

Country Report – The Netherlands

Multilingual early childhood education and care for young children



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This report aims to provide an overview of the practice of early childhood education and care (ECEC) for refugee children in the Netherlands. The focus in this report will be on three key areas: language input, parental involvement and dealing with trauma. In addition, childcare in the Netherlands and the reception procedure of refugees in general will be discussed. Finally, some examples of promising practices and initiatives regarding ECEC of refugees will be given.

1. Refugee Situation in General

Every year the Netherlands welcomes thousands of refugees. In 2016 the number was 18,000 and in 2017 this number decreased to 14,716 refugees. Most of them originate from Syria, followed by Eritrea, Morocco, Afghanistan and Albania¹. 40% of the Syrian and Eritrean refugees are under twenty years of age². Some of the family members are still in the country of origin but wish to come over because the conditions are more favourable in the Netherlands. Although the number of new refugees continues to decrease, the number of refugees in the Netherlands has grown, due to family reunification and newborns in refugee families. Refugee children in the age 0-4 call for another approach, since organizations in the Netherlands as well as the government are mostly sensitive to the needs of school-age children and adults. Focusing on children age 0-4 is important for integration in society, because an early start can lead to a positive change. Providing ECEC services at a young age will make the transfer into primary education easier and creates equal opportunities for all children.

Asylum procedure

As of December 30, 2017, 21,107 refugees resided in Dutch asylum reception centers. 1,623 of them were children from 0 till 3 years and 3,222 of them were children from 4-11 years³. Refugees entering the Netherlands are given at least six days to recover from their journey. To stay for a longer period in the Netherlands, an application for asylum is needed. The refugee explains to the Immigration and Naturalization Service by means of an interview why he or she had to leave the country of origin. The Immigration and Naturalization Service assess whether a refugee may stay or has to leave. In case of staying, refugees will be given an asylum residence permit. There are about fifty reception centers in the Netherlands. An average asylum seekers' center houses about four hundred occupants of as many as forty nationalities⁴. These centers provide housing units with bedrooms, shared living room, kitchen and bathroom. In principle, the maximum stay for refugees in a reception center is one year. Refugee families -whose request for asylum has been refused- have access to family locations. These are locations with modest houses which contain only the essential facilities. Although not every asylum reception center provides ECEC services, facilities for children are more or less the same at every reception center⁵. 40 of the 68 municipalities that have reception centers offer some form of ECEC services in the reception centers⁶.

¹ <https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/feiten-cijfers/cijfers/bescherming-nederland>

² Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2016). *Jaarrapport integratie 2016*. Den Haag: CBS

³ [Coa.nl/nl/over-coa/cijfers](https://www.coa.nl/nl/over-coa/cijfers)

⁴ <https://www.government.nl/topics/asylum-policy/asylum-procedure>

⁵ <https://www.government.nl/topics/asylum-policy/asylum-procedure>

⁶ Beekhoven, S. & Muller, P. (2016). *Educatief aanbod voor asielzoekerspeuters en peuters met een status*. Utrecht: Sardes.

2. Childcare in the Netherlands

ECEC in the Netherlands has been a split system over the last fifteen years. On the one hand, there is the regular childcare (see 2.1), on the other hand there are programs targeted at children from at-risk backgrounds (e.g. non-Dutch language background; see 2.2).

2.1 Regular childcare

Childcare in the Netherlands is an important social benefit. It contributes to the development of children and enables parents to go to work. Quality of childcare therefore needs to be ensured. Recent research indicates that the quality of childcare in the Netherlands is largely positive⁷. Children from six weeks till four years old are allowed to go to childcare. In the Netherlands there are several types of childcare. In general there are two forms of childcare: formal and informal childcare. Formal childcare is lead by caregivers, who in most cases have had vocational training at intermediate level⁸. ECEC services are an example of formal childcare. Foster families, babysitters or family members as grandparents are considered as informal childcare. Dutch childcare is focused on the provision of a secure base, stimulating personal competence, promoting social competence and transmission of standards and values⁹.

2.2 Targeted programs

Many ECEC services are offering extra support for children who are at risk for language delay, known as *voor- en vroegschoolse educatie*, VVE (preschool education). VVE is a targeting program and serves children from non-Dutch speaking and/or low-income families. VVE seeks to prevent educational disadvantages in order to offer children more opportunities through an early start. These VVE programs start at preschool age (2,5) and go on till the first two years of primary (basic) education until age 6. Within the VVE, two kinds of targeted programs are distinguished: centre based programs and family based programs. The purpose of centre based programs is to prevent and tackle educational disadvantages, whereas family programs are focused more on parent-child interaction and encouraging the development within the family¹⁰. For all programs, quality is ensured.

As mentioned above, targeted programs are intended for children at risk for language delay. In fact, municipalities may broaden this target group by setting other criteria. Municipalities could for example choose a target group including children from low-income families or refugees. It varies by municipality and every municipality decides who is eligible for these targeted programs. Some will offer home based programs, others centre based or none.

3. Working with refugee children in ECEC

Caretakers working with refugee children are facing challenges. In this report the challenges are broadly divided into three key areas: language input, parental involvement and dealing with trauma. Although the three themes will be discussed separately in this report, there is some overlap.

⁷ Slot, P., Jepma, IJ., Muller, P., Romijn, B. & Leseman, P. (2017) *Kwaliteit van de Nederlandse kinderdagopvang, peuteropvang, buitenschoolse opvang en gastouderopvang. Meting 2017*. Utrecht: LKK.

⁸ Helmerhorst, K. O., Riksen-Walraven, J. M. A., Gevers Deynoot-Schaub, M. J., Tavecchio, L. W., & Fukkink, R. G. (2015). Child care quality in the Netherlands over the years: A closer look. *Early Education and Development*, 26(1), 89-105.

⁹ <https://www.nji.nl/nl/Kennis/Dossier/Werken-aan-kwaliteit-van-kinderopvang-en-peuterspeelzaalwerk>

¹⁰ [https://www.nji.nl/nl/Kennis/Dossier/Voor-en-vroegschoolse-educatie-\(vve\)](https://www.nji.nl/nl/Kennis/Dossier/Voor-en-vroegschoolse-educatie-(vve))

3.1 Language input

Communicating is an important aspect for various purposes in ECEC. Think about expressing emotions, forging new friendships or clearly stating an idea. Refugee children who are not able to speak the Dutch language are struggling with expressing themselves. Therefore, caretakers play an important role in providing opportunities for young children to communicate.

Some of the refugee children who enter ECEC are absolute beginners regarding the Dutch language. Absolute beginners are children who are not educated in their own country and are hardly literate in their mother language let alone Dutch. Working with absolute beginners requires expertise. Young children are already exposed to their native language and need to start developing Dutch language skills at the same time. Learning two languages simultaneously doesn't have to be a reason for concern. At a very young age, children can transfer their phonological awareness and knowledge from one to another language¹¹. In Dutch childcare, caretakers use Dutch as a medium of instruction and communication, not in the least because the Dutch Childcare Act¹² prescribes the use of Dutch. Even when the goal is to stimulate the children's proficiency in Dutch, any form of language input (regardless of which language it is) is helpful for absolute beginners.

To stimulate language input in children, *de Taallijn* (Language route) can be used. De Taallijn is developed as a reinforcement of the integral ECEC programs to learn Dutch in an interactive way. De Taallijn is not only meant for absolute beginners but also for Dutch children with a language delay. Themes as language input, interaction, feedback and total physical response are discussed within de taallijn.

Language Input

As it comes to language input, caretakers function as role models and set the example for children. How can caretakers help children to easily learn a second language? Children can learn a second language by just listening or imitating, caretakers should bear this in mind regarding their own language input.

Rules of thumb

- Talk slowly and clear in order to be understandable.
- Be sure to use short sentences with only the most necessary words.
- Stress the words that are most significant for the meaning of a sentence.
- Choice of words: use basic words. Talk about bag in stead of shopping bag.
- Support your conversation with gestures and mimic. By pointing out or depicting words, children will easier understand what you are talking about.
- Repeat and rephrase: when children don't understand what you are talking about, make use of repetition and rephrasing.

For this specific target group the aim of learning a language is not to elicit words. The caretaker will talk relatively more than the children, while the children are reacting.

¹¹ Castro, D. C., Páez, M. M., Dickinson, D. K., & Frede, E. (2011). Promoting language and literacy in young dual language learners: Research, practice, and policy. *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(1), 15-21.

¹² Artikel 1.55 Wet Kinderopvang 2004

Interaction

The following rules are recommended to facilitate interaction in second language learning with absolute beginners

Rules of thumb

- Emphasize key words in a sentence by moving words to the front or the end of a sentence. For example: *cheese*, do you like cheese? Or, where can I find your *shoes*.
- Make proper use of open- and close-ended questions. Open-ended questions will encourage children to form complete phrases, but it takes a lot of knowledge to answer open question. Working with absolute beginners, it is easier to start with close-ended questions.
- Give a child space and time for self-expression. Determine the subjects of interest and respond to these interests.
- Interaction concerns more than verbal communication between **caretaker** and child. Keep an eye on non-verbal interaction.

Feedback

In teaching absolute beginners a new language, feedback refers to the positive and negative correction of words and sentences. Caretakers can provide feedback by different means.

Rules of thumb

- Modelling and expanding vocabulary: provide feedback by repeating a sentence in a correct way. When a child says: I game play, you can respond with: I play a game.
- Motive the child to interact. Make clear you will keep on listening by using words as yes, uh-hu and indeed.
- Give a child compliments for well formulated phrases.

Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a specific intervention that helps children to learn a second language. Children learn the second language by listening to the caretaker and putting words into action. For example the caretaker or teacher says '*put the book on the shelf*'. The teacher demonstrates the child how to put a book on the shelf. The child immediately understands the difference between book and shelf. After that, the child can put the book back on the shelf. TPR is useful in many different situations. Also, a teacher gets to know whether a child understands all the words or not. For example, when the caretaker asks a child to put on her shoes and in response the child puts on her jacket, the caretaker sees that the child understands the word 'put on' but doesn't understand the word for shoes. Research shows that adding an active component to language learning is beneficial for children¹³.

3.2 Parental involvement

Involvement and interaction with parents of refugee children requires effort and patience. In many countries parents are the only caregivers, and the concept of ECEC is a relatively new

¹³ Verhelst, M. (2003). De relatie tussen taalaanbod en woordenschat verwerving van het Nederlands als tweede taal door 2,5-jarige allochtone kleuters in Brussel. In T. Koole, J.Vontier & B. Tahitu (red.), *Artikelen van de Vierde Sociolinguïstische Conferentie* (pp. 522-531). Delft: Eburon.

or even unknown phenomenon for some refugees¹⁴. Therefore, the first step in involving parents is introducing parents to the concept of ECEC. Once they are adjusted to this concept, it is important to get and keep parents involved. It is common practice that Caretakers can make use of pictures, images and symbols to illustrate how they organize a day at the ECEC. An easy and straightforward way to add to this, is a list with 'important words and sentences' in the various home languages spoken by the children.

Communication with parents

Furthermore, parents serve as a link between the ECEC and child. Parents are aware of the background and history of children. Due to the fact that parents aren't familiar with the concept of ECEC centers, it is important to keep in touch with parents. Facilitate sessions about themes as language development or parental support, this will contribute to the involvement of parents. Creating an environment in which parents can talk with each other and share experiences may also help. In this way, caretakers will earn their trust and parents will be more open in return. Conversations about the background can be more easily discussed. Besides, to ensure contact with refugee families, it might be helpful to gather information with regard to family context, contact person, travel information or school experiences in the country of origin. Alignment between parents and caretakers leads to progress in the communication.

Language input and parental involvement

When it comes to language development, the contribution of parents is of great importance. Most of the refugee children are dealing with a language delay in the Dutch language and sometimes their native language. ECEC can serve as prevention to severe language delay and give children a good start in primary education. Besides, caretakers should encourage parents to stimulate language learning at home. Although some parents have a low level of education, there are multiple ways to offer language input. All forms of language input like reading stories, storytelling or having a conversation with the child play a part in the language development. If parents are illiterate, they can retell picture books instead. In first instance, it is important to work on the regular language development as a condition of development of the Dutch language. Enlarging the vocabulary in the mother language may also contribute to the acquisition of the Dutch language¹⁵.

Parental support

When it comes to standards and values, parents may have different ideas about raising children. In understanding parents and the way they raise their children, awareness and a cultural sensitive approach is important. Refugee parents may deal differently with issues as punishment and reward, autonomy or eating habits. When there is a climate of openness and trust, problems can be easily discussed.

For some refugees it might be hard to understand that raising your children outside the home (ECEC) is not harmful, but can even be beneficial. Parents will be more involved if caretakers explain the advantages of ECEC and respect the standards and values of refugee parents.

¹⁴ Muller, P. & Kolijn, E. (2016). *Peuters in de asielopvang naar de peuterspeelzaal - Handreiking voor kinderopvangorganisaties*. Utrecht: Sardes.

¹⁵ Castro, D. C., Páez, M. M., Dickinson, D. K., & Frede, E. (2011). Promoting language and literacy in young dual language learners: Research, practice, and policy. *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(1), 15-21.

3.3 Dealing with trauma

Children and families, who are fleeing their home country, may have been faced to acts of violence, separation or war. These events may have a huge impact on children and can restrict their early development. On the one hand, children are affected directly by traumatic events: children suffered and exposed war or violence. On the other hand, children are indirectly affected by the traumatic experiences of parents. For example, facing war or violence may affect parental practices, which in turn is of great impact on the development of a child.

Though the majority of refugee children will develop in a normal way, others will be impaired in their development¹⁶. For the latter, help is needed. Those children might develop psychological problems or post traumatic stress syndrome at worst. Although traumatic experiences and resettling into a new country are life changing events, displays of experiences may differ within children and occur in all developmental areas¹⁷

In early childhood traumatic experiences are exposed in terms of sleeping problems, aggressive or regressive behavior, fear, anxious attachment and delayed development¹⁸. Many studies report anxiety as a symptom of trauma, for children in this age it can sometimes be hard to empathize with people. Because of that, children find it challenging to trust other people¹⁹. In addition, effects of stressors on children may not always be open or visible. It is important to have an eye for the vulnerability of these children.

Find the right balance

Most of the caretakers are aware of the fact that trauma signs and symptoms in young children occur in many forms. Dealing with these problems entails two challenges: On the one hand, identification of severe problems and reach out for professional help. When a caretaker sees that a child misbehaves or acts shy or anxious, this could be an indication of trauma. On the other hand, caretakers should be aware of not always labelling behavior as traumatic. When two children are aggressive towards each other, this does not necessarily have to be a symptom of trauma. Caretakers need to find the right balance and try not to under- or overestimate problems.

Moreover, not every caretaker in the Netherlands is educated in diagnosing psychological problems or other problems related to trauma. After a period of habituation, caretakers need to monitor actions and behavior of the children because this specific target group had an increased risk on having psychological problems. Sometimes a guidance teacher or professional caretaker could assist the caretaker in signaling these problems (see 6.3)

Protective factors

In younger children, effects of stress and trauma are even more at stake, because they have

¹⁶ Van Schie, R.M., van den Muijsenbergh, M.E.T.C (2017). Psychische problematiek bij vluchtelingkinderen en – jongeren, handreiking-maart 2017. Utrecht: Pharos

¹⁷ Struik, A. (2010). Slapende honden? Wakker maken! Een stabilisatiemethode voor chronisch getraumatiseerde kinderen. Amsterdam: Pearson Benelux Medical.

¹⁸ Beer, R., Verlinden, E., Boer, F. & Lindauer, R. (2007). Protocol classificatie en diagnostiek van kinderen en adolescenten met traumagerelateerde problematiek. Duivendrecht: De Bascule, Academisch centrum voor kinder- en jeugdpsychiatrie.

¹⁹ Slone, M., & Mann, S. (2016). Effects of war, terrorism and armed conflict on young children: a systematic review. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 47(6), 950-965.

not developed strong coping skills to overcome these effects²⁰. Caretakers and parents have a crucial role to play. To help children overcome these problems, ECEC staff should create an environment with routine and structure. In this way, children can organize their lives and know what they can expect. Furthermore, ECEC staff may also strengthen the resilience of refugee children by offering social support²¹. The presence of familiar staff members or peers may contribute to recovery of the traumatic experiences.

Parents and ECEC staff have an important role in helping refugee children to overcome their problems. Parents can create a home environment in which children can live carefree and safe. When there is a good family functioning and a safe home environment, the intensity of problems in children will decrease²². Also the relation between parent and child can serve as a protective resource. An attachment figure that is unavailable to the needs of a child under conditions of risk may exacerbate the child fears, whereas an available attachment figure may be protective²³.

4. Supporting initiatives

Every year, the Netherlands receive large groups of refugees. Several organizations have launched initiatives to regulate and channel the reception of these refugees. Those organizations and ECEC enter partnerships in order to focus on help on practical issues. The most relevant organizations for ECEC purposes are the following:

Youth and family centers (*Centra voor Jeugd en Gezin*)

Youth and family centers (YFCs) are established to offer advice, support and tailored help to parents and their children. An YFC is a low-threshold meeting point, located in all 430 Dutch municipalities. The services that the YFC's provide can differ within the location. Main aspects are: information and advice, minor pedagogical support, identification of problems, guidance to help, coordination of care, including social work, family coaching and parenting support. All activities are preventive in nature. YFC employees hold different positions as physician, nurse, pedagogue or social worker. All employees work closely together with child care centers. Caretakers can refer children to YFC. Conversely, YFC can signal problems and inform caretakers. YFC's are accessible for all parents, including refugees²⁴.

Dutch Council for Refugees (*Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland*)

The Dutch Council for Refugees is an independent non-governmental organization that defends the rights of refugees. The Dutch Council for Refugees supports refugees during their asylum procedure and integration in the Netherlands. This organization offers help in other countries as well and shares knowledge with other NGOs abroad²⁵. 13.500 volunteers and a few hundred paid employees are working at the Dutch Council for Refugees. Work of the organization is mostly considering legal issues, but the Dutch Council for Refugees also

²⁰ Doyle, T., Dotsch, J., Savazzi, H., & Awamleh, T. (2015). *Caring for syrian refugee children: a program guide for welcoming young children and their families*. Toronto: CMAS

²¹ Van Schie, R.M., van den Muijsenbergh, M.E.T.C (2017). *Psychische problematiek bij vluchtelingkinderen en – jongeren, handreiking-maart 2017*. Utrecht: Pharos

²² Zahr, L. K. (1996). Effects of war on the behavior of Lebanese preschool children: Influence of home environment and family functioning. *American Journal of orthopsychiatry*, 66(3), 401.

²³ Chu, A. T., & Lieberman, A. F. (2010). Clinical implications of traumatic stress from birth to age five. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 6, 469-494.

²⁴ Darwish, L., & de Vries, S. (2010). *Youth and Family Centres in the Netherlands*.

²⁵ <https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/>

provides projects to support parents. In three locations in the eastern part of the Netherlands for example they have launched a parent coaching pilot program. The aim of the study is to prevent psychosocial problems in refugee children by reinforcing knowledge and skills of parents in supporting their children. The Dutch Council for Refugees organizes meetings for small groups where parents can deal with specific issues. Other issues discussed at the meetings are related to education and health system, impact of shocking life events. All meetings are accompanied by an employee of the Dutch Council for Refugees. Following an evaluation, this pilot may be expanded to other locations in the Netherlands²⁶.

Central Institute for reception of asylum seekers (Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers (COA)).

The central institute for reception of asylum seekers is a governmental agency responsible for reception and assistance of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. COA prepares -in partnership with other parties such as the immigration and naturalization service and Royal Military Constabulary – refugees for integration. COA supplies goods, maintains safety and quality of life in the reception centers. COA has several cities where reception centers are located. Although COA invests in sufficient reception centers, COA is not charged with professional reception of refugees²⁷.

Especially for children, COA creates a safe place to play and live. Refugee children are insecure about their position and vulnerable. COA organizes training sessions for children with regard to resilience as well as other activities. The Dutch law enforces compulsory education for all children in the age 5-18, regardless of their nationality. All reception centers are connected to a primary school. COA is responsible for the education.

5. ECEC centers – promising practices

The lack of a national policy for educating young refugee children contributes to variation in the availability, quality and structure of responsive ECEC services. Nevertheless, there are some promising practices in which an inspiring way of ECEC is offered. Need for these practices is great, because the early development of children marks one of the most crucial parts of their lives. In this stage children are going through several important stages with regard to language, attachment and other developments.

Interviews with several ECEC centers have been conducted in which the unique contribution of different ECEC locations is indicated. Three examples of practices are mentioned for the key areas: parental involvement, language input and dealing with trauma. Other child care centers may benefit from these examples.

5.1 Dynamo, key area: parental involvement.

Dynamo is a welfare organization, located in Amsterdam, which tries to stimulate and support inhabitants to actively participate in society²⁸. From September 2015 till January 2017, Dynamo was assigned to offer emergency assistance and care to asylum seekers families in partnership with other organizations. Care was in particular intended for children. Dynamo has worked with different target groups and employees and volunteers with various backgrounds. The team consists of volunteers with a refugee background and

²⁶ <https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/actueel/nieuws/preventieve-ouderschapsondersteuning-vluchtelingengezinnen>

²⁷ <https://www.coa.nl/en>

²⁸ <https://www.dynamo-amsterdam.nl/>

Dutch employees and volunteers origin from different ethnic groups. The vision of Dynamo is characterized by equality, a strong emphasis on parental involvement, a spirit of openness and hands on mentality. All asylum seekers are called 'Nieuwe Amsterdammers' (New inhabitants of Amsterdam), which reflects the welcome and open mind of Dynamo.

Practice of Dynamo

As it comes to language and communication, all possible languages are represented among staff members of Dynamo. For that reason, communication between families and staff causes less concern. Arabic, English and even Tigrinya speaking staff members are able to communicate with parents and children. Staff is working on the principle of reciprocity as it comes to language. They invest in learning the mother language of asylum seekers, in return they expect that asylum seekers try to learn Dutch as soon as possible. There is a climate based on common values and mutual respect.

Another objective is set on parental involvement. They dealt with parental involvement in the following way:

In September 2015 the situation was unorganized. Hundreds of asylum seekers needed reception and care. Dynamo had a floor of an office building and later on nursing home at their disposal. The building was not adjusted to so many asylum seekers. Children were spoiled with toys and attention from all the volunteers. Dynamo brought back routine in the daily lives and treated all children the same way as they would do in regular child care. Caretakers were entrusted with the care of the children for seven days a week, including holidays. Through this process, children get used to the situation and learned what was expected of them and how they had to behave. Structure and routine were a benefit for children, parents and staff.

Once care for children was set, Dynamo began to cater for parents. Dynamo created possibilities for parents to work as volunteer. Moreover parents were getting involved in the organized child care for children. Before and at the end of the day, parents had the opportunity to visit the child care room to see what their child learned. During these visits, employees and volunteers of Dynamo tried to meet the needs of parents. In order to achieve this, parents and children were actively addressed and involved. Dynamo met their needs by organizing language lessons under the guise of parental support. Meanwhile, Dynamo worked on the empowerment of parents. Staff members gave parents the necessary space and time to adjust and resettle into the new situation but gave parents at the same time the possibility to work as volunteer or participate in Dutch language classes. Every parent got involved on its own way. This approach differs from other reception centers. Most of the time refugees have to sit and wait. Dynamo gave refugees the opportunity to rebuilding their lives and forgetting the past by participating in society. Dynamo always considered the needs of refugees.

Suggestions and advice for the working field

- Make good use of volunteers; take everyone's strengths into account.
- Involve parents from the first moment.
- Focus on good communication between staff members, switching fast is required.
- Developmental stages of refugee children don't necessarily match the age of children.
- Gain trust before you tackle problems
- Consider the needs of people

- Respecting each others language will give way to shared language/communication.

5.2 Okidoki, key area: language input

Okidoki is a childcare organization that offers daily care for 1,500 children at five different locations. Every child is welcome at Okidoki, irrespective of their background or culture. Equality, openness and trust are their core values and the motto of Okidoki is: 'discover your talent'. Staff members of Okidoki have always worked with refugee children, mostly originated from Syria and Eritrea. Given their scarce knowledge of English, communication with the Eritrean refugees is complex. Most Syrian parents, however, can express themselves in English. The approach of Okidoki regarding communication and language input is point out below:

Parental participation

Okidoki actively involves parents to stimulate the language development of their children by means of book reading. Research demonstrates that reading books to preschoolers has positive effects on language growth, reading- and language achievement²⁹. Staff members of Okidoki asked parents to read stories in their own language and translate books, because not so many books in Arabic or Tigrinya are available. Parents also came to Okidoki on 'national reading aloud days'³⁰ to read stories in their mother language. Communication with parents takes place through pictograms or translators. The daily program is presented in a booklet with pictograms, which is handed out to parents. Information about the registration or other essential information is communicated to parents in the presence of a translator or an employee of the Dutch Council for Refugees (see 4.2). Furthermore brochures about the targeted language programs or ECEC services are made available in English, Polish and Turkish.

Targeted programs

As previously mentioned in 2.2, ECEC centers sometimes offer targeted programs. An example of a commonly used program is Uk & Puk, a language training focused on children aged 0-4. Uk and Puk is part of the early childhood education and designed in order to mitigate language- and learning deficiencies. In this program various activities are offered to children. Those activities are based on four domains: language development, social-emotional development, motor and sensory development and primary calculation development. Activities within these domains are tailored to the age of children. Okidoki offers Uk & Puk at their ECEC centers, although it's not suitable for all children. Uk & Puk can be too challenging for absolute beginners. For those children language input should first be aimed at daily communication in stead of language enrichment.

Staff members

Most staff members at Okidoki originate from the Netherlands. The Dutch language is most frequently used in conversations with children. However, two interns have an Eritrean or Arabic background. An exchange takes place: the interns can communicate with children or

²⁹ Bus, A. G., Van IJzendoorn, M. H., & Pellegrini, A. D. (1995). Joint book reading makes for success in learning to read: A meta-analysis on intergenerational transmission of literacy. *Review of educational research*, 65(1), 1-21.

³⁰National reading aloud days are held in the Netherlands ever year at the end of January. During this week, attention is paid to the importance of book reading with children. Parents or other people can come to authorities as schools or ECEC centers to read out stories and promote reading.

parents when the Dutch conversation lags. In return, the interns learn the Dutch language from the other staff members. The official language in the ECEC centers is Dutch, but under certain circumstances those interns might speak Tigrinya or Arabic.

Suggestions and advice for the working field

- For children who came to the Netherlands without any prior knowledge regarding the Dutch language, focus should be on communication instead of language enrichment.
- Make use of short sentences and easy words, too much information or language input can be distracting.
- Images, pictures and pictograms can support the communication between caretakers and refugees.
- Involve parents in language activities
- Create groups of refugee and Dutch children. Refugee children can learn the language from their Dutch peers.
- Present one subject at a time, when providing information to parents.

5.3 Kwink, key area: trauma

Kwink is a childcare organization that provides daycare in five cities in the Netherlands. Kwink has a partnership with Youké, an orthopedagogical center. Employees of Youké are trained in specialized care for children aged 0-23. In helping children, the social context and background is taken into account. Due to the fact that many refugee children are dealing with (traumatic) problems, Kwink involved employees of Youké for professional help. Usually children are referred to a specialist at Youké, but in this case there were too many children that show problematic or traumatic behavior. Therefore an employee of Youké was added to the team of employees at Kwink. This created two benefits:

On the one hand children can stay in the child care center, parents don't need to arrange transportation to Youké. On the other hand, knowledge sharing and information exchange between the Youké employee and caretakers takes place. In this way, caretakers learn how to signal or tackle trauma related experiences and behavior.

More or less the same principle is implemented in another childcare center in the Netherlands. In this childcare center two caretakers work together, supported by a guidance teacher. The guidance teacher works 5 half-days and offers professional help concerning care and support of refugee children with problematic/traumatic behavior. The guidance teacher observes all the children in the ECEC center and evaluates which children are most at risk and need extra help.

6. Inspiring programs

6.1 StorytellingExpress (*VoorleesExpress*)

StorytellingExpress is an organization that stimulates language and pre-literacy skills development of immigrant and native families with low literacy levels. Over 5,000 volunteers are working for StorytellingExpress in more than 150 locations in the Netherlands. Volunteers are visiting families for 20 weeks and come to read out stories. The benefit of reading at home is that all family members are involved. Tools and tricks for reading stories are handed to parents, as well as information about language acquisition in childhood.

Volunteers are making use of a dialogic reading style, in which they are talking about what happens in a book. This encourages children to think about the storyline.

StorytellingExpress acts as bridge between child care and families by assisting children with a language deficiency. During time in child care, there is not enough time to help every child with low literacy levels. Volunteers of StorytellingExpress make time to read and accompany families to the library, into which families can rent books for free. After twenty weeks parents are provided with sufficient guidance to stimulate language and pre-literacy skills development books^{31,32}.

6.2 Home-Start

Home-Start is a worldwide program for family education support, implemented in the Netherlands by Humanitas.

Humanitas is a nonprofit association, offering services as parental support, youth support or help with integrating. 24,000 volunteers are active in more than 700 projects³³

Volunteers of Home-Start provide one-to-one support for parents who feel uncertain about their parenting skills. Home-Start works with an evidence based world-wide program for families and children up to 7 years of age. Volunteers visit mothers or fathers once a week and provide social support in order to enhance maternal well-being³⁴. Every volunteer participated in several training sessions and gained experience in working with children. Aim of the home-start program is to enlarge maternal competence and reduce parental stress. A volunteer helps the parent to learn how to improve behavior of the child and forge a close relationship. Finally the aim of Home-start is to teach parents how to make use of a social network for practical issues or emotional support³⁵.

³¹ <https://voorleesexpress.nl/>

³² https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/good_practice_voorleesexpress.pdf

³³ <https://www.humanitas.nl/>

³⁴ Asscher, J. J., Hermanns, J., & Deković, M. (2008). Effectiveness of the Home-Start parenting support program: Behavioral outcomes for parents and children. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 29(2), 95-113.

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Colophon

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