

# Multi-country Partnership to Enhance the Education of Refugee and Asylum-seeking Youth in Europe

## Refugee Education in the Netherlands



October 2016

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Inducement to research

This report describes the educational support for refugee and asylum seekers children in the Netherlands. Because of a sudden increase in the number of newcomers in the last five years, there have been various additional challenges for the Dutch educational system. All parties involved on an administrative, social and educational level have been under high pressure. The report is being written within the European Educational Policy Network SIRIUS, the project name is PERAE. PERAE is establishing a partnership between seven countries to address inadequate access to quality education for asylum-seeking and refugee youth throughout the European Union. The project started in January 2016 and is funded by the Mercator Foundation. The recent drastic rise in asylum applicants has placed increased pressure on Member States to develop strategies for effectively integrating new arrivals into society.

Research has shown that education is one of the most important paths to the structural integration of young asylum seekers and refugees because they have particular social and emotional needs that quality education can help them overcome. Despite this need, there is currently insufficient understanding of the challenges that these youth face and inadequate transnational sharing of knowledge regarding potential solutions. For instance, the European Asylum Support Office – the primary EU Agency in charge of knowledge exchange in this field – does not (1) analyse the challenges that asylum-seeking and refugee youth face in accessing education, (2) facilitate the exchange of knowledge among the wide range of stakeholders involved in education nor (3) engage with stakeholders to encourage the implementation of policies that improve access to quality education. The project will contribute to filling these three gaps in the participating countries in three main phases.

In the **first stage**, each project partner will conduct desk research and field work within their country. The field work will consist of interviews with and participatory observations in reception classes and schools of different groups of refugee and asylum seeking youth inside and outside of education. For the Netherlands there is a distinction between those who have been here less than a year and those being here longer than a year. Also unaccompanied minors will be addressed. Field work will also consist of interviews/focus groups with stakeholders such as government agencies, NGOs, school administrators, teachers, social workers and parents. Partners will also make connections with government agencies and NGOs, which will facilitate this fieldwork. The resulting analysis will identify challenges that youth face, find good practices in addressing those challenges and provide an overview of the interaction between the profile of each education system (with a focus on primary and secondary education) and the migrants within it. In the **second stage**, each partner will hold a stakeholder meeting in their country, which will enable a wide variety of stakeholders of each participating country to exchange knowledge and experience regarding refugee education. These meetings will contribute to the development of policy and practice recommendations and indicators to

track the adoption and implementation of the recommendations. In the **final stage**, partners will develop a final report and conduct transnational dissemination and good practice exchange meetings. This report mainly focusses on refugee and asylum seekers children, but where needed it will be broadened for newly arrived migrant children (NAMS) as well.

## 1.2 The Educational System in General

In the Netherlands, education is compulsory for children between the ages of five and eighteen years old. In general, the parents are the ones who choose an elementary school for their children. Subsequently, the educational level of a child in secondary school is determined by the child's achievements when he or she is in grade eight. The school governing bodies and the municipalities on their turn are responsible for organizing the education for NAMS. As a result, there are various educational systems for the newcomers as is also the case in countries such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Eurydice, 2009). There might be advantages to this type of structure as the in- and outflow of newcomers is unpredictable and, moreover, a decentralized organization provides flexibility and the capacity to adapt to changes and fluctuations. However, this type of structure can also cause difficulties when the further integration of NAMS into society with respect to a career is put into consideration. For example, the expertise of teachers could be disproportionate on a meso-level. After all, there are no national laws or guidelines on how to acquire additional teaching skills for teachers of newly arrived students with a different native language (Vijfeijken & Schilt-Mol, 2012).

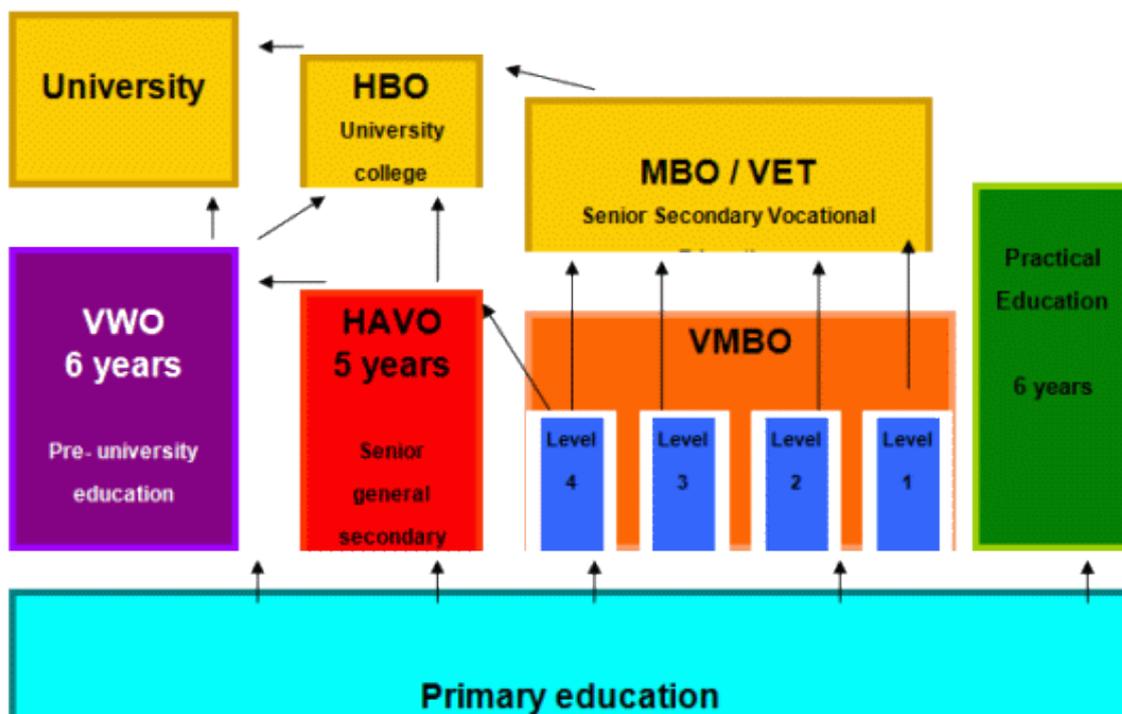


Figure 1: Educational system in the Netherlands

### **1.3 Summary of results found by the EDINA network**

The project EDINA (EDucation of International Newly Arrived migrant pupils) brings together policy makers, schools and researchers from Finland (Helsinki), Belgium (Ghent) and The Netherlands (Rotterdam and Utrecht). The main objective of EDINA is to provide support to municipalities, schools and teachers in the reception and the integration into the school system of Newly Arrived Migrant pupils (NAMS); more information can be found on [www.edinaplatform.eu](http://www.edinaplatform.eu). The network has written a country report on the Netherlands. The analysis of the data points out different aspects. First, the composition of the student population in Dutch schools has extremely changed in the last couple of years. The number of children of refugees and Eastern European migrant workers has increased excessively. As a result of this growing inflow of migrants, not only are the countries of origin and motives for migration different, but also the social background of migrants and complicated factors such as traumatic experiences have most probably changed. Moreover, it is noteworthy that newly arrived students not only have to make a transition with respect to moving to the Netherlands, but they also make more transitions in the Netherlands than other students do, as is demonstrated in the various analyses of the school population. After all, new coming students make an extra transition from the class for newcomers to the mainstream school after they moved to the Netherlands. All these aspects point out that the population of newcomers, even after their arrival in the Netherlands, is very dynamic on various levels. In elementary school, factors such as age and educational level are carried out in different ways which makes the transition between the different schools even more complicated. In addition, this report demonstrates that there are still no explicit requirements to teach a class for newcomers. However, explicit requirements for teaching a class for newcomers is desirable since the population of newly arrived students is complicated and demands more competences than teaching a mainstream class.

## 2 Desk Research

### 2.1 Number of asylum seekers

Even though the group of newly arrived students does not merely consist of asylum seekers, an overview of the number of the first asylum applications is indicative of the increasing inflow of newly arrived students. An overview of the first asylum applications can be found in table 1. This overview demonstrates that there is a visible increase of this group of newcomers. As can be seen, the number has almost quadrupled between the years 2013 and 2015. Moreover, data of the Central Organ Shelter Asylum Seekers (COA) point out that these children and teenagers comprise 22 percent of the total number of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. This information is based on a census on 23 November 2015.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Applications</b>
2013	2.800
2014	4.680
2015	10.220

Table 1: The number of the first asylum applications of people under the age of 18 years old per year

Moreover, the national origin of the asylum seekers has been fluctuating considerably in the previous years. Table 2 gives an overview of the top ten national origins of asylum seekers until the age of 18 years old in 2015, according to the Statistics Bureau Netherlands (CBS). This overview does not only demonstrate that the number of asylum-seeking children and teenagers has been increasing, but also that the countries of origin per year have been fluctuating immensely. Nevertheless, not every newly arrived student is also an asylum seeker. After all, there are children who move to the Netherlands because their parents are migrant workers. Since the request of these children to be placed in a class for newcomers is not always granted, an overview of these children distorts the information concerning newcomers. Therefore, one can use the overview of asylum-seeking children as a depiction of the diversity of national origins.

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Afghanistan	400	180	145	1110
Albanian	0	5	15	305
Eritrean	70	105	765	1720
Iraqi	375	100	140	695
Iranian	155	105	75	215
Kosovan	15	20	10	200
Mongolian	35	30	155	120
Serbian	50	115	65	195
Somali	265	630	180	100
Syrian	105	505	1 570	4030

Table 2: National origins of asylum seekers until the age of 18 years old with a first asylum application

Furthermore, according to education aid organization LOWAN, approximately 11.350 students were placed in primary reception classes in secondary school on 1 October 2015, which is similar to approximately 750 classes in the Netherlands. Moreover, it has been estimated that there were 3.000 additional students in the period between 1 October 2015 and January 2016. This estimation is based on the number of applications for casework assistance, in the period after 1 October. Currently, there are approximately 200 classes for newcomers in primary school. The Inspectorate has made an overview of the total number of newly arrived students who have a different native language, as can be seen in table 3. For this purpose, the following definition has been used for foreign language speaking newcomers: students who have been in the Netherlands for a shorter period than 4 years with a different nationality than a Dutch one, and who are not fluent enough in the Dutch language to participate in school.

<b>Number of Years in the Netherlands</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
< 1 year	3.726	4.454	5.452	22.091	18%
1 – 2 years	4.480	3.909	4.850	21.891	17%
2 – 3 years	4.356	4.536	3.945	20.890	17%
3 - 4 years	3.847	4.182	4.448	18.930	15%
Subtotal newcomers	16.409	17.081	18.695	83.802	67%
>= 4 years	8.147	9.291	10.427	42.146	33%
Subtotal known number of years	24.556	26.372	29.122	125.948	100%

Table 3: Newly arrived students with a different native language classified in the amount of years they have been living in the Netherlands

Apart from a few exceptions, most students who attend a class for foreign-language speaking newcomers belong to the group who have been in the Netherlands for a period which is shorter than 1 year. Moreover, even though data concerning the year of 2015 is missing, this overview prominently demonstrates that, on average, there is a yearly increase of 7 percent in the number of newly arrived students.

## **2.2 The asylum procedure**

People who wish to apply for asylum in the Netherlands must report to an application centre of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND). Asylum seekers are then brought to the central reception location of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). This central reception location is where asylum seekers are first received. As soon as asylum seekers enter the asylum procedure, they move from the central reception location to one of COA's processing centres. If, in the general asylum procedure, asylum seekers are referred on to the extended asylum procedure, they move to an asylum seekers' centre. Asylum seekers leave the processing centre or asylum seekers' centre after the asylum procedure has been completed. If asylum seekers are granted a residence permit, they are given their own residential accommodation in a Dutch municipality. If an asylum application is rejected, the asylum seeker concerned is entitled to remain at

an asylum seekers' centre for a maximum of 28 days, during which time, steps are taken to prepare the individual for a return to his or her country of origin.

### **Relocations**

Because of the lack of places at regular reception facilities and the creation of temporary locations, the number of times that children have to move has increased sharply since 2015. Most of the children and young people had moved seven or eight times. Some of the children moved ten or eleven times. This is because, in many cases, these children were placed in emergency reception centres. While there are currently no children in emergency accommodation as such, the situation remains challenging in that the locations at which many children are living are temporary and the asylum procedure has been extended from a maximum of six months to nine or fifteen months, which means that these children will also have to move more often. The relocations have a negative impact on the situation of children for several reasons. First and foremost, moving means instability. Children must repeatedly become accustomed to a new residential environment, new children and adults who live in the area, new housing supervisors and new volunteers who work in the municipality, a new school environment and new teachers and classmates. Each time, a child must leave a familiar environment with familiar people and friends behind and find a way of making a new place home. The more often children have to move, the less regularity and stability in their daily upbringing and education. This lack of regularity and stability has an adverse effect on their development and well-being. In addition, because children do not have a stable residential environment in which they can settle, they are unable to process the experiences that they have been through and give these experiences a place. Relocations also undermine the continuity of education. In addition, teachers at the new school are often unaware of what students who have come from elsewhere have already learned or still need to learn.

## **2.3 Structure of classes for newcomers**

Since there are differences between the various language schools and classes for newcomers, it is difficult to create an image of the policy and structure of the general education for newly arrived students in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, in order to provide an image of the structure, the websites of different language schools, classes for newcomers and International Intermediate Classes (ISKs) in the Netherlands have been visited. However, the websites of the individual schools or classes contained few or no information concerning the school policies. Therefore, this chapter provides an overall picture of the information which is available.

### **2.3.1 Primary Education**

When the status of refugee children are set, there are four possible scenarios for them between the age of 4 and 12 years old:

- The city has asked a school board to establish a school within an asylum seekers' center. The students attend this school until they receive a definitive answer about

their asylum application. (According to the classification made by the Inspectorate: education type 1).

- The city has asked a school board to establish a school with the purpose of providing an education for NAMS. In this specific scenario, the students will be enrolled in this school as soon as they are settled in that city (education type 2).
- The city has asked a school board to create classes for newly arrived students within a mainstream school. In this situation, mainstream schools create separate classes for foreign-language speaking newcomers in order to help them to participate in a regular class within one year. After having attended the classes for newcomers with a different native language, they are able to integrate into the regular classes of the primary school. In some cases, the students also attend the regular class during a part of the day. The schoolboard often decides which schools should be specialized concerning education for NAMS, which means that future students often have to seek a school outside the region they live in. According to the Inspectorate there is a difference between schools with three or more classes for foreign-language speaking newcomers and schools with merely one or two of such classes. The prior sort of schools belong to the education type 2 as described above and the last sort of schools are referred to as education type 3.
- In the last scenario a NAM student is enrolled in a mainstream school straightaway. In this case, the student does not receive any further special support. This scenario is often found in rural regions and is referred to as education type 4.

According to LOWAN, currently, the Netherlands have almost 200 classes for newcomers with a different native language. While some of these classes are regional classes, other classes are centered around a district, village or town. Asylum seekers, EU migrants and permit holders are all given a chance to enroll in these classes. They will stay in these classes until their Dutch language skills are sufficient enough to attend a (regular) school in their district. Most classes for newly arrived students are part of a mainstream school and are either located in the same building as the mainstream school or have their own building.

Also, there has been a notable increase in the number of classes for newcomers in the last 5 years. The rise in the last year can be explained by the large inflow of people into the centers for asylum seekers and emergency accommodations, and the obligations which the municipalities have to place permit holders in accommodations. Furthermore, every asylum seekers' center works together with a school. In some cases, the schools are to be found in the center for asylum seekers, as is the case in the cities of Leersum, Katwijk and Dronten. Nevertheless, in the city of Utrecht, the school can be found outside the center for asylum seekers.

In addition, LOWAN stimulates a regional vision (concerning a policy for classes for newcomers), whereby the word "region" is often as big as the regional cooperative association. LOWAN desires an implantation which fits this vision. Examples are an establishment of a regional class, multiple language classes in one area, and ambulant teachers who are able to travel from one primary school

to another. However, there are still areas in the Netherlands which lack a vision for the reception of newcomers. As a consequence, these schools sometimes receive an unforeseen request for placing a newly arrived student in one of their classes.

### **Classification criteria**

When it comes to classifying newcomers within the primary education in the Netherlands, there are two perspectives worth discussing: classifying the students on their age or classifying them based on their fluency in the Dutch language. This last perspective's method is continuously subject to changes as the first method used to be the so-called PRISMA-method and nowadays the method which is being used is the Mondeling Nederlands Nieuw. Nevertheless, both methods consist of four levels, which all have a duration of four weeks. Moreover, students start at level 1 and subsequently move on to the higher levels until he or she starts attending a mainstream school. Furthermore, in some schools, students with the same level attend the same class. In other schools, on the other hand, students with different levels also attend the same class. Schools who do not place newcomers in a certain class based on their fluency in the Dutch language, as described above, are often concerned with the age of the students. Nonetheless, because of a lack of mutual coordination concerning the classification of students among the classes for newcomers of different schools, the transition of students from one school to another is often difficult.

### **Reception, Transition and Replacement**

The information gained from the websites of the different schools demonstrates that primary schools have different requirements when it comes to receiving newly arrived students, and transitioning and placing them into mainstream schools:

- There are different definitions of a “newly arrived student,” (e.g. someone new in the Netherlands, someone who is not fluent in the Dutch language, everyone with a different native language, whether they have recently arrived in the Netherlands or have been living there for a while).
- Only central schools have reception classes for toddlers. Other schools are merged into mainstream groups.
- Even though the websites of the schools indicate that students are placed into classes for newcomers for the duration of approximately two years, reality shows that the duration is approximately one year.
- There are no specific protocols when it comes to deciding which educational level fits a student. Sometimes a student's age is used as a criterion for determining the level of education, with the additional remark that a student has to be fluent enough in the Dutch language. However, the exact meaning of being fluent enough in the language is not clear.

Moreover, LOWAN suggests that schools with a good educational structure register the initial conditions of every student and also have an intake interview with the parents whereby the student's

family conditions, personal details and school history are discussed. During this interview, the schools also try to find out if the student has attended a Dutch school before. After all, if that is the case, the previous school can be contacted.

Moreover, the initial conditions of the students are determined by testing the motor skills, reading skills (e.g. literacy, reading comprehension skills in the native language, and knowledge of the Latin alphabet), mathematical abilities (e.g. working with numbers and arithmetical skills), and their vocabulary (knowledge of Dutch words). Nonetheless, LOWAN also points out that not all schools are well-structured or make use of such elaborate intakes. According to LOWAN, it takes “a proper budget, a strong teacher, a strong organization, support of the board, support of the municipality, and a good learning environment” to comply to this type of educational structure.

Furthermore, LOWAN points out that the schools who do make use of tests to define the initial conditions of the students, test (without any certain type of method) the reading skills, mathematical skills and vocabulary of the students every 10 until 13 weeks. In addition, these schools also have determined which goals a student should achieve in order to start attending a mainstream school. Hereby, it is preferred that a student is transferred into a class with students of the same age. Lastly, aspects such as didactic conditions, learning efficiency, and a student’s social-emotional development are also put into condition when a student is transferred into a mainstream school.

### **Cooperation with mainstream education**

In primary education, parents point out which school has their preference for their child. Subsequently, a caseworker from this school has a conversation with the parents about their child. Also, an Educational Report (OKR) of the child is sent to the future mainstream school of the child. Moreover, in order to evaluate this process, questionnaires are sent to the schools after the child has been enrolled in the schools for a couple of months. In other cases, a caseworker from a mainstream school is called in to see how the child is doing and to determine which group or class is the most appropriate for him or her.

#### **2.3.2 Secondary Education**

In secondary school, which is often for students in the ages between 13 and 18 years old, the primary reception classes, also called ISK, are part of the schools which are specialized in primary reception education. This type of education in secondary school is organized on a national scale and varies minimally on a regional scale.

According to LOWAN, ISKs are always connected to a mainstream secondary school because a reception class is not a separate form of education itself. There are four different scenarios for the reception of new coming students within secondary education:

- A school has a separate department within a mainstream secondary school
- A school has a separate department within another school building
- A school has a separate department within multiple buildings
- A school has a separate department within a center for asylum seekers

Moreover, students receive a profile with underlined goals which they have to achieve before they can attend a mainstream school. Furthermore, the schools have different points of views when it comes to the maximum age of the newly arrived student they accept into their classes (either 12-18 or 12-16 years old) and the length of the reception classes (1 up to 3 years). In reality, a reception class provides educational support for 30 weeks, on average. However, this varies strongly per school. After all, according to LOWAN, ISKs provide educational support for approximately two years. Remarkably, there is no information about shorter periods of educational support to newcomers.

### **Classification criteria**

Within secondary education, classification of the newcomers is not based on their age, but on their expected educational level when they finish attending the reception class. Hereby, their competences at school and fluency in the Dutch language are put into consideration. There are currently 85 ISKs in the Netherlands. Some of them are on the grounds of an asylum seekers' centre. Newcomers can enrol in these reception classes from the age of 12. ISKs are of course not only attended by refugees. They are also attended by newcomers like children of migrant workers, those who have come to be reunited with their families and Dutch individuals from the overseas territories of the Netherlands. The aim is for students to enter a mainstream secondary education programme or, if they are somewhat older, a senior secondary vocational education programme after approximately two ISK years.

### **Reception, Transition and Replacement**

In contrary to primary schools, all the ISKs use the same criteria when it comes to the reception of newly arrived students. The number of students which are placed into the ISKs vary from 15 up to 500 students and they come from all places in the region. Moreover, in secondary education, a broad definition of a "newly arrived student" is applied: newly arrived students are all students who are not fluent in the Dutch language, such as children of migrant workers and refugees, solitary underage refugees, permit holders or those who applied for a permit, and students whose mother or father married a Dutch citizen. LOWAN also points out that several schools are using an intake-instrument created by Bureau ICE. In addition, LOWAN, in cooperation with the Institute for Language Research and Language Education for Foreign-Language Speakers (or ITTA for), is creating an educational curriculum for the ISKs. Hereby, a fitting level of education is offered to students, which is based on an extended intake with a duration of maximum 4 weeks (Intake-Instrument Primary Reception of ForeignLanguage Speakers, EOA). Nonetheless, according to LOWAN, the communication between the different institutes is challenging.

### **Cooperation with mainstream education**

In secondary education, there are educational curricula which describe what a student has to achieve in order to be transferred into a certain form of mainstream education.

### **2.3.3 Senior secondary vocational education**

From the age of 16, young adults in the Netherlands can enrol in a senior secondary vocational education programme to prepare for a profession. There are four levels of senior secondary vocational education: (1) starter training for young people who do not have a certificate, (2) basic vocational training to perform practical work, (3) vocational training to become an independent professional, and (4) middle-management training and specialist training to qualify as a professional who can perform work entirely independently. In 2014-2015, the Netherlands had 65 senior secondary vocational schools with 484,985 students, a large majority of which were under the age of 18. Because of the current influx of refugees into the Netherlands, schools that provide senior secondary vocational education are being asked by municipal authorities to admit refugees and prepare them for a place in the labour market. The focus in this regard is on 16 and 17-year-old newcomers who in practice do not always fit well in ISKs, since these reception classes include many younger children. Efforts are therefore made to place these young adults in senior secondary vocational education. In addition, senior secondary vocational schools provide language support and/or civic integration courses for refugees aged 18 and older. A cohort survey (2009-2014) shows that approximately 70% of ISK students continue to senior secondary vocational education, mainly to levels 1 and 2, though in some cases to levels 3 and 4.

#### **Classification criteria**

By law, admission to the higher levels of senior secondary vocational education is only possible if the student concerned holds a certificate at at least pre-vocational secondary education level. On the instructions of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Cooperation Organization for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB) has for many years determined the value of foreign certificates in comparison with Dutch pre-vocational secondary education certificates and senior secondary vocational education certificates. If a refugee who holds a foreign certificate wishes to enrol in a senior secondary vocational education programme, SBB can determine the value of the refugee's certificate for free. Within a week, SBB provides an opinion regarding the refugee's level of education by email. This enables the school concerned to admit students at the level that is appropriate to them. However, selection is more difficult for senior secondary vocational schools if a refugee who does not yet have a certificate advances from an ISK. Senior secondary vocational schools are wary of admitting ISK students to their programmes if they are not convinced that the students concerned have completed the initial, reception education to the level required for participation in vocational education. The senior secondary vocational education system does not have the resources required to provide adequate language support for these newcomers. For self-evident reasons, it is not possible for newcomers to achieve, within one or two years of ISK education, learning objectives that native students work towards for 10 years. Nevertheless, the competent authority of a senior secondary vocational school can opt to provide an admission test that a student without a certificate can take in order to be admitted to a level 2, 3 or 4 programme. Not every school exercises this option in the case of refugees, however, since admission by means of this method can have an adverse effect in terms of performance and the dropout rate. There is therefore a risk of

refugee children being enrolled en masse in level 1 programmes (starter training) because admission requirements do not apply to these programmes.

### **Cooperation with mainstream education**

Partnerships were formed in many municipalities this year to ease the progression of newcomers into senior secondary vocational education. LOWAN, the University of Amsterdam and a number of schools are currently working together to develop profiles and learning programmes that can be used to provide an appropriate combination of subjects to newcomers. It is important in this regard for the level of newcomers to be determined not only by their language proficiency. Their other skills, talents and prior education in the country of origin must also be taken into account. The education programme of an ISK student must therefore focus on the student's future possibilities. The ISK period must be dedicated to preparing the student for progression into senior secondary vocational education at the right level.

In addition, the Foundation for Refugee Students (UAF), the Netherlands Association of Senior Secondary Vocational Schools and the Dutch Council for Refugees (VWN) held a conference in March 2015 that focused on possible solutions to improve the progression of refugee students into senior secondary vocational education. Two coordinators were appointed to ensure practical implementation. The following solutions were formulated:

- Improve the provision of information for potential refugee students and their guides regarding senior secondary vocational education and preparatory programmes.
- Identify possible senior secondary vocational preparatory programmes for refugee students and share this knowledge.
- Create appropriate practical training places for potential refugee students.
- Simplify the testing process by making B1 the equivalent of 2F (language concerned) in the context of the language examination programme.

## **2.4 Financial support for schools and municipalities**

### **2.4.1 National scale**

The government supports municipalities financially in order to stimulate the language development of students, which is based on the Policy for Educational Disadvantage (or OAB for short). With the help of this financial support, which amounted up to 361 million euros in 2013, municipalities can cover the expenses of classes for newcomers within primary education, pre-primary and early childhood education, and summer schools (Hogeveen, 2014). This support is assigned to municipalities based on the expected financial expenses per newly arrived student. These expenses are determined by the educational level of a student's parent (Cebeon, 2015).

Also, the financial support which secondary schools receive is determined by the number of students which are enrolled in school on 1 October and the educational level the student has in secondary school. In addition, secondary schools can receive extra financial support by making use of a

procedure concerning newcomers, which applies to foreigners without a Dutch nationality and who have not been living in the Netherlands for longer than two years. Moreover, the procedure concerning foreigners who have been living in the Netherlands for shorter than one year, also known as the First Reception of Foreigners procedure, can be used. Yearly, secondary schools receive 4.500 euros per student who meets this last requirement. Furthermore, secondary schools can receive 16.000 euros extra in order to perform preparatory and coordinating activities<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, when the schools receive enrollments of minimally 20 children of asylum seekers, they can ask for special financial support which, according to LOWAN, amounts up to 1.355,40 euros for personal support and 40,87 euros for material sustainment purposes per student per year. There is also a procedure which applies to students who have been living in the Netherlands for a shorter period than one year. The financial support regarding this group comprises 2.710,80 euros for the staff and 81,74 euros for material sustainment purposes. When the schools make use of this last procedure, they receive 10.679 euros for once only. Schools in areas with a high percentage of low incomes and social welfare can also make use of another special procedure concerning financial support, which can be requested at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW). This schoolyear, this financial support amounts up to 1.350 euros per student<sup>2</sup>.

Financial support is also provided to schools by the Ministry of Refugee Children. According to the Secretary-of State Dekker, this support amounts up to 9.000 euros per student in primary education, in addition to the regular funding (maximally 4.000 euros) and the current procedures concerning asylum seekers and newcomers (maximally 4.000 euros). Furthermore, secondary schools receive a fixed sum of money per student, which comprises “the regular funding for a student and the average necessary expenses for a newly arrived student.” In addition, in order to keep up with the fluctuations in the number of students which are enrolled in a school, there are four reference dates for this type of financial support: 1 October, 1 January, 1 April, and 1 July. With the help of this arrangement, on average, schools receive 2.750 euros per student per quarter. In other words, yearly, schools receive approximately 11.000 euros per student, which is similar to the amount of financial support a regular student with additional educational needs receives. This funding is significant for the year of 2016 and every student which was enrolled in a school from 1 October 2015 on (Ministry OCW, 2015).

Furthermore, in a recent letter to the President of the Second Chamber, the Secretary-of-State pointed out that secondary education, just like primary education, should also be eligible for this new type of financial arrangement, starting from the schoolyear of 2016 - 2017. This arrangement will replace all the existing additional arrangements for foreigners. For example, the funding will be based on the number of enrolled newcomers per quarter instead of the number of newly arrived students which are enrolled on the first day of the quarter. Furthermore, this arrangement implies that secondary schools will be receiving a fixed sum of money per quarter, which comprises 2.250 euros, or in other words 9.000 euros yearly per student. However, when a school is already receiving extra financial support for the fast increase in the number of students which is enrolled after the reference

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<sup>1</sup> See for information: <http://www.lowan.nl/voortgezet-onderwijs/financiering/ocwduo/>

<sup>2</sup> See for information: <http://www.vosabb.nl/toelichting-op-impulsregeling-postcodegebieden/>

dates for the new financial arrangement, this extra sum of money will be subtracted from the new funding in order to prevent double funding. This new arrangement, nonetheless, is only applicable for asylum seekers. All the other newly arrived students are eligible for the existing financial arrangements. Lastly, the financial support which has been offered to primary education by the government has been based on the size of the municipality involved. The 37 largest municipalities receive extra funding for activities which help students with a language deficiency to attend education which corresponds to their talents. The financial expenses for this purpose comprised 95 million euros in 2013. Moreover, the Minister and involved municipalities have made agreements concerning these financial expenses for the years of 2012 - 2015. Starting from the year 2017 on, the policy described above will be changed as all municipalities will receive the same type of financial support (Hogeveen, 2014).

#### **2.4.2 Municipal scale**

Based on the Policy for Educational Disadvantage (OAB), schools with classes for newly arrived students receive financial support from the municipalities, whereby the degree of support varies per municipality. For example, research conducted by Cebeon demonstrates that the participating municipalities in 2012, 2013 and 2014 spent approximately between 205 and 290 million euros in order to prevent educational disadvantage among students. In other words, the schools received approximately between 2.300 and 3.300 euros per student (Hogeveen, 2014). As a matter of fact, the government is expecting 93.000 refugees in 2016, which is already a remarkable increase in comparison to the previous year. It is expected that the number of newcomers will be multiplied, which subsequently might put the quality of education provided to newcomers under pressure.

#### **2.4.3 Policy developments**

Since April 2016 the government made available 353 million via the municipality funds for housing students in secondary education, transport for students, pre-primary education and preparatory and language classes. Furthermore there have been a lot of motion discussed and voted about in Dutch parliament:

1. The motion-Van Meenen about limiting the number of relocation of refugee children → REJECTED
2. The motion-Van Meenen on inflows at the appropriate level by students around 18 years of international transition classes → APPROVED
3. The motion-Siderius on professional youth work focusing on traumas of refugee children → REJECTED
4. the motion- Grasshoff et al. on additional funding in the second year primary level → APPROVED
5. The motion- Straus about more consistency in the education of refugee children for a better use of public funds → INCORPORATED

#### **2.4.4 Forecasting**

The funds for the education of newcomers should be raised with approximately 25 percent (+/- 2300 students) in order to provide financial support to students in ISKs who do not have the Dutch nationality and have been living in the Netherlands for more than two years. After all, these students are not calculated in the regulations for newcomers and cannot attend regular classes because they are not fluent enough in the Dutch language, according to LOWAN. This situation is also evident in primary education as children of migrant workers are not always placed in classes for newcomers, when they have been living in the Netherlands for a longer period of time than allowed by schools. Nevertheless, the schools are rather independent on the established rules of the government in order to gain necessary extra financial support (chapter 4). As a result, students who are not fluent enough in the Dutch language start attending regular classes because the schools cannot afford to place them in a class for newcomers. There are, however, schools who chose to place these students in classes for newcomers at their own expense.

### **2.5 Critical points**

Children who are placed in a temporary reception centre often have to wait for a long time before they can go to school. The interviews revealed that this waiting period can range from weeks to months. There are several barriers to rapid entry into education. This study suggests that these barriers are greater in primary education than they are in secondary education.

#### **No data on children of compulsory school age**

Neither the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science nor the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) has information on the number of asylum seeker children of compulsory school age who are currently not attending school. LOWAN, an organization that supports schools in setting up education for newcomers, has stated that it needs such information in order to be aware of the municipalities in which children are not yet receiving education and problems still have to be resolved. Problems regarding children's access to education will persist for longer without such information.

#### **Relocations**

The relocations of children hamper education in different ways. First, the many moves mean that municipalities and schools are often "surprised" by the arrival of asylum seeker children and do not have enough time to properly arrange for the funding and content of the education. The interviews revealed that schools often start organizing education only after the children have arrived at the emergency reception centre.

Second, schools are at risk of missing out on funding because their student numbers fluctuate as a result of the relocations. Schools are at additional risk if they purchase materials and recruit new teachers. The interviews revealed that children are also affected, since some schools, because of the risk referred to, are more cautious in terms of organizing education. These schools are therefore less able to deal with a rapid increase in the number of children at an emergency reception centre and

cannot simply admit new students if such an increase occurs. The information obtained during the interviews indicates that this is mainly a problem in primary education.

The relocations are also a problem in terms of the continuity of education. When a child arrives at a new location in a new municipality, the school concerned must first find out about the student's prior education. Experiences in primary education indicate that, during the intake process, parents are often unable to recall the schools that their children have attended. As a result, the child may repeat or indeed skip a certain subject. In other words, continuity in the learning process may be lost. LOWAN therefore advises schools to give parents a letter that states the child's education number in order to improve the exchange of information between schools. This practice has not yet been adopted by all schools.

The interviews revealed that relocations also undermine continuity in secondary education. Each school uses different methods that are not attuned to each other.

### **Lack of accommodation**

Many schools that provide education to newcomers have a lack of space. In the Netherlands, municipalities are in principle responsible for providing the accommodation needed for education. However, municipalities in which an emergency reception centre is located for less than six months do not receive government funding to establish education facilities for newcomers. In such a situation, a municipality must itself provide the resources required for accommodation, a process that results in delays. Municipalities do not receive any funding at all to establish facilities for secondary education. Another problem occurs when no vacant spaces suitable for the provision of education are available in a municipality. In such cases, building barracks is often the solution adopted. A permit is required to do so, however, and the application process also causes a delay.

### **Lack of experience and teaching staff**

Emergency reception centres are being opened in municipalities in which education has not previously been provided to newcomers. This means that the school responsible for the provision of such education must engage external parties to secure the expertise required in terms of, for example, teaching methods and materials. Schools are often forced in this regard to invent the wheel by themselves.

In addition, teachers who are qualified to teach Dutch as a second language and have experience in teaching newcomers are scarce. Finding good teachers is a challenge for all schools. New teachers are all hired on the basis of a temporary employment contract. Because teachers may not be given a permanent employment contract following the end of two temporary ones, the staff turnover rate at schools may be high, something that is detrimental to the quality of education.

## **2.5.1 Specific problems in primary education**

The interviews revealed the following specific problems regarding access to primary education and the quality of primary education.

## **Special funding**

In principle, school boards that create classes for newcomers or establish a school for newcomers qualify for special funding from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. School boards are only eligible to receive additional funding, however, if they provide education for four or more asylum seeker children. The special funding that is then available is regulated by roughly four schemes that each have their own conditions. In practice, these schemes and conditions are extremely complex to school boards. One of the individuals interviewed stated this is especially true in the case of school boards that are organizing education for newcomers for the first time. These boards must first learn about the funding system and often struggle to complete the application processes of the schemes. Because many new emergency reception centres have been opened in recent months in municipalities in which school boards do not have any experience in providing education for newcomers, this is a frequent problem. The interviews revealed that the financial risks that schools and municipalities run and the bureaucracy involved in education for newcomers is a burden and discouraging for schools. The result is that the process to set up education is delayed. This is certainly the case in an increasing number of municipalities that do not as yet have knowledge about education for newcomers.

## **Funding for one year**

One of the schemes referred to above provides for additional funding for primary schools that admit a minimum of four students who have been in the Netherlands for less than a year. This additional funding is meant to enable a school to eliminate the educational disadvantage of students. Interviewees stated that this scheme is inadequate, however. Because of the greater influx of asylum seekers, children are placed in emergency reception centres at which or from which they cannot immediately go to school. Some of the children who joined classes in the past half year had to wait for months before being able to do so. In addition, relocations undermine continuity in education. Children therefore require special assistance for a longer period of time to overcome their educational disadvantage. The funding for two years that applies in secondary education would also be better for primary education. Such funding has now been granted as a result of the Grashoff motion.<sup>3</sup>

## **Application of compulsory attendance**

The interviewees stated that, at a number of emergency reception centres, four-year-olds cannot go to school, whereas all Dutch children are given access to education from the age of four. The societal standard that applies in the Netherlands regarding school attendance is not applied in the case of asylum seeker children. In Heumensoord for example, it is indeed the case that children can only go to school after they have reached the age of five. In the emergency reception centre in Gorinchem that the Ombudsman for Children visited, children go to school from the age of four. Early and preschool education is also not available to asylum seeker children (Kinderombudsman, 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> Lower House, 2015-2016 session, 34 334, no. 18.

## **Interpreters**

Schools do not receive funding for interpreters. While interpreters are not necessary for the provision of education, they are of major importance in terms of communicating with parents in the context of primary education. Communication with parents is a problem that teachers face during the intake process and on other occasions.

### **2.5.2 Specific problems in secondary education**

Contrary to the situation in primary education, there is an infrastructure of secondary schools that provide ISKs. In addition to asylum seeker children, these schools focus on all children (aged 12-18) in the region who are newcomers to the Netherlands and need to learn Dutch. This group therefore includes the children of migrants from other European countries, for example. The interviews revealed that the funding of this education is more transparent than is the case in primary education because funding for a period of two years is standard.

For children of secondary school age, it is important that the emergency reception centre is not far from a school that provides ISKs and is capable of creating additional places. Since the increase in the influx of asylum seekers, many schools have increased the number of ISKs provided or opened a branch for asylum seeker children. A number of new schools have also been opened. There are now approximately 90 secondary schools that provide education for newcomers. In Gorinchem, for example, a new school was established for all children who are placed in the emergency reception centre. Children aged 12 to 17 are taught as a group in Gorinchem.

### **Education after the age of 18**

In secondary education, concerns are mainly about students who can no longer progress to mainstream education. Because ISKs do not provide formal education, students who attend these classes cannot obtain a secondary education certificate. Children aged 16 or 17 who receive ISK education usually do not progress to mainstream education and therefore leave school without a secondary education certificate. Because the children referred to were unable to obtain a secondary education certificate, they often end up in a senior secondary vocational education level 1 (starter training) programme. Young people who are in principle capable of handling a higher level of education are mostly given access to education that is below their level of ability. In addition, individuals aged between 18 and 20 are formally no longer children and therefore do not attend ISKs. In principle, they still have access to ISK education, but many schools do not have arrangements in place to provide education for this older target group. Some of these individuals also enter level 1 senior secondary vocational education or look for work after being granted residency status. Individuals in both groups have an educational disadvantage as a result of their arrival in the Netherlands and are unable to eliminate this disadvantage because of the fact that they are not given the opportunity to obtain a secondary education certificate.

## 3 Field work

### 3.1 Introduction

Methodological guidelines drew up for the field work of this study. Based on the length of time that individuals have been in the destination country, a distinction is made between three groups of refugees and asylum seekers. The first group consists of refugees and asylum seekers who have just arrived in the Netherlands and have been in the country for less than two months. The second group has been in the Netherlands for 3 to 12 months and the third group has been in the country for over a year. According to the guidelines, a distinction must also be made between two different geographic locations. This distinction can be made at the level of neighbourhoods or municipalities. This classification does not work in the Dutch context. The criteria used are “less than a year” in the Netherlands and “longer than a year”.

Part of the field work focused on education and newcomers in the north-eastern part of the Netherlands in the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe. The reason for this focus was twofold. First, Ter Apel, an asylum seeker complex that is referred to as the “asylum seeker capital”, is located in the region referred to. The complex is where foreign nationals, including refugees, who wish to apply for asylum in the Netherlands must first report. The complex is home to three kinds of reception facility, namely the central reception location, the processing centre and a facility at which foreign nationals have restricted freedom. Since the summer of 2015, there has also been a processing centre for unaccompanied foreign minors in Ter Apel. Identification, registration and a check for tuberculosis take approximately three days, after which individuals proceed to the processing centre. The central reception location in Ter Apel is the only one in the Netherlands. The processing centre is where foreign nationals stay during the period of rest and preparation prior to the general asylum procedure of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND). Foreign nationals remain at the processing centre also during the general asylum procedure, which takes place in the adjoining application centre. In the facility at which foreign nationals have restricted freedom, asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected are given guidance and support for a period of 12 weeks to prepare for the return to the country of origin. The freedom of these individuals is restricted because of a measure imposed by the Repatriation and Departure Service. The purpose of the measure is to ensure that the individuals concerned are available for discussions and activities in the context of their return. The complex includes Interschool, a primary school that was established for children aged 4 to approximately 12 who are staying in Ter Apel. This school provides education mainly to children who have just arrived and who are still in the early phase of the asylum procedure. Second, the north-eastern part of the Netherlands has a very low population density relative to other parts of the country. It is therefore interesting to compare education for newcomers in this rural region with the education provided in more urbanized areas that have higher population densities.

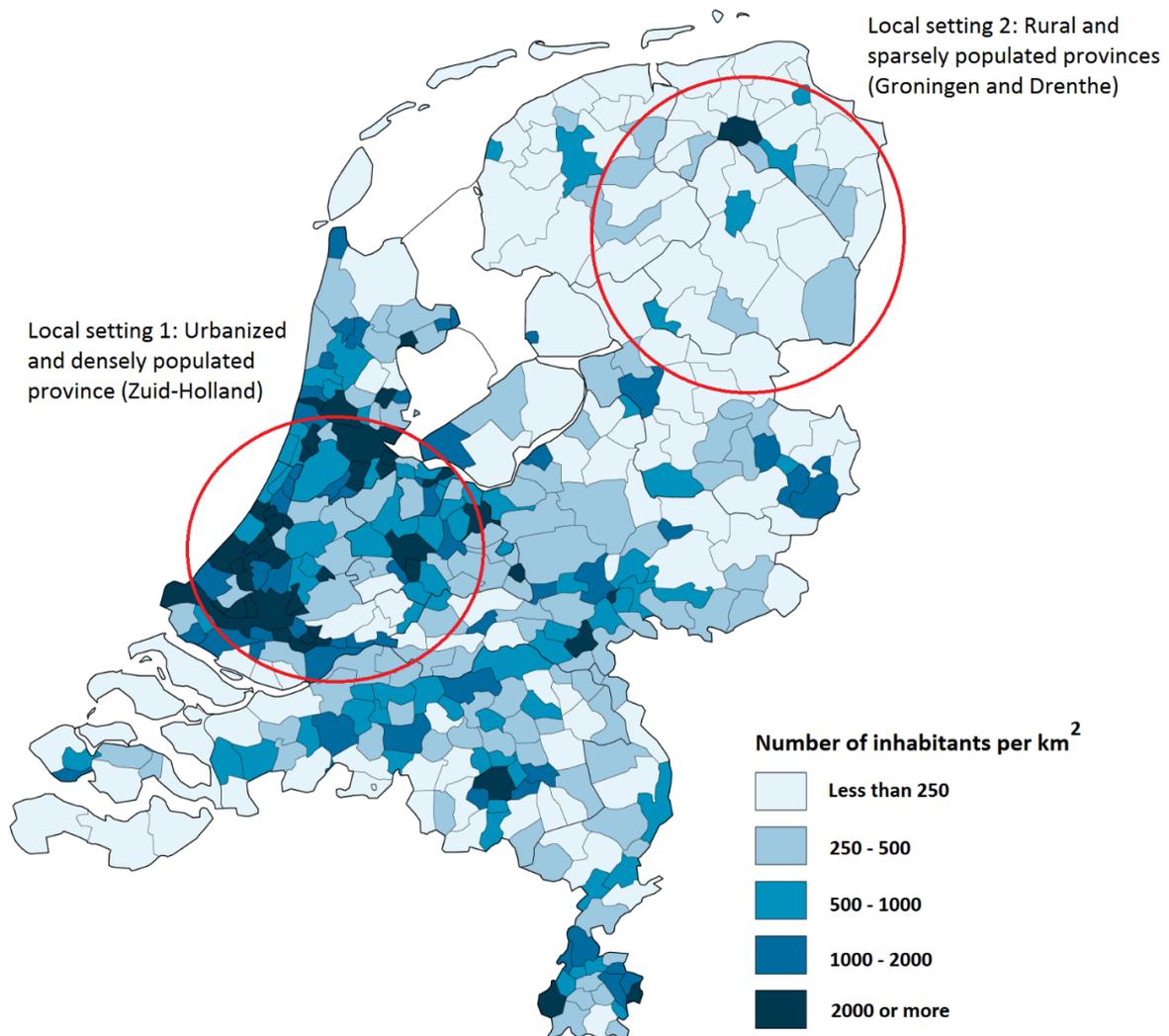


Figure 2: Two local settings of field work (Source: CBS [www.clo.nl/nl210205](http://www.clo.nl/nl210205))

At the asylum seeker complex in Ter Apel (province of Groningen), interviews were held with (1) Interschool's head teacher, (2) a language teacher at Interschool and (3) a location manager and senior employee of the facility at which foreign nationals have restricted freedom. In the city of Assen in the province of Groningen, interviews were held with individuals who work for the Dutch Council for Refugees in the northern part of the Netherlands. This council, an independent foundation, advises and supports asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in the Netherlands from their initial reception until the time at which the individuals concerned can live independently. The foundation's 7,500 trained volunteers are active in 300 municipalities. At the Assen location, an interview was held with (4) an active volunteer and (5) young refugees.

The other part of this study focused on South Holland, the most urbanized and densely populated province of the Netherlands. This region (The Hague) is home to LOWAN, an organization that

provides support at national level to schools that provide primary and secondary education for newcomers. This organization consists of approximately nine advisers who are active in the field of education and share information and expertise with organizations, schools and municipalities regarding education for newcomers. In the context of this study, interviews were held with (6) the director of the organization, who is also the primary education adviser, and (7) the secondary education adviser. Interviews were also held in the province of South Holland with teachers and coordinators of four different schools. In addition, the researchers visited a primary school in the eastern part of Rotterdam that provides a number of ISKs for newcomers. Children aged between 6 and 12 who have recently arrived in the Netherlands from abroad attend these ISKs for a year or, in exceptional cases, for two years. At this school, interviews were held with (8) the ISK coordinator and (9) a language teacher. ISKs are also provided for newcomers in the same age group at a different publicly run primary school in the southern part of Rotterdam. At this school, the researchers spoke with (10) the ISK coordinator and observed an ISK. A secondary school in the southern part of Rotterdam was also visited. This secondary school provides pre-vocational secondary education for students aged between 12 and 16. In terms of specialization, students at this school can choose from three fields (sectors): Technology, Care and Welfare and Economics and Business. The school also provides ISK education for students aged 12 to 18 who do not yet speak Dutch or who have not yet sufficiently mastered Dutch. An interview was held with (11) the ISK coordinator. Finally, the study included a large senior secondary vocational school. Senior secondary vocational education is intended for young adults and adults who have at least completed a pre-vocational secondary education programme. This school provides, among other things, a Dutch course for people who have a different language background, a basic skills course and a civic integration course. An interview was held at this school with (12) an education policy adviser.

## **3.2 Primary education for refugees**

### **3.2.1 First meeting**

All families that apply for asylum in the Netherlands are received at the central reception location of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) in Ter Apel, where the family stays for a maximum of four days. The family then moves to a processing centre, where interviews start with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND). Education is available to the children from the time at which the family moves to a processing centre. Only since February 2012 has it been possible for students who are still in the asylum procedure to go to school immediately after arrival. Prior to that time, the thinking at different agencies was that children had to be available to go with their families to interviews with the IND and could therefore not go to school. Compulsory school attendance now applies throughout the Netherlands to asylum seeker children who have just arrived in the country. Interschool in Ter Apel focuses primarily on children aged 4 to 12 who have just arrived and live in a processing centre. While changes in the composition of the student population are of course frequent because of the coming and going of students, the board tries to ensure that the school always has around 100 students so that the number of teachers remains stable. There is a “core team” of

teachers and additional teachers are seconded from the region if necessary. Interschool developed its own method for teaching Dutch to asylum seeker children who live in an asylum seekers' centre. Little or no documentation had been available on language training for (traumatized) children of a non-Dutch background living in a non-Dutch environment. In cooperation with other schools that provided education for asylum seekers, Interschool published a 128-page working document in November 2015 that describes how effective language training can be provided in processing centre classes.<sup>4</sup>

### **Processing centre class and language class**

Ideally, the intake procedure at Interschool takes place in the presence of both parents or carers of the child. During the intake interview, teachers try to obtain as much information as possible about the child's level of education and educational situation in the country of origin. Sometimes the parents do not speak English and an interpreter is engaged for this in interview. On the first day of school, students are included in what is referred to as a processing centre class, the main purpose of which is to give students the opportunity to settle in. Based on a proper consideration of specific needs and circumstances, the school defines a programme for the first six weeks of processing centre education. During this period, learning programmes in the narrower sense are not implemented and students are given the opportunity to become accustomed to Dutch culture and customs and practices in Dutch education. Some students have never seen a school before, for example, and do not know how a school operates. Experiencing success plays an important part in this regard. The student discovers, experiences and becomes acquainted with Interschool and the teachers, students and learning materials. After this period of six weeks in the processing centre class, students are assigned to a language class on the basis of their respective language levels. By this time, however, many students have moved to another asylum seekers' centre in a designated municipality or have returned to the country of origin. The language level of students who are still at Interschool after six weeks is assessed by looking at how many words students know in a list of 52 frequently used Dutch words. In addition, a child must be "stable" enough in social and emotional terms to join a language class. Teachers assess whether this is the case on the basis of observations and experiences with the student in the first six weeks. Once they have been assigned to a language class, students start learning Dutch in a targeted way. The language class consists of an average of 10 to 15 students who are led by a teacher and classroom assistant. For each discipline (technical reading, arithmetic and so on), the group is divided into four separate groups of different levels. According to the teachers, this must be done to enable the provision of tailored guidance and assistance. After 40 to 60 weeks in the language class, the children are referred on to mainstream education. The mainstream school receives an education report on the student that states, among other things, the learning objectives that were achieved, the student's current level of ability in reading and arithmetic, areas in which additional care is required and the student's social and emotional state. However, it is rare for a student to remain at Interschool for 40 to 60 weeks because of moves to other asylum seekers' centres. An education report is also available if students move to a different school after a few weeks

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<sup>4</sup> This document is available at <http://www.lowan.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Beredeneerd-aanbod-POL-Interschool-november-2015.pdf>.

or months. The new school can request this report from Interschool. This is rarely done in practice, however.

### **A safe and predictable learning environment**

Because of the unstable and unpredictable nature of the lives of asylum seeker children, providing a safe and stable learning environment is a matter of priority to Interschool's head teacher. To provide such an environment, a great deal of attention is devoted to the prevention of bullying by means of Positive Behaviour Support (PBS). Teachers teach students skills that lay a foundation for a school environment in which students feel safe and in which bullying is not allowed to occur. Teachers cultivate this environment by, for example, staging a play each Monday in which they provide examples of good interpersonal conduct and the rules that exist. All school rules are also visualized by means of pictograms that are displayed in the halls and in the classrooms (see figure 3). The emphasis of all school rules is on how things should be done, not on what is not allowed (a positive approach). An example in this regard is that teachers tell a student to "walk in the hall" rather than state "no running in the halls". Students also learn a three-step response to bullying, a response that is referred to as "stop-walk-talk". Students learn to stay "stop" to bullying behaviour, walk away and inform a teacher about the issue. In addition, students are rewarded for responding to bullying in an appropriate manner and for intervening if they see that a fellow student is being bullied. By responding and intervening in the appropriate manner, a student can become "hero of the week", for example. Interschool's teachers work to create predictability by all responding to students in the same way. It does not make a difference whether a student approaches Ms A or Ms B, the same can be expected from both teachers. According to the head teacher, this consistency provides a certain peace and predictability for students: *"I do think, however, that a child must remain at a school like this one for up to a maximum of two years to really develop a foundation, otherwise children can become frustrated in education and simply drop out of school."*

In addition to the regular (language) teachers, there is a play therapist and a behavioural expert. In a playroom, a traumatized student and the play therapist discuss the student's traumatic experiences in a playful manner. The behavioural expert monitors and helps fellow teachers to understand the behaviour of students. The day always starts with a game in the classroom because the home situation of the students is not ideal and it therefore helps to start with a bit of fun. Sometimes the children may be more stressed or concerned because of incidents that have occurred at the asylum seekers' centre. Teachers always take this possibility into account. The teachers frequently hold interactive meetings so that they can share knowledge, experiences and tips with each other. The head teacher stressed that it is important to do one's best for the children and make them feel welcome. She therefore tells her teachers that *"you are their first teacher, the one that they will never forget. (...) I know from my own experience, because my children now call me and tell me things like 'Ms, I play the guitar now because you played the guitar' or 'Ms, I got married at Christmas because you got married at Christmas.' (...) That's how important you can be as a teacher. A single comment can blight a life. A single comment of a teacher can leave someone else with an issue that takes years to overcome."* The board of Interschool does not get involved in the decisions of COA or the IND regarding the asylum procedure of children or families. The school deliberately distances itself

from decisions made in the context of national politics and observes the universal right of children to education. Teachers value this approach because it prevents them from being subconsciously influenced by a student's circumstances or background.

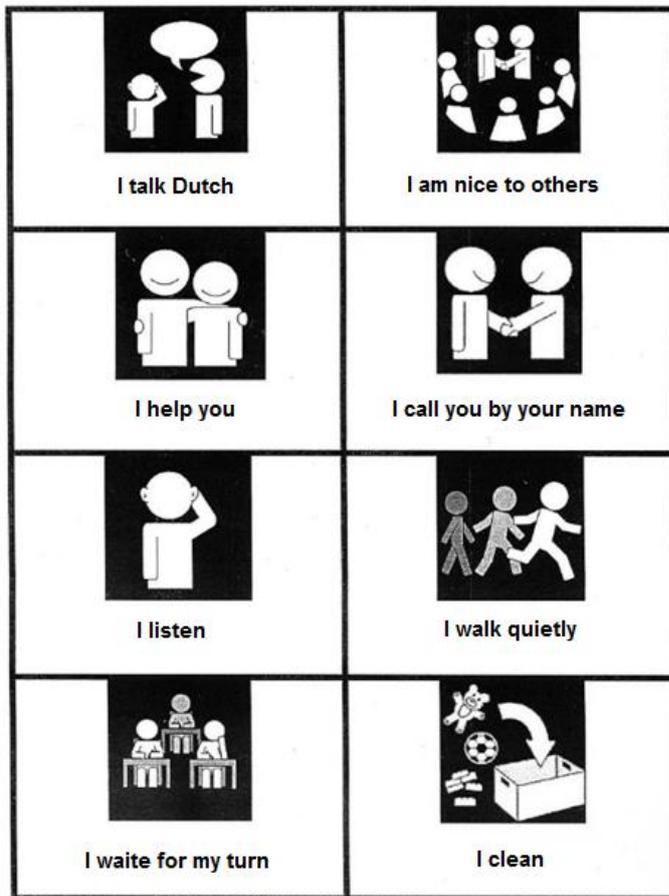


Figure 3: Visualized school rules at the Interschool

### 3.2.2 During the first year

If asylum seeker children have been given a status and a home, they are admitted to preparatory classes. The purpose of a preparatory class is to enable newcomers to progress to a (mainstream) primary school or secondary education after 1 to 1.5 years. In principle, children can go to a school that has a preparatory class every day. They literally come from all over the world: Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Eritrea and so on. Education professionals must therefore be able to rapidly adapt. There is an intake interview, a guided tour and then the first day of education. The intake interview is important because it makes it possible to ascertain what the child went through before he/she arrived in the Netherlands. The journey to the Netherlands may have been a relatively peaceful one. Equally, the journey may have been very challenging, one that is still very much alive in the memory of the child. In such cases, it is important to provide *trauma-sensitive* education (this can be done through social work at school, a GP, psychologists outside the school, play therapists and so on). Ultimately, it is not possible to really know what a given experience meant to a child. A preparatory class coordinator provided a striking example: *"I once said to a boy, he was 11 or 12 at the time, 'It's cold outside, put on your coat.' 'Ms, you don't know what cold is,' he replied. 'I say it's cold now, so put on*

*your coat.* 'Ms, some people die from the cold. You have not seen that.' 'No, I haven't'(...)." Some children also associate a fire alarm with an armed attack. Although the schools can obtain information from the asylum seekers' centre at which the children are staying, it is regularly the case that the children have stayed at so many different locations that an education report has not been drawn up or, if one has been prepared, different parts of it are at different locations. Such a report is also given to parents for submission to the new school. Children who have entered the country *illegally* are also admitted. The intake process is used to determine what a child can already do and what he or she learned in the country of origin, particularly in terms of language and arithmetic. If a school has several preparatory classes, children are often assigned to a class according to level. This does not happen, of course, if there is only one preparatory class. Schools try to create groups that consist of a maximum of 15 students. Schools also experiment with *intergroup work*. Such work involves placing students of preparatory classes and mainstream classes together according to level and subject. It is demanding for teachers. They must be flexible, able to work independently and able to properly differentiate.

At the time of the interview, a primary school in the southern part of Rotterdam had approximately 15 refugee children. Each year, the school handles a flow of 100 NAMS. The school has four preparatory classes. There are approximately 16 children in each class. Refugee children come to the school via different routes. Examples in this regard include a supervisor of the community team, an Islamic organization and a neighbouring primary school. Some children come as a result of independent initiatives. This year is the first in which the school has children from Syria. There has also been an increase in the number of applications for children from Eritrea and Somalia. Experience so far indicates that Syrian children are under considerable stress and have relationship problems as well as problems in the domestic sphere. In addition, there is a major difference between children of migrant parents, such as Polish or Hungarian children, and refugee children. The children of migrant parents reached the Netherlands within a day and their parents work on a full-time basis, whereas refugee children have been through a longer journey and their parents remain at home or in an asylum seekers' centre waiting for their asylum applications to be processed.

Information about the students is always requested from the previous school. The intake interview is conducted in English or sometimes in Dutch. Interpreters are engaged and/or Google Translate is used if required. Not all children have already been to school. Because some have been through such a journey and have subsequently had to move several times during the holiday period, the number of effective days at school has been minimal.

The most important thing in the initial stage is the social and emotional connection of children and giving them the feeling that they belong and are taking part. There are a number of activities in which children can immediately participate, such as physical education, swimming and optional subjects. The preparatory classes are organized according to student age. For each subject (oral Dutch, reading, arithmetic), the group is divided into three or four small groups based on the student's level. The school wishes to introduce the creation of smaller groups in all mainstream classes as well to enable personalized learning and ensure more rapid progression from the preparatory class to a mainstream class. The school has drawn up a plan to use a "buddy system" in the next school year. A

newcomer will be paired with a student who is in a mainstream group. This student will act as a guide for the newcomer at school. There is a lot of playful learning and methods like “oral Dutch” are modified and used during lessons. Attention is also given to methods that are the children’s own, such as different ways of calculating sums. Their method must often be translated into our Dutch (or European) method. If children move within the city, the situation is tricky in that schools regularly prefer not to admit them because those at the school know that such children always come with an educational disadvantage.

**A school that we visited has the following programme for learning Dutch.**

Each day, students learn approximately 10-15 words. By week 50, students have learned approximately 500 words and are tested on this basis. If students achieve a satisfactory mark, they progress to level 2, then level 3, then level 4 and so on. By the time they reach course 4, the students have encountered over 2,000 words. Children leave this school when they have learned 2,000-2,500 words at the age of 6, 7 or 8. Older children must develop a more complete vocabulary of approximately 4,000 words.

### **3.2.3 Critical points and lessons learned**

- There is a rigid system of processing centre, asylum seekers’ centre or central reception location, processing centre, asylum seekers’ centre. This system requires several moves, at least seven a year, to different locations in the country. This effects children.
- There were several political developments last year. There is quite a buzz in situations that are improvements relative to the state of affairs in previous years. As many children as possible receive education from day one. A second year of funding for primary education was recently accepted (June 2016) as a result of the Grashoff motion.
- Schools often learn how many children will be coming only a week and a half prior to the arrival of the children. Making the necessary arrangements is therefore far from easy and things do not always go as planned.
- Virtually all of these schools have *separate* preparatory classes from which students gradually progress to mainstream classes after a year. Schools are free to make their own specific arrangements in this regard and opt for different models that range from learning certain subjects with children in mainstream education and language lessons in the preparatory class to complete “immersion” in mainstream education.
- Children are grouped in one of two ways: half of the schools group children according to *age* while the other half groups children according to *level*.
- In general, not much attention is paid to the native language. Nevertheless, more schools have stated that the native language must be spoken well and that parents must read out in their own language.

- Because of the language deficit, many children are assigned to a level that is probably *lower* than their actual level of ability. In addition, a relatively high number of refugee children are in special (primary) education.
- Not much *data* is available on refugee children who leave school, progress or go abroad.
- Funding is flexible: if a child enrolls, the school concerned can submit an application and will receive money for the first three months. If a child moves, the next school can submit an application for the subsequent months.
- According to diversity in the class more classroom assistants or extern teachers are needed.

### 3.3 Secondary education for refugees

#### 3.3.1 First meeting

ISK is meant for 12 - 18 years in secondary education. If you enroll just before your 18th birthday you can finish your secondary school, because there is not an upper limit to age,.

Recently, only 2 years ago, it was agreed that all 12 - 18 years in first reception could not have education since it was decided to wait until IND was more sure about their status. Nowadays the right for education is much stronger argument and so everyone in all ages enroll as fast as possible into school rooms. Finances has been arranged since January 2016 for 2 years in secondary education. On average students stay 2 years in the ISK since it is much harder to enroll in secondary education on a certain level if you have not followed Dutch primary education. There has been a lot of changes in the last half year on different aspects of the position of refugee children. As describes finances are being arranged for 2 years and also housing is better regulated.

ISK has a regional function and there is a system set up where there are no waiting lists anymore for participation in the ISK class.

In secondary education it is not common that a student without ISK transfers into mainstream education.

ISK classes are always bound to mainstream schools. They are not separate schools for ISK. All lessons focus on the Dutch language. A coordinator says: *"In the past 10 years, the focus on the mother tongues has been disappeared slowly but certain. Nowadays you see a shifting action to incorporate it a bit more; although it remains precarious, you cannot speak all the languages of the class."*

Many teachers cut and paste their educational materials together and thus there is no clear educational line within the ISK.

#### 3.3.2 During the schoolyears

The student population consists of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and with different reasons for being present in the Netherlands. they have in common that they all have recently arrived

in the Netherlands. Most of the students are refugees and those numbers go up steadily. Within the ISK teaching students requires another way of handling: differentiation on the different levels of education is the starting point. Additional gestures and repetition of some words reflect that one has to deal with a different group of students than those who are to be found in mainstream education. One teacher says: "*Yes, the students are much more motivated than classes with native students, I cannot argue why, but so it feels at least for me.*"

During the first teaching period the school collects information about their knowledge, their ability to learn and their instruction sensitivity.

By testing students on their strengths and weaknesses, both cognitively and in task and learning behavior, it is possible to tune to the best possible educational needs for the student. Both tests results as well as information on the initial start situation and observation data helps to get a good picture of the student. On basis of this it can be decided which learning path may be best practicable and suitable for students.

There are three 'outflow' graduation profiles. In profile 1 students are send to for practical education or special education when they are 12 -16 years old. For those over 16 years, a route for work with assistance lies for them.

Profile 2 follows the regular route of vocational secondary education *practical* (12-16 years) or senior secondary education, levels 1 and 2 (the lowest achievements levels).

Profile 3 flows into vocational secondary education *theoretical* and senior general secondary and pre-university education (12-16 years) or senior secondary education, levels 3 and 4 (the highest achievements levels).

### **3.3.3 Critical points and lessons learned**

- What takes it for teachers to teach for refugee diversity? It is not clear at all yet in the Netherlands. Dutch research on this topic is very old, 20 years ago.
- There are studies on teaching for diversity in regular classes, but not in classes especially aimed only at newcomers.
- To create a safe environment is critical for health of the children.
- There is a debate and it differs per school if they let their children speak amongst each other in their own language.
- It asks a lot of competences of teachers; most of them have no experience at all. And less attention in teacher training education is given to this subject. So all has to be learned on the job and in courses which are fully booked.
- Educational material is a problem: they have recently developed DISK for NAMS from 10 to 18, but it is not suitable for all groups and certainly not for illiterate children. So Disk is the only NT2 made recently, other material is must older or only for adults.

- There are only a few publishers who want to publish NT2 material because the market is relatively 'small'.

**We highlight one personal story of our focus group with young refugees**

We spoke with a young Palestinian man (17 years old) who has been in the Netherlands for 1.5 years. With his father and younger brother, he travelled 4,000 km from Syria without a passport to reach the Netherlands. Following his arrival, he stayed for two days at the asylum seekers' centre in Ter Apel (Groningen) and was subsequently transferred to an asylum seekers' centre in Oranje (Drenthe). Here, after nine weeks, he was able to go to a school that focuses exclusively on (unaccompanied) foreign minors aged between 13 and 18. The students at the school are individuals who cannot (yet) go to another school or who have not (yet) been admitted by another school. After three weeks of education, he was transferred back to the asylum seekers' centre in Ter Apel for the continuation of his asylum procedure. He stayed there for five weeks and was able to go to a school for asylum seeker children for two of those five weeks. He was granted a residence permit and was moved to the asylum seekers' centre in Drachten (Friesland). In Drachten, he joined the ISK of a mainstream secondary school. He described his education-related experiences during the asylum procedure as follows:

*"For the first time during my stay in the Netherlands, I was in the ISK of a school. All of the other schools were in one way or the other not real schools. A dedicated building is made available for the ISK often enough. The other schools were just rooms somewhere close to an asylum seekers' centre for the sake of formal procedure."*

After five weeks in the ISK in Drachten, the respondent had achieved the required level of Dutch. This was remarkably rapid progress, since achieving the level required usually takes one to two years. Dutch is the respondent's sixth language, which means that he probably has a gift for languages (other languages: Spanish, French, English, Arabic, Kurdish). The respondent stated that he was advised by his ISK mentor to join a pre-vocational secondary education programme, from which he could progress to senior secondary vocational education, higher professional education and finally university education. The respondent did not accept this advice, however, because in his home country of Syria, he had completed the last year of secondary education at the highest level. On his own initiative, he went to a mainstream school in Drachten with all of the certificates that he had obtained in his home country (certificates for Spanish and other languages and the last school certificate obtained). As a kind of experiment, the school concerned allowed the respondent to join all Dutch lessons of all classes (years 1 to 6). In addition, the respondent took all science and technology subjects (like physics, mathematics and geography) of years 4, 5 and 6 because the symbols and figures used in these subjects are basically the same as the ones used in Syria. The only difference is that (technological) aids like calculators, dictionaries and laptops are not used in Syria.

The respondent experienced a cultural difference during his initial period at the mainstream school in Drachten. He stated that his classmates did not talk to him because he had made a mistake or they thought that he was crazy or rude. The most difficult thing is the cultural difference in humour. He explained that in the past decades, all jokes in the Middle East have been about war, bombings, murders or beheadings, whereas these subjects are not considered to be funny in the Netherlands. The respondent also had to become accustomed to the way in which girls and boys relate to each other. Nevertheless, the respondent stated that he really started to learn Dutch from the first day at the mainstream school. Precisely because of the cultural differences in humour, interpersonal conduct and manners, it is important to be surrounded by Dutch people to truly learn the language. The respondent described this aspect as follows:

*"Imagine that it's just a ball and part of the ball is the language but another part is perhaps a culture and yet another part is the mottos, the difference between mottos and the standards and values, and the different way of interacting with girls, since many refugees or Arabs have never spoken with a girl because doing so was to a large extent forbidden. [...] To talk and to have a discussion, you always need people. If you go to school every day to learn Dutch with people who cannot speak Dutch, how will you learn to speak Dutch?"*

### **3.4 Senior secondary vocational education**

An interview was held with a policy adviser of one of the largest senior secondary vocational schools in Rotterdam. The policy adviser also acts as a contact person between the school and the municipality in matters concerning education for refugees/holders of a residence permit. Numerous problems were discussed during the interview. These problems are also discussed in section 2.3.3 above. The senior secondary vocational school apparently does not provide any specific programmes or educational opportunities for students who have a refugee background. This means that refugees must meet the same admission requirements, including that of language level, as their non-refugee peers to be able to enter mainstream senior secondary vocational education. Meeting these requirements is often impossible in practice because refugees only receive language training for one year in an ISK. Some do not receive any training at all. Their command of Dutch is often inadequate and they are not admitted to a senior secondary vocational school. National performance agreements apply to senior secondary vocational schools. Under these agreements, if students do not complete their programmes successfully, the school concerned loses income. Contrary to the situation in primary education and secondary education, no additional funding is available for refugees in senior secondary vocational education. At the time that this study was being carried out, Zadkine, a senior secondary vocational school, was holding talks with other schools and the municipality of Rotterdam to improve educational opportunities for young refugees (often aged 16 to 18). The respondent stated that *“we’re basically at the beginning when it comes to refugees in senior secondary vocational education.”*

#### **3.4.1 Critical points and lessons learned**

- Improve the provision of information for potential refugee students and their guides regarding senior secondary vocational education and preparatory programmes.
- Identify possible senior secondary vocational preparatory programmes for refugee students and share this knowledge.
- Create appropriate practical training places for potential refugee students.
- Simplify the testing process by making B1 the equivalent of 2F (language concerned) in the context of the language examination programme.

## **4 Concluding remarks**

### **4.1 Words of advice**

Based on the expected further increase in the number of newly arrived students, with a high percentage of refugee children, it is important that the following critical points are taken into account in the Netherlands:

- There is a rigid system of processing centre, asylum seekers' centre or central reception location, processing centre, asylum seekers' centre. This system requires several moves, at least seven a year, to different locations in the country. This affects children.
- There were several political developments last year. There is quite a buzz in situations that are improvements relative to the state of affairs in previous years. As many children as possible receive education from day one. A second year of funding for primary education was recently accepted (June 2016) as a result of the Grashoff motion. But a motion by Van Meenen about limiting the number of relocation of refugee children was rejected as well as the motion by Siderius on professional youth work focusing on traumas of refugee children. Fortunately another motion by Van Meenen on inflows at the appropriate level for students around 18 years out of international transition classes has been approved.
- Schools often learn how many children will be coming only a week and a half prior to the arrival of the children. Making the necessary arrangements is therefore far from easy and things do not always go as planned.
- Virtually all of these schools have *separate* preparatory classes from which students gradually progress to mainstream classes after a year. Schools are free to make their own specific arrangements in this regard and opt for different models that range from learning certain subjects with children in mainstream education and language lessons in the preparatory class to complete "immersion" in mainstream education.
- Children are grouped in one of two ways: half of the schools group children according to *age* while the other half groups children according to *level*. The criteria for evaluating the educational level of students and placing them in the right newcomers'- and mainstream educational institutions have to be clarified and made uniform.
- In general, not much attention is paid to the native language. Nevertheless, more schools have stated that the native language must be spoken well and that parents must read out in their own language. There is a debate and it differs per school if they let their children speak amongst each other in their own language.
- Because of the language deficit, many children are assigned to a level that is probably *lower* than their actual level of ability. In addition, a relatively high number of refugee children are in special (primary) education.
- Not much *data* is available on refugee children who leave school, progress or go abroad.
- Funding is flexible: if a child enrolls, the school concerned can submit an application and will receive money for the first three months. If a child moves, the next school can submit an application for the subsequent months.
- According to diversity in the class more classroom assistants or extern teachers are needed.
- The expertise of teachers of this complex target group has to be improved. What takes it for teachers to teach for refugee diversity? It is not clear at all yet in the Netherlands. Dutch research on this topic is very old, 20 years ago. It asks a lot of competences of teachers; most of them have no experience at all. And less attention in teacher training education is given to this subject. So all has to be learned on the job and in courses which are fully booked.

- There are studies on teaching for diversity in regular classes, but not in classes especially aimed only at newcomers.
- To create a safe environment is critical for health of the children.
- Educational material is a problem: they have recently developed DISK for NAMS from 10 to 18, but it is not suitable for all groups and certainly not for illiterate children. So Disk is the only NT2 made recently, other material is must older or only for adults.
- There are only a few publishers who want to publish NT2 material because the market is relatively 'small'.
- Improve the provision of information for potential refugee students and their guides regarding senior secondary vocational education and preparatory programmes.
- Identify possible senior secondary vocational preparatory programmes for refugee students and share this knowledge.
- Create appropriate practical training places for potential refugee students.
- Simplify the testing process by making B1 the equivalent of 2F (language concerned) in the context of the language examination programme.



Image 1: Children cooking in class at the Interschool

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