University (University Assistance Fund), *Appendix* point 1.

D. Looking for cooperation partners

- Making contact with local authority and interested organizations and companies for possible cooperation
- Dutch Organization Voluntary Work (NOV: Nederlandse Organisatie Vrijwilligerswerk)

4. EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

We will devote seminars and lessons to subjects related to the refugee project, such as the European Refugee Problem and humanitarian law and human rights with respect to refugees. One of the starting points for these lessons and seminars may be ‘The Practical Guide for Humanitarian Law’ (published online by Doctors without Borders, and published as a book by Rowman & Littlefield International) and reports by the EU about the European Refugee Problem.

Possible research topics or questions for discussion during the lessons:

- Are refugees received decently and fairly in the Netherlands?
- Do they get sufficient access to the labour market and volunteer work?
- Do they get sufficient access to medical aid?
- Is there adequate medical aid for refugees with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?
- Differences in chances of family reunification for refugees from Eritrea and Afghanistan compared to refugees from Syria, to the prejudice of the former (see *de Volkskrant*, 7th October 2016)
- Differences between judges of the IND with respect to granting the refugee status?
- To get the refugee status the coherence of the refugee's story is important. For higher educated refugees it is easier to tell a coherent story than for lower educated refugees. Does this lead to differences in acceptance-rates between higher and lower educated refugees? This is an important question especially with respect to refugees from Eritrea who often haven't the required identification papers.
- Why not more effective surveillance for boat-refugees in the Mediterranean Sea? If the victims were Europeans the problem was probably already resolved!
- Interviewing lawyers of refugees
- Are countries allowed to close their borders for refugees or does this violate human rights?
- Is the division of refugees amongst European countries fair?
- Is it fair that 'countries in the region', such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are much more burdened with the reception of much more refugees than European countries?
- Is the deal with Turkey about the influx of refugees acceptable, or contrary to human rights?

5. ADDRESSES

- *Regional Office Dutch Council for Refugees*: Groningen, tel 050 5757290
- *Gezondheidscentrum asielzoekers (GC A's)*: health centres for asylum seekers.
General telephone number: 0 881 122 112
- *GC A Ter Apel GGZ consulente Thea de en vr 9u 12-1 4-5u*
Tel 088 715 4614

6. ABBREVIATIONS

AZC: Asylum seekers centre

COA: Central agency for the reception of asylum seekers

IND: Immigration and naturalisation service

NOV: Nederlandse Organisatie Vrijwilligerswerk (Dutch Organization Voluntary Work)

UAF: (University Assistance Fund): Foundation for Refugee-Students

VWN: Vluchtelingen Werk Nederland (Dutch Council for Refugees, an independent, non-governmental organization that defends the refugees' rights to a fair asylum procedure, and subsequently access to adequate housing, education, health care and work.)

7. LITERATURE

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- *Information online by 'Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland'* [The Dutch Council for Refugees]
- Doctors without Borders, *The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law*
- Patrick Kingsley, *The New Odyssey. The Story of Europe's Refugee Crisis* (Patrick Kingsley is journalist of the *Guardian*).
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- Sociale Geneeskunde (AMC), Preserving and Improving the Mental Health of Refugees: A Literature Review for the Health Council of the Netherlands (2016)
- Health Council of the Netherlands, Geestelijke gezondheid van vluchtelingen (Mental health of refugees). Publicatienr. 2016/01
- *Information on internet by ‘Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland’* [The Dutch Council for Refugees]
- Wander Jager and R. Paolillo (2016). Refugee crisis: Easy solutions cause big problems? *Euractiv*, May 26, 2016. <http://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/opinion/refugee-crisis-easy-solutions-cause-big-problems/> (Immigration policies often miss that migration is not only a matter of managing an influx of people. A social complexity perspective contributes to a more systemic view, write Dr. Wander Jager and Rocco Paolillo.)

APPENDIX

1. UAF mentoring programme

Wat voor mentoren zoekt het UAF?

Iedereen die interesse heeft in andere culturen en zijn netwerk wil delen, kan mentor worden van een vluchteling. Professionals die ervaring hebben op het gebied van taalverwerving, studieondersteuning en/of arbeidsmarkt(toeleiding) zijn extra hard nodig. Daarnaast is het belangrijk dat mentoren openstaan voor een gelijkwaardig contact en interesse hebben in interculturele uitwisseling.

Hoe ziet het mentortraject eruit?

Een mentortraject begint met een algemene voorlichting van het UAF. Mentoren krijgen dan informatie over de inhoud van het programma. Vervolgens worden mentor en mentee gematcht en maken zij afspraken over de doelen van het traject. Gedurende het mentortraject organiseert het UAF trainings- en intervisiebijeenkomsten om mentoren te ondersteunen. Na een half jaar wordt het mentortraject afgesloten.

Wat wordt er van mentoren en mentees verwacht?

Een mentorrelatie is gebaseerd op gelijkwaardigheid. Wij gaan er dan ook vanuit dat mentor en mentee van elkaar kunnen leren. Belangrijk is dat de zowel mentoren als mentees een open en lerende houding hebben en ook hun grenzen aan durven geven

als dat nodig is.

Frequentie, locatie en inhoud van de mentoring wordt gezamenlijk bepaald door de mentor en de mentee. Gemiddeld kost het mentortraject ca 2 uur per week.

Kunnen mentoren en mentees elkaar zelf uitkiezen?

Mentoren en mentees geven zichzelf op en worden daarna gematcht door het UAF. Hierbij staat de informatiebehoefte van de vluchteling centraal. Dit betekent voor mentoren dat het soms een tijd kan duren voordat u ingezet wordt en soms zelfs dat u niet ingezet wordt.

Wat kan de mentor van het UAF verwachten?

Het UAF organiseert meerdere keren per jaar voorlichtingsbijeenkomsten over wat mentoren en mentees kunnen verwachten. Daarnaast werkt het UAF aan deskundigheidsbevordering van vrijwilligers, door geregeld trainingen en intervisiebijeenkomsten te organiseren. Wanneer reiskosten een belemmering vormen, stelt het UAF een reiskostenvergoeding beschikbaar.

Project coordinator mentoring Rachel:

Het mentoring-programma biedt UAF-studenten de gelegenheid om in contact te komen met Nederlanders die interesse hebben in vluchtelingen. Hierbij worden vluchtelingstudenten gekoppeld aan bedrijven of vrijwilligers, die hen wegwijs maken binnen hun onderwijsinstelling, hun netwerk delen of met hen de Nederlandse taal oefenen.

Rachel: 'Het is mooi om te zien dat studenten niet alleen leren van hun mentor, maar dat mentoren ook geïnspireerd raken door de verhalen van onze studenten. Zo is het traject verrijkend voor beide partijen.'

2. Refugee Task Force

Objectives of the Refugee Start Force

- Enable refugees to integrate more quickly into the Dutch society and labour market.
- Gain insight into qualifications and talents of refugees at an early stage.
- Create relevant professional networks between Dutch citizens and refugees at an early stage
- Gain insight into possibilities for volunteering, internships and other development opportunities
- Stimulate entrepreneurship.
- Examine possibilities for more 'experimental space' within the current legislation.

The Refugee Start Force creates social and professional networks with the aim to help refugees to integrate more quickly in the Dutch society, learn language and to find opportunities for volunteer work, internships and jobs.

The guiding objective is empowering refugees to participate more quickly into the Dutch society and labor market and built a successful life in The Netherlands.

It aims to match refugees, locals, organizations and companies based on professions, skills and expertizes. Our networking groups, projects and events enable refugees to find contacts who can help them to further develop professional skills and ambitions.

We believe that one simple cup of coffee can be basis for the key piece of information that makes a real difference in the life of a refugee!

3. From the report of the Summer School 'Migration Matters'

Students presented a short problem analyses and suggested five concrete interventions on how to improve the current situation: (1) to create awareness and decrease violence of the policy corps against refugees on Lesbos, (2) to develop an Integration Toolbox for Municipalities to monitor and share their successes in the field of integration across the Netherlands, (3) to set up a women4women network by female students to strengthen talented young women, (4) to develop a school education programme for children to decrease prejudice, and (5) to stimulate integration and belonging in the neighborhood by creating an art project with refugees and Groningers. Three student groups are busy to put their proposals into action: the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) has already expressed interest in further developing the Integration Toolbox; the women2women network is planning its first activities in cooperation with Groningen Verwelkomt and other societal organisations; and students are planning a seminar with art students to start creating art together with refugees and Groningers .

The overall feedback from the students was overwhelming positive. Students especially appreciated to have learned how to analyze a societal challenge involving relevant stakeholders, the political settings, and societal sentiments; develop an evidence-based intervention; set up a monitoring and evaluation plan; and by this create impact from knowledge. In addition, they had the chance to network with the different guest speakers to develop their professional ambitions further.

The transdisciplinary approach is an important driver for Sustainable Society in order to bring science closer to society. This initiative develops innovative concepts on improving impact from science, as well as roadmaps to implement them. By offering the students a wide variety of skills development, they will be better equipped to become the professionals of the near future in tackling societal issues. And find a balance between facts and emotions in order to make a durable difference.

4. List of asylum seekers centres and their locations



❖ Asylum seekers centre

<i>AZC location</i>	<i>Number of refugees (maximum)</i>
Assen	475
Delfzijl	Zwet: 430 Zeevaartsch.: 450
Musselkanaal	450
Oranje	700
Oude Pekela	200
Ter Apel*	2000
Veenhuizen (registration centre for reunification of the family)	600

*Ter Apel is not an AZC but a location for the first reception of refugees after arriving in the Netherlands. It is a process reception location, where the asylum procedure starts for all the refugees who arrive in the Netherlands by land (instead of by plane). The centre gives particular attention to the meetings between asylum seekers and their lawyers, the provision of information by the Dutch Refugee Council, information about the COA and medical advice. They have to apply at the Central Reception Centre (Centraal Opvanglocatie, COL) in Ter Apel, where their registration takes place (fingerprints, travel- and identity documents are taken). After registration activities in the COL, the asylum seekers are transferred to a Process Reception Centre (Proces Opvanglocatie, POL). The duration of the rest and preparation period is at least six days. On the one hand, the rest and preparation period is designed to offer the

asylum seeker some time to rest, on the other hand, it is designed to provide the time needed for undertaking several preparatory actions and investigations.

After the rest and preparation period has ended, the actual asylum procedure starts. In the first instance, all asylum seekers are channelled in to the so-called regular asylum procedure (Algemene Asielprocedure, AA), which is, as a rule, designed to last eight working days ('short asylum procedure'). If it becomes clear on the fourth day that the IND will not be able to take a thorough decision concerning the asylum application within these eight days, the application continues according to the extended asylum procedure (Verlengde Asielprocedure, VA). In this extended procedure the IND has to make a decision on the application within 6 months (the time frame of 6 months can be extended by another 6 months). On the other hand the short asylum procedure can be extended by 6 working days if more time is needed (this is not, however, the extended asylum procedure). The short asylum procedure can be described as fast, but technically it is not an accelerated procedure. Every asylum application is initially examined in the short asylum procedure. Less complex or evident cases will be decided within eight days in the short asylum procedure while the examination of more complex cases is continued in the extended asylum procedure (which can take 6 months to a year to decide). Positive as well as negative decisions can be taken in the short asylum procedure. If the decision is positive, the refugee gets asylum/refugee status (qualification as a refugee under Article 1A of the Geneva Convention) if there is a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. After a positive procedure the refugee moves to an AZC, an asylum seekers centre until he can move to a normal house.