



Summary

Report 'Crisis over.

Towards humane accommodation for asylum seekers from a human and children's rights perspective'

What is this report about?

This report looks at the lives of families in crisis and emergency accommodation. This is where children and their parents who have sought refuge in the Netherlands are currently living temporarily. The National Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children understand that there are multiple problems in these families' lives. These include the fact that it takes a long time for the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) to decide whether the families have the right to remain in the Netherlands. This creates uncertainty. But there is also the fact that many people are living in one large room without any real place of their own. This is why the ombudsmen have investigated the lives of families in crisis and emergency accommodation and have identified what improvements are needed. They are concerned that the refuge accommodation provided fails to take sufficient account of both parents' and children's rights.

Everyone has rights. You get them automatically when you are born. These rights are enshrined in a convention. A convention of this kind contains a list of agreements that almost every country in the world has signed up to. That includes the Netherlands. Rights that apply to adults and children are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Rights that apply specifically to children are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights protect you and are important for everyone. That includes people seeking refuge.

What did we do?

We investigated which rights parents and children have when they seek refuge in the Netherlands. And when they are living in crisis and emergency accommodation. We looked at the agreements laid down in asylum treaties. These are agreements that apply to people who are refugees. We also looked at agreements enshrined in human rights treaties and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We held talks with various people. With parents and children who are living in crisis and emergency accommodation. With the people who work there. We also talked to people who work for the government. It is the responsibility of these people from the Ministry of Justice & Security, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and the local municipalities to ensure that parents' and children's rights are properly respected.

What did we find?

The information we collected reveals that the rights of parents and children living in crisis and emergency accommodation are not being properly respected. Living in crisis and emergency accommodation is often so difficult that people start feeling that they are not being treated decently or with respect.

We identified five major issues that are causing people to feel this way:

- a. The government is not allowing parents and children to do things independently and take the initiative. For example, they cannot decide for themselves what to eat, when to eat and cannot cook for themselves.
- b. The government is not providing the essentials for a proper place to live. In other words, somewhere where you can sleep in peace, lock your door to have some privacy or cook for yourself.

- C. The government is not providing parents and children with proper information. They are not telling parents and children everything they can expect. For example, when they can expect to be processed by the IND or about rehousing.
- d. The government is not listening to children's wishes and needs. Children must have a proper childhood and be able to develop and parents must be able to raise them. This is impossible if there are too few places at school for the children, there is little to do or if they do not always receive the care (medical or psychological) that they need.
- e. The government is not treating all refugees and asylum seekers equally. It is also not taking the needs of particularly vulnerable groups, such as children, into account.

What needs to change?

The government has an obligation to observe human rights and children's rights. This is why the two ombudsmen would like to see certain things change as soon as possible. This will mainly be the responsibility of the municipalities where the crisis and emergency accommodation is located. These changes are:

- * Provide accommodation with sufficient opportunities for a private life and where families are able to cook for themselves.
- * Ensure that children are able to attend school and that parents have enough useful activities to do during the day.
- * Identify where changes can be made now. Also identify what residents themselves know and are capable of, what local residents can do and what other similar locations are doing.
- * Stop continually relocating families to different places in the Netherlands. Relocation is really only an option if families have requested it themselves.
- * Talk to children about what they need and keep an eye on their progress. Also ensure that their opinion weighs heavily in any decisions taken.

There are several other issues that will take slightly more time to change. This may not happen soon, but it is important that these changes are also made. For this purpose, the Ministry of Justice and Security will need to work with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. These changes are:

- * We must bring an end to crisis accommodation. These places need to become permanent sites to accommodate refugees.
- * The IND needs to increase staff numbers, so that refugees and asylum seekers do not have to wait so long to find out if they are permitted to remain in the Netherlands. This will also help reduce long waiting lists in the future.
- * Schools need to provide more places for asylum seekers' and refugees' children. This will enable children to learn properly, together with other children. Just like every other child in the Netherlands.