

In the centre, the child
Children's rights in asylum-seeker centres
Summary in English

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Kind in het centrum

Kinderrechten
in asielzoekerscentra

Samenvatting

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Summary

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Introduction

In the Netherlands, thousands of children are growing up in families in the country's asylum-seeker centres. Right now, the situation in which these children are growing up does not meet the standards set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹, and that observation applies not only to the situation in general but to every individual area faced by these children: family and upbringing, living environment, recreation, playing & free time, education, health, safety, procedure, financing and participation. This is the conclusion reached in a study of these children's situation, and the results of that study are detailed in the report *In the centre, the child: Children's rights in asylum-seeker centres*.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges the government to take proper care of children in asylum-seeker centres; in fact, the convention obliges signatory countries to make that care just as good as the care received by any other children in their country. Children growing up in asylum-seeker centres must be fully covered by the social standards in place in the Netherlands as applicable to children in areas such as living environment, safety, education, health, etc. Additionally, the government has an extra responsibility for refugee children, because this group is even more vulnerable.

Of all experts surveyed for this study, only 8% agreed with the proposition that asylum-seeker centres offer adequate conditions for a normal (safe, healthy and stable) family life.

For some time, many have been concerned with the situation of children in asylum-seeker centres, for the very reason that they are here with their parents. Where the government asserts its responsibility for unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers is recognised, little changes for children who are here with their parents; their parents are assumed to be giving them the care they need. But many parents prove to be not in a position to provide this care because of the situation in which they find themselves and the problems they face. In these cases, the government has an obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child: to support the parents, and where necessary, take on some (or even all) of the task of upbringing, just as the Dutch government would for other children in the Netherlands.

This summary sketches the situation of children in asylum-seeker centres and presents information on the study and an overview of its results. The full results are set out in the full report *In the centre, the child*. See also www.unicef.nl or www.kind-in-azc.nl.

¹ The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a United Nations convention that has been in force in the Netherlands since 1995, and applicable to all children (defined as any person between the ages of 0 and 18).

A sketch

The Netherlands is currently home to some six to eight thousand children living with their parents in asylum-seeker centres. One-third of all asylum-seekers in the national asylum-seeker relief system are children. These are children who have come from a wide range of countries to the Netherlands with their families in search of asylum, meaning protection. This, by definition, puts them in a position of dependence here.

The question of whether they can stay here, or must leave the country, is decided in an asylum process. Until that process has run its course, the family is placed in one of the nearly 60 asylum-seeker centres in the Netherlands. For some families, the process can take years. For all of that time, these families must live in such a centre, and children can find themselves spending a significant portion of their youth in one. At the time of the interviews for this report, the average length of stay in an asylum-seeker centre of the 66 children interviewed was 4.7 years.

Relief

The COA (Asylum-Seekers Reception Services) has been arranging the care for asylum-seekers since 1994. The IND (Immigration and Naturalisation Service) is responsible for the asylum procedure. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for general policy on aliens, and this includes asylum-seeker relief and the asylum procedure.

The nearly 60 asylum-seeker centres are spread throughout the Netherlands, and they differ from each other in a number of ways. Firstly, a distinction is made between the centres focusing on repatriation and those focusing on cultural orientation and assimilation. The phase and result of the asylum procedure determining where a family is placed.

There are asylum-seeker centres in or near urban areas, but most are in isolated locations in forests or in the countryside. The housing provided to the residents differs from centre to centre. Some are former military barracks, hospitals or air bases converted into housing; some are prefab construction built for the purpose; some are caravan parks, and in others asylum-seekers are housed in holiday homes.

Relocation

For a number of different reasons, families must be relocated to different centres frequently. Firstly, the type of placement is linked to the phase of the procedure. When a family first arrives in the Netherlands, they are first placed in a temporary facility and must go to a registration centre. After this, most are placed in an asylum-seeker centre. If or when the asylum request is rejected, the family must then relocate to a different centre.

“I don’t want to make friends at the school I’m at now, because I might have to move again. So there’s not really any point.”

(girl, 10)

There are also other reasons that a family may be relocated. Most asylum-seeker centres are temporary: they are only allowed in the municipality for a period of five years, after which they must shut their doors. This means that the families living there at that time must be moved. The COA responds to fluctuations in the flow of asylum-seekers coming to the Netherlands by opening and closing centres. Residents may also be transferred to make sure that occupancy across different

centres is optimal. The children interviewed for this study had moved an average of 2.5 times over the 4.7 years they had been in the Netherlands.

Adjusting

Children move frequently. That means that even while still adjusting to a new country, they must also adjust to new surroundings, new schools and teaching methods, new teachers, and new friends, and do so time and time again. After a few moves, some children close themselves off to new friendships because they know they will only have to give them up again. Likewise, the many moves put children at a disadvantage at school, and this often compounds the disadvantage they already face due to their situation.

Upbringing

An asylum-seeker centre is no place to raise a child. Nonetheless, there are parents who succeed in bringing up their children despite the experiences in their home country and despite the situation in which they find themselves in this one. And then there are parents who do not manage to do so, for a variety of reasons. Many face severe emotional problems. Parents who have yet to be approved for asylum are not given the opportunity to learn Dutch, while at the same time, must find their own way in this country for years on end. The children, meanwhile, generally learn the language and customs readily, which puts them astride two ever-diverging worlds: society and the home life. The parents are socially isolated due to their living situation, the many relocations, and the fact of having left everything that was familiar to them behind them in their country of origin. Others (the COA) make the rules, and can punish the children if they do not follow those rules.

Family

The relationship between parents and children is very prone to change in an asylum-seeker centre, particularly when the period of uncertainty is a prolonged one. Children take on the role of their parents in a process of “parentification.” They become concerned about their parents, interpret for them, and look after younger siblings. In many cases, parents lose the authority over (and respect of) their children, and it becomes more and more difficult for them to be a good example when their primary activity is waiting. They find it more and more difficult to set down the limits for their children that are appropriate to both the Dutch society in which their children are growing up and their own standards and values instilled in them in their country of origin. Because they have little or no contact with their environment, they have no one to turn to and must face these dilemmas alone. Rarely do they receive any support in the upbringing of their children at the asylum-seeker centres.

Home

The size, quality and atmosphere of the living space for families differ in every asylum-seeker centre. In some, children live with their parents in one or two rooms, often sharing a kitchen, shower and toilet with other families. In other centres, a family will live in their own caravan or flat. But there are also centres where any beds not filled by family members are “topped up” with non-family members. In general, children and parents live in cramped conditions, sometimes for years, with little to no privacy. This becomes an extra source of tension in addition to the stress of the flight and the asylum procedure already burdening the family.

“Families live in one room here. That room has to be the study, the bedroom, the living room, the kitchen and meeting room. It goes without saying that this will have its impact on the child’s development.” (COA residential counsellor)

The lack of space and privacy make it difficult for children in a centre to be alone when they need to be, and make it very difficult for them to meet their basic needs for a relaxed environment, sleep, and a quiet place to do their homework.

Island

Asylum-seeker centres are “islands” where residents with very different cultural, social and religious backgrounds and family structures live. Asylum-seekers live behind a security gate, on a site specially set aside for them, generally far removed from the rest of society. The centre’s isolation, in combination with the lack of public transport or other means of travel, make it very difficult for the residence to conduct everyday activities. Whether it’s shopping, clubs, sports, school, medical care, everything is far away and difficult to get to.

School

Like Dutch children, the children of asylum-seekers are under the compulsory education obligation, and must go to school from the age of 5. Many of them derive the structure in their lives and their hope for the future from this. Generally, the children learn Dutch very quickly. Some asylum-seeker centres have a primary school on site, where new children first learn the language to enable them to go to a regular school outside the centre. In practice, however, some children continue to go to the centre school for years. This is often due to the isolated location of the centre and the many relocations the family goes through. In some situations, children at an asylum-seeker centre school develop their own language to communicate with each other as they learn Dutch.

Internet

In the centre, children have little to no opportunity to access the internet. This is a particular problem for primary school students beginning in “group 6” of the Dutch system (age 9/10) and right through secondary school; it hampers them in the ability to do their homework, and they miss updates and information from the school. They are excluded from gaining experience with the online world and many contacts with their peers that others take for granted. Children who have to move want to be able to stay in contact with the asylum-seeker children in the centres where they have lived.

Play

For children in asylum-seeker centres, even the opportunity to engage in ordinary play is not a given, for the simple reason that there is no room to do so in the home. Even if the centre has a common area, children may or may not be able to use it for play. Noise issues or fire safety regulations may prohibit children from playing there. Playing outside is generally an option, at least for the smaller children; most centres have a small playground with see-saw, slide or swing set. But centres may or may not have facilities for older children. Some have a football pitch or basketball court, but many do not.

Free time

Outside school hours, children in asylum-seeker centres have little to do. While other children in the Netherlands have after-school clubs and lessons, friends to play with, and weekends and holidays to look forward to, for children in the centres all these things are luxuries. In some cases, the centre is too far out to be able to travel to the club. In others, lack of money is the decisive factor. With the frequent moves, it is often difficult to get involved in a club “mid-stream” or to make contact with friends. Parents may also not give their children the support they need to do so, in many cases simply because they do not know how. The children who are able to participate in a club or in sports are very enthusiastic about it, and see it as a way to relieve the pressures of their lives.

Activities

In about half of all asylum-seeker centres, the Dutch *Nationale Stichting ter bevordering van Vrolijkheid* (the “National Foundation for the Promotion of Happiness”) organises creative activities for children, usually on Wednesdays. Where this is possible, it provides a great source of enjoyment for the children. In the centres where they do not, few, if any, activities are organised. Children are often extremely bored, especially in weekends and during holiday periods. The parents have little to offer their children. They mope through their free time, awaiting the chance to go back

to school. These children are not permitted to travel abroad on school trips (or for any other reason) as long as they do not have legal residency.

Healthy

Many children and parents struggle with health problems. Some of these problems relate to the story of the families as refugees, but many are the direct result of the stress surrounding the asylum procedure. Recently, the health care system for asylum-seekers was comprehensively restructured.

“I think that you inevitably adjust your standards for asylum-seekers; that you will start to find things normal that are not normal at all.”

(paediatrician)

Until 1 January 2009, the MOA (Medical Aid for Asylum-Seekers) was responsible for preventive health care and guidance towards curative care. Since that date, the care of asylum-seekers has been shifted to the mainstream health care sector.

But there are a number of reasons why in practice, this may not be the best choice. Firstly, children living in an asylum-seeker centre are particularly vulnerable. Many have faced war, violence, loss of family members and other traumatic events. Even though asylum-seekers do not speak the language, language is essential in conveying what the problem is. Additionally, they have no idea of how the health care sector works, and they are not given information to help them.

Safety

Children and parents often feel unsafe in the asylum-seeker centre. Some compare the centre to a “pressure cooker” in which people of very different backgrounds are put together under high stress. And this does not always go smoothly.

Prolonged uncertainty on whether they will ever obtain a residence permit contributes to the residents’ feeling threatened, especially after becoming used to seeing other residents being collected by the Aliens Police for deportation, or seeing them “lose it” when their request for asylum is rejected.

Many centres are home to single fathers prone to drunken rages around their children, fighting amongst each other, or accosting resident women and girls.

Options

Children and parents get the sense that they have no control over the situation they find themselves in. They feel powerless, a feeling that is only reinforced by their lack of involvement in the events at the centre.

They are not properly informed of their rights and how things stand, and when they ask the centre personnel about any of their issues, they feel that they are not taken seriously. Generally speaking, children are enormously resilient. But there is a limit. The longer the asylum procedure (and with it the stay in the centre) lasts, the more psycho-social problems children develop. As the stress factors accumulate over the long term, at a certain point the asylum-seeker will feel “out of options.” When children have no prospects, things go wrong in their lives.

The whole package

Properly describing the situation children in asylum-seeker centres face is a complicated process. In a “normal” situation, many of these problems would not be a problem at all. But in the centres, as they accumulate they become a significant threat to the child’s development.

Moreover, we must remember that living in the asylum-seeker centre is not a normal situation. But it remains difficult to get this across, because, as football great Johan Crujff once said: “You don’t really understand things until you figure them out.” Anyone taking a day to visit any asylum-seeker centre, talk to the residents and experience how they live will see a situation in which children in

asylum-seeker centres are not afforded their rights under the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The study

From June 2008 to May 2009, a research team under Karin Kloosterboer interviewed 66 children and eight parents in five different asylum-seeker centres. A total of 164 experts were consulted: 44 individual interviews, 89 respondents to questionnaires, and 31 participants in five expert meetings, including one with parents and children in an asylum-seeker centre.

“You guys are really the first people to come and ask what we think.” (four boys of 11-12, all in the Netherlands for ten years)

The questionnaires were returned by 42 residential advisors and programme assistants of the COA, 14 doctors and nurses in youth health care for asylum-seekers, 18 teaching personnel of schools for asylum-seekers or with asylum-seeker students, and 15 employees of the National Foundation for the Promotion of Happiness.

The study also analysed recent literature on asylum-seeker children and children of refugees.

Taken together, this information presents the first complete picture of the situation facing children of families living in an asylum-seeker centre. It compiles the different perspectives of the children, the parents, the experts and the relevant literature. Based on the resulting picture, the children's situation is reviewed against the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This study was commissioned and financed by the Dutch Foundation for Children's Welfare Stamps (*Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland*), the COA, and UNICEF Netherlands. Representatives of these organisations sit on a steering committee.

In addition, an expert sounding board group handled the content. The conduct of the study was the responsibility of UNICEF.

The research activities produced a great deal of information, which was entered into a database in a structured way. This information incorporated 352 sources, including children, parents, experts and publications. These sources resulted in a total of 3315 independent entries. The responses to the multiple choice questions on the questionnaires were also incorporated into the database. In the course of the study, the website www.kind-in-azc.nl was launched to present the latest information on the study. All the research documents are available on this site. Also during the study, the researchers reported their stories, photos and drawings on a weblog. A newsletter presenting the latest developments in the study was released in January and May of 2009.

“Anybody who has to wait should know the exact time when the waiting will end.” (boy, 9)

This is the summary of the research report. The full report, *In the centre, the child*, also includes a detailed list of the problem areas documented.

The results

The research focused on nine aspects of the lives of children in asylum-seeker centres that, together, define the course of their lives: family and upbringing, living environment, recreation, playing & free time, education, health, safety, procedure, financing and participation.

In all these areas, the situation as it stands does not meet the requirements set out by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The issues surrounding all these areas are closely interrelated, and together (partly due to their accumulation) constitute a significant threat to the development of children.

The children's living situation and the review against the Convention on the Rights of the Child are described in detail in the full report of *In the centre, the child*. That report enumerates, for each area, the problem points that the children, parents, experts and the literature identify, and how they describe them. From this more detailed analysis, three underlying, fundamental problem points emerge.

1 *The long duration* – many families stay in the process for years awaiting a definitive answer on their asylum request. In that time, they have no certainty on the question of whether they can stay in the Netherlands. The relief provided is not structured for this type of long-term stay.

2 *The frequent relocation* – children and their parents have to relocate frequently, and that has an impact in many different areas.

3 *The lack of information* – in most cases, children and parents have inadequate information (or no information at all) on their situation, so they do not know what options they have and do not have in their situation or how long the situation will continue.

Analysis

Refugee children are in a situation of extreme vulnerability. Migration and flight always create severe stress on all concerned. On top of these factors, children in the asylum process are inevitably exposed to tension. There is little to be done about this. What we can do is to create the conditions that can keep these tensions from being exacerbated. This starts with an understanding of the unique position that asylum-seeking children are in.

Children are confronted on a daily basis with a range of problem areas that are closely related to each other and which reinforce each other. The long duration of the procedure and the relief phase only make these problems more severe. Additionally, current relief policy has a number of obstacles. For one thing, the approach is very control-oriented, and the government's attitude to the asylum-seekers is ambiguous.

"Waiting for a status is very stressful, but the fact that there is nothing to do at the asylum-seeker centre makes it even more stressful." (girl, 17)

But the stipulations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are clear. It is oriented towards the government and organisations and persons living with or working with children, or all of the above. Everyone has their own responsibility, and the fundamental underpinning of all these responsibilities must be the interests of the child.

Making an active choice for children's rights demands a new paradigm on various levels and on major points.

It necessitates systemic solutions and solutions focused on sub-areas.

Recommendations

The recommendations made in the report *In the centre, the child* are mandatory based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These are not “cosmetic” changes, but minimum standards entailed by the firm commitments made under an international convention.

Following the recommendations will bring the situation of children in asylum-seeker centres into line with the Convention. The recommendations include basic recommendations, recommendations on the duration and continuity of the placement and area-based recommendations. A selection of the recommendations is presented below; the full list follows.

To start with

- Assume the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European standards of relief.² Ensure that the situation of children in asylum-seeker centres meets these standards from the first moment of placement.
- Acknowledge the special position of children in asylum-seeker centres. Create conditions to ensure that the tensions inherent in the position of asylum-seeker children are not exacerbated by the situation in which they find themselves.
- Formulate a mission statement behind the relief provided. In it, describe the things that are considered in the interests of the child.
- Train personnel in the ideals of children’s law.
- Describe the responsibilities of each chain partner, and make clear what qualifies as aid.
- Appoint a supervisory body to guarantee that the aid given is of a high quality and “children’s law-proof.”

Limit the duration of the relief

Keep the asylum procedure (and thereby the relief provided) as short as possible, and to provide a sense of certainty, set an upper limit on the length of a child’s stay in an asylum-seeker centre. In the setup and furnishing of the aid accommodations, adhere to the quality standards for permanent housing.

Increase the continuity

For children, guarantee continuity in all important life areas. Prevent families and children from having to relocate to another asylum-seeker centre. Link the location of the placement to the course of the asylum procedure.

Improve the information supply

Inform the parents and children directly about their situation and their options in the asylum-seeker centre and in the Netherlands. To do this, produce an information booklet and a website that allows children to post their own information and get (and stay) in contact with each other. In each centre, appoint a mentor to answer questions and help children understand what is happening to them.

“I just want to know. I want to know what’s happening.” (girl, 12)

Support the family in the child’s upbringing

Give parents sufficient options to raise their children in an independent family environment. Support the parents in doing this as required. Provide information about the Dutch options. Take responsibility for child upbringing with a regular presence for a Centre for Youth and Family in every asylum-seeker centre.

² The European relief directive is detailed extensively in the full report, *In the centre the child*.

Improve the accommodation

For many children, placement in a residential neighbourhood is better than placement in an asylum-seeker centre. For other children, a good asylum-seeker centre is suitable for placement (at least initially). Offer housing that is suitable for permanent occupancy (despite the temporary nature of the placement), in the vicinity of schools, shops and other basic facilities.

Facilitate recreation, play and leisure activities

Give children of all ages options for meaningful leisure activities both within and outside the asylum-seeker centre. Help them use this to structure their days and bring enjoyment to their lives. Consider the needs of different age groups, and support participation in clubs/sports; engender social contacts outside the asylum-seeker centre.

Improve education

Ensure that the children can go to school. Hold the local authorities to their responsibilities in regard to the children's compulsory schooling. Give parents and children information on the Dutch educational system and help them choose between an asylum-seeker centre school and a conventional school. Assist conventional schools in supervising these children. Give children from "group 6" (age 9/10) and above a quiet place to do their schoolwork, adequate internet access and a bicycle for travelling to school.

Take responsibility for health

Use the same standards for prevention, identification and access to health care as other children in the Netherlands enjoy, but keep sight of the vulnerability and specific circumstances of the children in an asylum-seeker centre. Take the children seriously, engage an interpreter where necessary and guarantee continuity of treatment in the event of a relocation.

Increase safety

Guarantee child-safe housing for families, even in complexes that are only temporarily serving as asylum-seeker centres, and improve living conditions there. Give parents and children information on safety issues in and outside the centres. Deal with nuisance and intimidation.

Improve the asylum procedure

Let children participate in the asylum procedure in a manner appropriate to their age, and make a confidential advisor available to them. Improve the expertise on the part of the IND, courts and attorneys on the content and scope of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Improve the financial situation

Give parents and children information on safety issues in and outside the centres and offer them the help they need. Investigate whether the current family budgets are adequate, and expand parents' options to work.

Increase participation

Involve children in the affairs of the asylum-seeker centre, introduce a children's participation group and appoint a mentor. Organise ongoing contacts with community centres, clubs, athletics and sports organisations, schools and other organisations in the local environment of the asylum-seeker centre. Give the children a chance.

Who needs to do this?

The full report *In the centre, the child* contains checklists indicating the persons and organisations designated to implement each recommendation. Naturally, the report also devotes attention to the parents and their responsibilities and tasks.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child gives the government the responsibility to support parents in their parenting duties, and to take over these duties where such proves necessary. In addition, the government has its own responsibilities in regard to asylum-seeker children (as it does for all children in the Netherlands).

The Ministry for Youth and Family must oversee the performance of the recommendations. The ministry is there for all children, including asylum-seeker children.

There are additional checklists for the Ministry of Justice, the COA, the IND, VluchtelingenWerk, the legal profession, aliens administrative courts, municipalities, various ministries, schools and institutions for health care and youth care.

Why do they need to do this?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child imposes clear and specific requirements on governmental authorities for the treatment of children. In 1995, the Netherlands officially declared its intention to adhere to this convention (as has virtually every other country in the world at this point). Because the Convention on the Rights of the Child only sets minimum requirements, the recommendations given here are non-optional and must be implemented.

[“I want to start my life.”](#)

(girl, 17)

The 65 recommendations

To start with

1. Assume the Convention on the Rights of the Child and European standards of relief. Ensure that the situation of children in asylum-seeker centres meets or exceeds these minimum standards.
2. Acknowledge the special position of children in asylum-seeker centres. Create conditions to ensure that the tensions inherent in the position of these children are not exacerbated by their situation.
3. Formulate a mission behind the aid given. In it, describe the things that are considered in the interests of the child.
4. Train personnel in the children's law vision.
5. Describe the responsibilities of each chain partner, and make clear what qualifies as aid.
6. Appoint a supervisory body to guarantee that the aid given is of a high quality and "children's law-proof."

Limit the duration of the placement

7. Reduce the duration of the asylum procedure, and in so doing, the length of stay in the centre.
 - Set a limit on the children's length of stay in asylum-seeker centres.
 - Give families a status after five years.
8. Set the housing in the centres up with long-term stay in mind.

Increase the continuity

9. Provide the greatest possible degree of continuity in the lives of children and families.
10. Separate the asylum procedure from the housing aspect so that relocation as a part of the procedure is no longer necessary.
11. Limit the relocation of school-age children to a maximum of one time only, and only under very strict conditions.

Improve the information supply

12. Inform children and parents adequately of their situation and options they do and do not have.
 - Increase children's access to information, in part by providing internet access (see recommendations on education).
 - Produce a COA information guide for children, to include: who's who in the asylum-seeker centre, what are your rights, what can you do in the asylum-seeker centre, what can you do in and around the centre.
 - Develop a "Child in the Centre" website: for maintaining contact with children in other centres, for information on the rules and regulations, and for information on the options (recreation, sports, etc.) in and around every asylum-seeker centre.

Recommendations by subject

13. On all subjects, take responsibility for an approach to children in asylum-seeker centres that is "children's rights-proof." Start from the perspective of the interest of the child, rather than the institution's own share of the responsibility.

Support the family in the child's upbringing

14. See the parents as the ones raising the child.

15. Create conditions in which parents can perform their child-rearing task and continue to do so, and which allows them to have a stable family life.
 - Respect the role of parents as those raising the child by approaching them first when the children need corrections in their upbringing/parenting.
 - Give all parents the option of learning the Dutch language.
 - Offer families independent living quarters with their own facilities and the option to cook for themselves (see recommendations on living environment).
 - Create conditions for after-school care and, for young children, a child care centre with professional care-givers. Give parents a role in voluntary tasks in this care.
 - Get parents active through art, sports or music.
 - Stop parents from engaging children as interpreters on adult subjects.
 - Organise a meeting place for parents where they can also obtain practical advice.
 - Reinforce the parents' feeling of autonomy by helping them structure a meaningful daily programme.
 - Organise contacts between the parents.
 - Expand activities for parents and young children.
16. Evaluate what families need.
 - Shortly after arrival in the Netherlands, take stock of the family's support needs.
 - As quickly as possible after arrival in the Netherlands, refer the children to youth health care services for an initial medical and psycho-social examination.
 - At regular intervals, ask parents what they need to properly raise their children.
17. Organise child-rearing support for all parents in an asylum-seeker centre.
 - Bring Centres for Youth & Family (mobile teams with pedagogic consultants) to asylum-seeker centres, and guarantee youth care.
 - From arrival at the asylum-seeker centre, support parents in their role as parent by taking inventory of what parents need to carry out those tasks.
 - Create a separate curriculum for fathers.
 - Use self-organised, low-threshold group-building with involvement of key figures. Organise contacts between people in similar situations, and work with self-organising groups.
 - Support parents in their parenting competencies. Use the experiences with the approach to child abuse and available methods for parenting support. Adapt to the parenting competencies, background and experiences of the parents.
 - Provide information on the role of parents and on child-rearing without physical violence. Underline the importance of structure and a good night's sleep.
 - Provide information on the extraordinary situation in which families find themselves and where they can go for help if child-rearing problems arise.
 - Organise child-rearing support, aid and care for new families in the centre and coach them towards independence and the use of standard facilities in the local environment if available at a reasonable distance.
 - Train COA personnel in dealing with children and parents, recognising problems in child upbringing, and the process of referral and coaching.
 - Appoint a mentor (see recommendation 63).
 - Improve identification and support of serious issues and referral to youth services, youth health care services or child protection.
18. Organise child-rearing support tailored to the families that need it.
 - Give single parents social and psychological support and preventive assistance in child-rearing.
 - Offer extra help to parents and children in extreme situations.

19. Reinforce the psycho-social resilience of children.

- Provide a national curriculum of resilience training for all children of all ages in asylum-seeker centres.
- Adjust to the aspects that children consider important.

Improve the accommodation

20. Investigate the option to place asylum-seeker families in normal housing in society, with assistance, as quickly as possible. Do this with a primary focus on the interest of the child.

21. Invest in adequate living space and privacy for children and parents.

- Set up the environment and conditions for beneficial developmental opportunities for children.
- Increase families' privacy and provide for sufficient living space, separated spaces in the home, a private bedroom for children of primary school age, and private bathroom and cooking facilities for each family; do not place non-family members in family homes.

22. Provide for quality living space.

- Offer families with children accommodations suitable for permanent habitation.
- Give families adequate space (see above).
- Provide for healthy, insulated and child-safe homes (see recommendations on safety).
- Give families a higher degree of freedom in laying out and furnishing their living space.

23. Set up asylum-seeker centres so as to provide a healthy and safe relationship between families and single persons.

- Divide asylum-seeker centres into sections (young families, the elderly, single persons) so children are not inconvenienced by other residents.
- Offer small-scale relief.

24. Place families with children in asylum-seeker centres in the vicinity of a village or urban centre, with essential facilities such as schools and shops.

25. Organise proper transport (ideally public transport) for every asylum-seeker centre.

26. Give every child and parent in an asylum-seeker centre a bicycle and cycling lessons.

27. Place families with children in the right place the first time, in an asylum-seeker centre that offers sufficient opportunity for education and development in the local environment.

- Never place families in an asylum-seeker centre that is slated for closure.
- Choose regional placement, and ensure that families with a status get a residence in the region.
- Prevent moving (see recommendations on continuity)
- Organise sufficient buffer capacity.

Facilitate recreation, play and leisure activities

28. Organise sufficient after-school activities in the centre for children of all ages.

- Organise activities in every asylum-seeker centre where children live.
- Offer the activities regularly, at fixed times.
- Organise activities more than once per week, and offer extra activities during holiday periods.
- Organise after-school care, with professionals, for primary school pupils.
- Offer activities for different age groups (0-4, 4-12, 12-18).
- Offer different types of activities for children.
- Ask children what they like and involve them in the development and performance of activities.
- Involve older children and parents in organising and assisting with activities for young children.
- Also organise activities designed around cooperation between parents and children.
- Wherever possible, make connections with activities outside the asylum-seeker centre.

- Bring trainers and teachers to the asylum-seeker centre if participating in activities outside the centre is not an option due to distance.
 - Train personnel in developing and performing activities and involving residents in them (see recommendations on participation).
 - Call upon the Foundation for the Promotion of Happiness to organise appropriate creative and recreational activities.
29. Provide for adequate facilities in the asylum-seeker centre for recreation, play and leisure.
- Invest in larger living space and privacy for children and parents (see recommendations on living environment).
 - Offer parents sufficient finances to allow children to participate in sports or other activities outside the asylum-seeker centre (see recommendations on finance).
 - Provide for good transport if the centre is remote (see recommendations on living environment).
 - Give every child and parent in an asylum-seeker centre a bicycle and cycling lessons (see recommendations on living environment).
 - Make sure that playground equipment in the asylum-seeker centre is properly maintained.
 - Give every child as from primary school “group 6” access to a computer with internet (see recommendations on education).
 - Expand the options and space for playing outside.
 - Invest in a separate recreation area for children to play inside, and keep this area open when children are not in school.
 - Involve parents in setting up facilities such as a library, recreation library and clothing market in the asylum-seeker centre.
 - Involve architects and artists in setting up the public space and play area in the centre, and allow children to participate.
 - Encourage parents to organise swimming lessons for their children.
30. Give children more opportunity to engage in independent activities in and outside the asylum-seeker centre.
- Expand the opportunities for children to engage in independent activities in their own environment.
 - Refer children and parents to options for financing membership in sports clubs, sports clothes and materials, and help them as required.
 - Appoint a mentor (see recommendation 63).
31. Increase the opportunities for social contact.
- Organise regular activities designed to engender contacts between new children and children who have been living in the asylum-seeker centre for some time.
 - Wherever possible, integrate activities with options outside the asylum-seeker centre.
 - Organise exchange activities with schools in the local environment (with particular focus on primary schools).
 - Involve local residents with the children in the asylum-seeker centre.
 - Give every child as from primary school “group 6” access to a computer with internet (see recommendations on education).
 - Develop a “Child in the Centre” website (see recommendations on information).
32. Properly inform children and parents on the options for leisure activities, and where necessary, assist them in getting started.
- Develop a “Child in the Centre” website on which they can find the options (see recommendations on information).
 - Inform parents extensively on how important activities, play, playing outside, sports and social contacts are for their child’s development.
 - Assist parents and children as required.

Improve education

33. Improve the continuity in the education provided to asylum-seeker children.
 - Enforce the Compulsory Education Act.
 - Prevent relocation, and ensure that any unavoidable relocations are only scheduled between school years (see recommendations on continuity).
 - Organise suitable education and transport from school prior to a move.
 - Give children in asylum-seeker centres a permanent national student number as the basis for a student tracking system.
 - If relocation becomes unavoidable, devote attention to the departure in the class and at school.
34. For each child, evaluate whether it is in the child's interest to go to an asylum-seeker centre school or a regular school. Do this together with the parents.
 - Make clear to parents that they have a free choice of school and support them.
 - At the end of a school year, make an evaluation for every child at the asylum-seeker centre school of whether he/she can be transferred to a regular school.
 - For children in secondary education, make every effort to place them in a regular school programme.
 - Provide adequate transportation to and from school, and make bicycles available (see recommendations on living environment).
35. Organise better support in schools.
 - Liaise with school management and instructors, and organise periodic instructor visits to the asylum-seeker centre.
 - Ensure that intensive and focused school information is provided to children and parents in asylum-seeker centres.
 - Help the school organise homework assistance/tutoring in the asylum-seeker centre (could be done by teacher training college students).
 - Organise regular contacts between school, the COA and institutions for youth health care to ensure that school-age children get the support they need.
36. Give primary school children from "group 6" and up adequate access to the internet on a PC or laptop.
37. Provide good study space for school-going children to do their homework.
38. Involve parents more in their children's education.
 - Inform parents of school-going asylum-seeker children better about the Dutch school system.
 - Actively approach parents for parent-teacher evenings and encourage them to participate in volunteer activities at school.
39. Improve the continuity in the education provided to asylum-seeker children.
 - In the asylum-seeker centre school, start with teaching in Dutch straight away.
 - Adjust the educational level to the level and needs of the individual children as much as possible.
 - Encourage and support children as much as possible.
 - Offer children who have to return to their countries of origin within the foreseeable future short, practical programmes that will be useable in their home countries.
 - Utilise the specific knowledge on teaching asylum-seeker children available from LOWAN, the National Educational Working Group for Asylum-Seekers and Newcomers.
40. Inform everyone involved on the arrangements on education for asylum-seeker children.
41. Adjust the educational regulations to the children's situation where necessary.
 - For example, try to observe some flexibility on repeating classes with students who have had to move frequently due to circumstances beyond their control.
 - Offer further educational opportunities for young adults between the ages of 18 and 21.

Take responsibility for health

42. Improve prevention of health problems.

- Place the emphasis on protective and supporting factors, and adapt to the children's own problem-solving skills.
- Improve families' living conditions (see recommendations on living environment).
- Coordinate prevention towards the long-term and uncertain existence of asylum-seekers in asylum-seeker centres.

43. Improve identification, access and referral.

- Inform asylum-seeker children and parents adequately about their options under the Dutch health care system.
- Increase the options for engaging interpreters.
- Reimburse costs (such as telephone costs) that children and parents incur for health issues.
- At regular intervals, ask asylum-seekers directly about their health care needs. Do this at both the individual and group level.
- Take children's health-related questions seriously.
- Ensure a regular presence of general practitioner and medical support personnel at the asylum-seeker centre site.
- Cooperate on identification.
- Utilise the specific knowledge on health care for asylum-seeker children, such as that available from PGA (Public Health Care for Asylum-Seekers).
- Clearly identify the responsibilities of the various aid personnel and institutions, and take responsibility for tasks.
- Follow asylum-seeker children more intensively.
- Provide for a good, electronic registration system that provides insight into the nature and frequency of health problems in asylum-seeker centres.

44. Expand the health care available to asylum-seeker children.

- Expand the capacity of the health care.
- Train employees in the health care and well-being sector on the problems of asylum-seeker children and the specific help they need.
- Improve the continuity in the care provided to asylum-seeker children, with special attention to those relocating frequently.
- Increase the opportunities for case history discussions in consultation between the relevant institutions.

45. Offer the child specially tailored assistance.

- Opt for age-appropriate help that takes the asylum-seeker child's background into account.
- Recognise that asylum-seeker children may also be the victims of abuse, exploitation, armed conflict or other traumatic experiences.
- Follow the child's own interests.
- For every child, evaluate whether group therapy or individual counselling is called for.
- Organise a social and professional network to support the child.

46. Improve the information given to children and parents on subjects that affect their health.

- Inform them about resilience and communicative and interactive skills.
- Inform them about sexuality and forms of exploitation (including sexual exploitation).
- Inform them about healthy nutrition and hygiene.
- Inform them about the risks of alcohol and drugs.

Increase safety

47. Train personnel in recognising signals and risk factors for asylum-seekers.

48. Implement a reporting code for child abuse, ultimately to become a reporting obligation.

49. Inform children and parents about safety issues.

50. Improve families' living conditions and make living spaces and asylum-seeker centres child-safe (see recommendations on living environment).
 - Set up asylum-seeker centres so as to provide a healthy and safe relationship between families and single parents (see recommendations on living environment).
 - Equip residences for families with young children with safety features such as wall plug protectors and child-proof windows.
 - In the asylum-seeker centre, make arrangements for safety, good lighting, CCTV monitoring, etc.
 - Address and take care of problems of nuisance, drug use, harassment and criminal behaviour in the asylum-seeker centre.
51. Inform parents and children of the nature and duration of their placement.
52. Give children courses on resilience and self-defence.

Improve the asylum procedure

53. Wherever possible, allow children to participate in aliens law as appropriate to their age.
 - Specify how the interest of the child is factored into the asylum procedure.
 - Value the child's vision.
 - Involve criteria in the decision-making such as the length of stay, level of integration, degree of connection with Dutch society, knowledge of language and culture, etc.
 - Recognise that rights such as the right to housing and education are independent of the asylum status.
54. Build a children's rights review into the procedure.
 - With each child, evaluate whether his/her interests and rights to development are at risk.
 - In cases in which the child's development appears to be at risk, charge a specialised institution (such as the Council for Child Protection) with an investigation.
 - In all cases, base assumptions on the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
55. Appoint a confidential advisor for children who is aware of their situation and who can assist them and explain the legal procedure.
56. Increase the expertise of aliens administrative courts, the IND and asylum attorneys.
 - Inform them about child development and the impact of their decisions on children.
 - Educate them in the requirements that the Convention on the Rights of the Child places on the government and anyone working with children.

Improve the financial situation

57. Investigate whether families require a bigger budget.
58. Give parents information on safety issues in and outside the centres and offer them the help they need.
59. Avoid parents having to front payment for critical aspects such as health and education.
60. Increase the options for parents to work without losing their benefit.

Increase participation

61. Organise children's participation in asylum-seeker centres.
62. Train centre personnel to identify, recognise and address social care issues for children in asylum-seeker centres.
63. Appoint a mentor children can approach and who will maintain direct contact with children and parents in the asylum-seeker centre. The mentor will inform, counsel and support families with questions on education, recreation, contacts with school, etc. This mentor must be present regularly, including after business hours, and easily accessible.
64. Involve children in the day-to-day issues at the asylum-seeker centre.
 - Survey the needs of children and parents at regular intervals.
 - Invest in informal contacts with children.

- Place a “suggestion box” in the asylum-seeker centre and take ideas and complaints seriously.
 - Ask children actively about ideas on structuring suitable care and assistance.
 - Organise a children’s participation group or youth council.
65. Organise contacts between the asylum-seeker centre and community centres, clubs, athletics and sports organisations, schools and other organisations in the local environment of the asylum-seeker centre.

Chin up!

Because if you have made it this far with implementing the recommendations, then the situation in which children in asylum-seeker centres in the Netherlands live is in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.