



**PLAN EINSTEIN UTRECHT REFUGEE LAUNCHPAD:
MANUAL FOR TRAINING VOLUNTEERS
THE WEST EN CENTRAL NETHERLANDS REFUGEE COUNCIL**

Anne-Els Jansen & Conchita Rink



PLAN EINSTEIN: living, learning and working together

The city of Utrecht offers an innovative and inclusive approach to facilitate integration from day 1, involving asylum seekers and local residents into urban communities and social networks within the neighbourhood. Simultaneously Plan Einstein seeks a futureproof approach to the complex and insecure situation in which asylum seekers find themselves. Neighbourhood residents and refugees live, learn and work together in the U-RLP project: an Urban Innovative Action funded by the European Regional Development Fund during 2016-2019.

Creating a community

The concept and vision behind the Plan Einstein U-RLP project is based on the principle of activation from day 1, with opportunities for people to have meaningful encounters from the start. The Dutch Council for Refugees (VluchtelingenWerk) supports refugees, e.g. to identify their social, educational and professional background, skills, current interests and possible obstacles. Local (young) residents and refugees work on their future together: by participating in courses and activities such as business English and international entrepreneurship courses and through (individual) coaching and personal and professional development events. Creating a community has been central to this urban project's success. Spontaneous social initiatives have sprung from the project, such as the community radio station 'Radio Einstein'. Residents have started businesses, taken their studies further and contribute to society as a volunteer.

A positive example

The project illustrates Utrecht's wider refugee integration approach, in which volunteers, professionals and stakeholders work together within the inclusive Utrecht society. Lessons learned from the project contribute to the development of the central reception facility in the city as well as migration policy in Utrecht and elsewhere. The Plan Einstein partners University of Utrecht, Socius Wonen, City of Utrecht, Dutch Council for Refugees, Social Impact Factory and People's University of Utrecht are keen on sharing best practices, e.g. with municipalities, political leaders and sister organisations in the Netherlands and abroad. This is why the project partners wrote their own manuals in which they share their experiences, lessons learned and recommendations for the future. These manuals can be read alongside the independent research by Oxford University and University College London. Their expert researchers evaluated the 2016-2019 project from the start. These final results and manuals can be downloaded on UIA-initiative.eu. For more information about Plan Einstein, please visit www.plan-einstein.nl

Future

The Dutch government is currently researching the possibility to use U-RLP's integration model in all Dutch cities with refugee reception facilities. The project was also presented to representatives of other local authorities from the EURO CITIES Social Affairs Forum and Intercultural Cities Network as an example of how to strengthen social cohesion in cities.

Utrecht Municipality is proud to present you these manuals. "Cities play a crucial role in the integration process of asylum seekers. The way we receive newcomers into our society has an impact on its future shape and prosperity."

Maarten van Ooijen, Deputy Mayor of Utrecht
October 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	3
	1.1 COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES IN PLAN EINSTEIN	4
2.	WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS	6
	2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERS	6
	2.2 TRAINING SESSIONS	7
	2.3 CONTENT OF THE TRAINING SESSIONS	8
	2.4 PROTECTION OF THE (VISUAL) PRIVACY OF REFUGEES	10
	2.5 SELF-RELIANCE	12
	2.6 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION	13
	2.7 DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY	14
	2.8 PRACTICAL TIPS FOR CONDUCTING THE TRAINING SESSIONS	16
3.	RECOMMENDATIONS	19

1. |

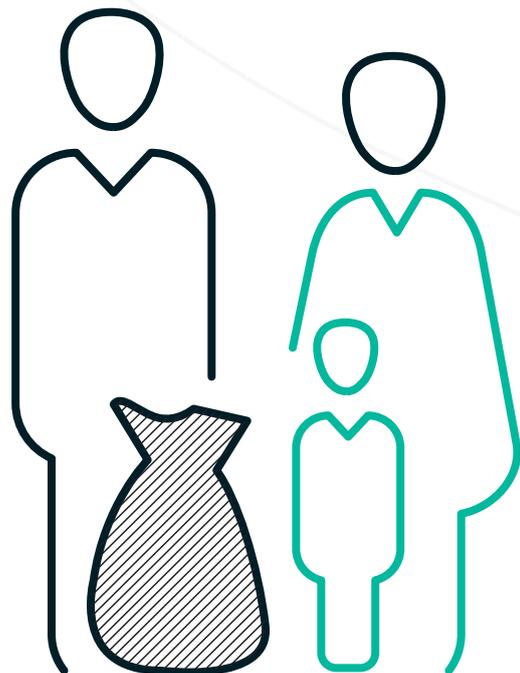
INTRODUCTION

The Dutch Council for Refugees is an independent, broad-based professional voluntary organisation that – based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with many volunteers – has been working for 40 years to protect asylum seekers and refugees through personal support and advocacy during their admission, reception and social participation, primarily in the Netherlands. The Dutch Council for Refugees consists of five regional foundations.

The West and Central Netherlands Refugee Council was one of the partners involved in the Plan Einstein project, which was launched at Einsteindreef in the Utrecht district of Overvecht. In the 40 years that the Dutch Council for Refugees has been active, we have built up a great deal of expertise and experience in working with the target group and working with volunteers. In all phases of the asylum procedure, asylum seekers receive support from our paid employees and professional volunteers.

In an Asylum Seekers' Centre (ASC), we inform the residents about the asylum procedure and support the residents with the asylum procedure, with general residence applications and with family reunification. Because the Dutch Council for Refugees is involved with asylum seekers and refugees right the way through from arrival to integration, we are able to build up a long-term relationship of trust.

**WE ARE
ABLE TO BUILD
UP A LONG-TERM
RELATIONSHIP
OF TRUST**



1.1

COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES IN PLAN EINSTEIN

In 2016, we were approached by the municipality of Utrecht to participate as one of the partners in the innovative Plan Einstein project. The aim of the project was to allow asylum seekers and refugees to actively participate in the various programme components of Plan Einstein from day one.

For years now, the Council for Refugees has been drawing attention in its lobby to the fact that the residents of an ASC have far too few options for meaningful daytime activities, which means that many residents end up being hospitalised. This applies in particular to residents who are still in proceedings and to residents with few future prospects in the Netherlands.

In Plan Einstein, the range of programmes was future-free and accessible to all residents regardless of their residence status. By offering asylum seekers and refugees the opportunity to participate in society at an early stage through training, contacts with local residents and participation in activities, they are supported in building a future in the Netherlands or in their country of origin. It is important that after an active life in their country of origin, asylum seekers and refugees do not come to a standstill after arriving in the Netherlands and can continue to develop. This is important because this also gives them more control over their lives. For the Council for Refugees, participation in the Project was a valuable opportunity to play an active role in this.

At the ASC in Overvecht, in addition to our legal team in the ASC section, a project team from the Council for Refugees was also active in the framework of Plan Einstein. The project team had the task of informing residents of the ASC about Plan Einstein with the aim of allowing residents to participate in the various courses and activities that were offered as part of the project. We did this by providing information collectively and individually. By conducting the NOA assessments and an extensive intake, we mapped out the educational and professional backgrounds of asylum seekers and refugees.

The results of the assessments were discussed with the participants, and then a plan of action was drawn up with the resident. Once the resident had made a choice based on their wishes and possibilities, they were referred to the various partners. The entrepreneurship course at the University of Utrecht and the Business English course at the Volksuniversiteit were important elements of the range of programmes on offer. In addition, a lot of people were also referred to the activities organised by Welcome to Utrecht and other organisations.

In the conversations with the residents, the possible obstacles to participation were also discussed and in the case of concerns about residence procedures, we ensured proper referral to the legal team from the Council for Refugees.

Residents who participated in the activities as part of Plan Einstein were invited for progress interviews to discuss further wishes and the continuation of activities. The Council for Refugees also played an important role in maintaining contacts with the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) in order to ensure good cooperation and coordination. The COA also offered programmes, which is why it was important to ensure that the programmes offered by Plan Einstein and COA were coordinated.

Regular meetings were also held about information and registration. In addition to consultations with the COA, we brought the various partners together in consultations to optimise the collaboration in the project and, where necessary, to provide the partners with information about the target group in general.

In our project team, the trainer was responsible for organising training sessions for volunteers about working with the target group and life at the ASC, for example. This guide focuses on the latter task of informing volunteers who developed work and activities for residents at the ASC or elsewhere.



2. |

WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS

The Council for Refugees is a professional voluntary organisation with 14,000 active volunteers nationwide. In this guide, we want to share our experiences of working with volunteers and training volunteers in the context of Plan Einstein with organisations that wish to set up similar projects. The training sessions were intended for volunteers from various organisations who often came into contact with the target group at the ASC for the first time.

**VOLUNTEERS
ARE ESSENTIAL**

| 2.1

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERS

No Council for Refugees without volunteers. With many thousands of volunteers, we support asylum seekers in the reception centres and refugees who are creating a new existence in municipalities.

Volunteers are essential for the Council for Refugees, because of their involvement and the quality and accessibility of the support they offer to refugees. The Council for Refugees recognises the important role that volunteers can play for refugees and asylum seekers and for the various organisations. Volunteers played an important role in Plan Einstein in terms of meeting and connecting.

As a bridge between refugees and society, volunteers know how to give substance to the duality of integration. Volunteers often act locally and actively use their own talents, network and knowledge to support asylum seekers and refugees. Local volunteers ensure contacts and meetings between the residents of the ASC and the residents of the neighbourhood take place, making the ASC much more a part of the neighbourhood. In addition, volunteers, as committed citizens, contribute to the support for refugees in society. Support in society is crucial for the integration and reception of refugees. Because of the important role that volunteers play, it is also important to provide volunteers with information and tools for working with asylum seekers and refugees.

2.2

TRAINING SESSIONS

The Council for Refugees developed a training programme aimed at volunteers active within Plan Einstein, but we soon noticed that professionals who worked with volunteers and/or with the target group and committed local residents also needed training.

The training sessions were offered to the participating organisations in the project, but also to organisations involved with the residents of the ASC. Because it was a new target group for many volunteers and organisations, there was a clear need for information exchange outside the training sessions.

**VOLUNTEERS;
A BRIDGE
BETWEEN
REFUGEES
AND SOCIETY**

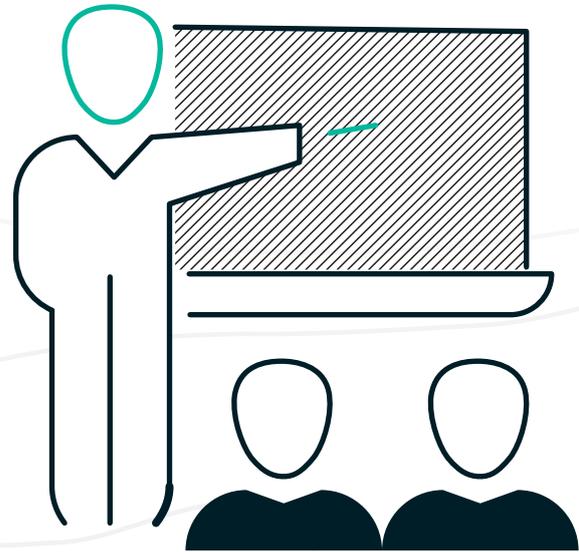


2.3

CONTENT OF THE TRAINING SESSIONS

The training sessions cover various topics. Depending on the target group of the training and the activities of the volunteers and other interested parties, the training courses were customised as much as possible.

If a specific question had not been made known in advance, then the participants were always asked at the start of the training what they hoped to learn and, if necessary, the training was adjusted accordingly. Every situation is different and it is important for a trainer to be flexible. We will briefly mention the most important topics and elaborate on a number of themes that we think should be included in every training session.



SUBJECTS OF THE TRAINING SESSIONS:

Information about refugees worldwide, in Europe and in the Netherlands, numbers. We noticed that it was important to pay attention to this because there are many misconceptions about the numbers of refugees who are received in the Netherlands and in Europe and the numbers that are received in their own region of the countries of origin.

Explanation about the Council for Refugees, the COA responsible from the government for the reception of asylum seekers, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) responsible for carrying out admission procedures, including asylum, and the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) responsible for implementing the departure policy.

The importance of referrals to the respective organisations. It is also important here that the rules on sharing information (GDPR) are explained and that information may never be shared without the permission of a resident.

Information about the countries of origin where many refugees come from. Why people flee from the countries concerned.

Information about the asylum procedure and the refugee treaty.

Information about the family reunification procedure. Who is entitled to it and how does it work?

Position of asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected. What does it mean for a resident when their application has been rejected and what do they do with the volunteer and/or the professional?

Material legal status of holders of residence permits: housing and integration. How are refugees housed after a residence permit has been granted, when can they start their integration and what shape does it take?

Plan Einstein; explanation of the project and the project partners and organisations involved. What role can volunteers play?

Regard for dealing with refugees: cultural communication, encouraging self-reliance.

Tools for working with refugees: do not ask the reason for fleeing; do not ask questions that are too direct and personal; in the event of problems, refer to professional bodies; look at similarities, not differences; take cultural differences into account; give the other person the opportunity to say no; do not try to interpret attitude and behaviour according to your own standards.

We want to discuss a number of topics in more detail, topics that are important for both volunteers and professionals.

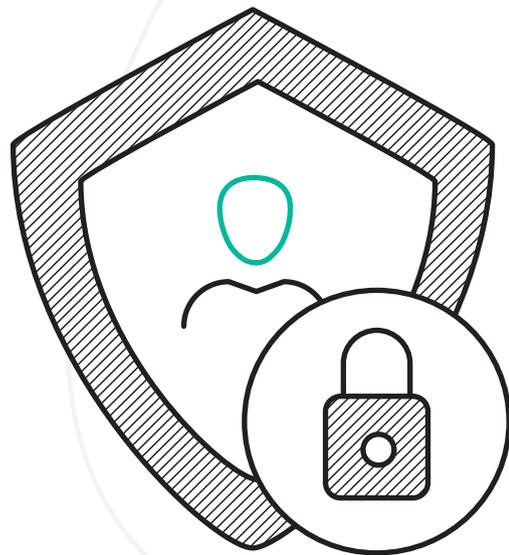
2.4

PROTECTION OF THE VISUAL PRIVACY OF REFUGEES

According to the Convention on Refugees, a refugee is someone who has well-founded fears of persecution in their home country and does not get protection in their own country against this persecution.

Reasons for persecution are the religion of the refugee; the political conviction of the refugee; the sexual orientation of the refugee; or belonging to a specific ethnic or social group. It is very important to convey that the fear of persecution for refugees does not stop when they leave their country of origin.

Most refugees still have family members in their country of origin and they may be at risk if it becomes known where the refugee has applied for asylum in the Netherlands. It can, therefore, be of vital importance to refugees and their family members that their identity does not appear in publicity or in social media. This can be dangerous not only for the family members but also for the refugee who is staying in the Netherlands. There are countries that also monitor and threaten their nationals in the Netherlands.



Professional organisations must comply with privacy laws and can only share data with permission.

This also applies to the volunteers working for the organisations concerned. At the same time, information is often exchanged and photos are often taken during informal contact between professionals, volunteers and refugees. This data can be distributed by social media at lightning speed, and people are often not aware of the possible consequences for a refugee. That is why the protection of personal data is also an important point in the training sessions, and why information sharing of photos and the purpose for which the photos are used also require attention. It is important that volunteers and professionals are aware of this and always discuss this with asylum seekers and refugees.

When discussing the topic, it is useful to also indicate how you as an organisation deal with this. The Council for Refugees also has to deal with this, for example with a generic photo or image project, such as Plan Einstein. There may be a tension between sharing in (social) media and protecting the interests of participants by not featuring them in the publicity. Our work cannot be carried out without support for our work; visual stories are important to maintain support and volunteers. On the other hand, as the Council for Refugees, we are the advocate for and protector of our target group (asylum seekers and refugees), and we know how important it is to protect the privacy of our clients and to handle their data with great care.

**BE AWARE
DATA CAN BE
DISTRIBUTED BY
SOCIAL MEDIA
AT LIGHTNING SPEED**

As mentioned before, a media appearance can have major consequences for the family in the country of origin and for the refugee themselves. Moreover, a media appearance can draw attention to the current asylum procedure. The refugee runs the risk of their story not being presented correctly and that this will result in negative attention. The advice here is to always consult with the Council for Refugees and the lawyer about whether this is desirable.

There are ways to make visual recordings of a meeting and also to respect someone's (visual) privacy. For example, a photo of people in action can be made where the faces are not visible. In the case of activities and meetings, it is important to indicate in advance that pictures will be taken and to ask in advance who does and does not want to have their picture taken. Always request permission and show the result before you intend to use it. Immediately remove what may not be used in the presence of the person. The permission in the context of publicity will also always have to be recorded in writing together with the purpose for which the photo will be used and the possibility for the refugee to withdraw the permission.

2.5

SELF-RELIANCE

In our participatory society, striving for more self-reliance is of great importance. This also applies to asylum seekers and refugees. Asylum seekers and refugees need a lot of support when they arrive in the Netherlands, but it is important that they continue to exercise control.

Due to fleeing and arriving in a foreign country, they often experience that they no longer have control and are dependent on all kinds of authorities. It is important to start from the strength of the asylum seeker and not to take over all of the control from the asylum seekers and refugees. Asylum seekers and refugees must continue to make their own choices and decisions. This is easier said than done. Many asylum seekers and refugees often feel powerless and ask for help from various places.

Many people who have personal contact with refugees for the first time are affected by the difficult situation in which asylum seekers and refugees find themselves. In this way, they can see from up close in which circumstances asylum seekers live, often small and with little privacy. Their uncertain situation when it comes to their legal status of residence or the well-being of their family members in their country of origin is also often seen as very confrontational and unjust.

**STRIVING
FOR MORE
SELF-RELIANCE**

Due to the enormous involvement that is felt, volunteers and professionals also regularly actively, without the required knowledge, interfere with legal proceedings or reception issues and lose sight of the residents' self-reliance. This is ultimately not in the interest of the asylum seeker.

When it comes to promoting self-reliance, volunteers can play a very important role. By familiarising refugees with the Netherlands and by supporting them in building up a network, refugees learn to find their way in the Netherlands and to remain in control and not to become dependent on others. Encounters with Dutch people and the ability to speak Dutch are very valuable.

2.6

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Human nature is everything that is innate, such as the need for food. Culture is what a certain group does with this human nature. Culture is learned, you grow up with it.

Culture causes the most problems when it comes to communication. In communication with people from a different culture, problems arise due to cultural differences that people are not always aware of. For example, in the Netherlands, it can be seen as disrespectful if someone does not look at you. In some other cultures, this can be seen as respectful.

To communicate as well as possible with someone from a different culture, an uninhibited and open-minded attitude is important. It is important to be prepared for the possible differences and to try to be open to these differences and not to interpret them directly in a negative way. You can think of the principle that every behaviour, however strange it may seem, comes from a positive commitment.

Why people do what they do is always due to certain reasons. When communicating with refugees, it is important to reflect on the questions that you should and should not ask. For example, it may seem logical to assume that refugees are happy to be in the Netherlands, but they often won't feel this way. They have been forced to leave their country, and have often undergone a dangerous journey.

After arriving in the Netherlands, they often feel a huge amount of fear, pain and sorrow at the forced departure, as well as missing the family members they had to leave behind. However, it is a question that is often asked to refugees, and the refugee often feels called upon to say that they are happy because they don't want to come across as ungrateful.

Dutch people often ask questions that are too personal. For example, the question of why refugees fled and how they fled is often distressing for refugees. By asking this question, however sincere the interest may be, the person asking the question does not seem aware of the personal nature of the question and the many memories and emotions that this question may evoke. Give the refugee time and wait to see if a refugee wants to tell their own story. It is important to realise that the refugee will have already had to tell their story many times, to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), the lawyer and the Council for Refugees. Refugees want to get to know Dutch people and learn to speak Dutch, often about issues they encounter in the Netherlands and subjects that are not painful to them.

2.7

DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY

Distance and proximity is a well-known term in the provision of assistance. It is also relevant for volunteers and professionals who work with asylum seekers and refugees.

Not all volunteers involved with asylum seekers and refugees work for an organisation, and some cases do not involve a care-giving relationship. However, it is also important to take distance and proximity into consideration in these cases.

In the case of volunteers and paid workers from the Council for Refugees, a service-oriented relationship is always involved. If an employee does not keep the correct distance, that is the end of the service-oriented relationship and the employee is no longer able to help the refugee. Staying professionally involved whilst maintaining the right distance is difficult for professional caregivers, let alone volunteers without that professional background. If an insufficient distance is kept, there is a risk that volunteers and professionals will experience the refugee problem as their own.

WHEN IS THERE AN INSUFFICIENT DISTANCE?

- if the client becomes dependent on the volunteer (professional)
- if the volunteer becomes dependent on the refugee (client)
- if the volunteer can no longer let go of the story and history of the refugee (client) and takes the story home with them
- if the volunteer becomes too involved with the issues
- if the volunteer ends up assuming the role of rescuer
- if the volunteer starts arranging everything behind the scenes for the client that falls outside the scope of what's asked of them (providing assistance that is not requested)



All Council for Refugees employees are educated and trained and bound by a code of conduct. For new organisations with professionals and/or volunteers who come into a service-oriented relationship with refugees through their work, it is important to offer the development of expertise about working professionally and distance and proximity. This not only concerns the protection of the client, in this case, the refugee, but also of the volunteer and/or professional themselves.

2.8

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR PROVIDING TRAINING SESSIONS

Ask in advance about the target group (who are they, what are their activities) of the training session and whether there are any special wishes.

Ask at the start of the training session what the participants want to learn. If this is not included in the presentation as a standard, make a note so that it can still be offered during the training session. Keep track of current developments and provide the opportunity for questions.

Prepare the presentation well each time. Put the date and name of the organisation or group on the front page so that the presentation comes across as personalised.

Ensure that the training session contains enough interactive elements and alternate between theory and interactive components so that everyone remains engaged.

Have a short coffee break after about an hour and fifteen minutes. Five minutes is sufficient.

Provide water, tea, coffee and some biscuits.

Do not stay on topics that are not useful to the participants for too long. If all the wishes of the group are known in advance, sufficient time can also be given to them.

Make the presentation your own. If you want to adjust, omit or add something, that is fine. Keep the time in mind. Our presentation takes approximately three hours including a question and answer session.

Do not underestimate the importance of the question and answer session. Set aside enough time for this and ask if the training session has met expectations.

Keep the presentation and training session up-to-date. Check whether the content is still correct and always consider which interactive components need to be adjusted.

Offer the training session at different times of the day and also in the evening.

Our experience with the Council for Refugees and Plan Einstein teaches us that new volunteers benefit from education and training at the start of the activities they are going to carry out.

Knowledge of the organisations and the services they offer to asylum seekers makes it easier for volunteers to refer them and they know that refugees receive support from professionals with regard to residence procedures, reception issues and medical issues. Many volunteers are involved in activities aimed at meeting people and language acquisition, and it is important that they can concentrate on that without feeling that they also have to provide support in all kinds of other areas. Providing guidance for dealing with refugees is also essential.



With Plan Einstein, it was not always possible to train volunteers right from the start. This had to do with the fact that at the start of the project, not all organisations active at an ASC were familiar with the training, and we were not familiar with all organisations. Furthermore, many individual volunteers are active who were not visible to us. The training was open to all volunteers and interested parties. The condition is that participants are motivated to participate in the training. In practice, we noticed that with some training sessions, people cancelled at the last minute or failed to show up without letting us know. It is therefore important to continue to bring the possibility of the training to the attention of the project partners and to jointly endorse the importance of the training. In addition to the project partners, it is important that other organisations and volunteers are aware of the possibility of following a training course.

With Plan Einstein, developing a flyer about the training helped with this. Further information about the training session, the plan for the training session and the method of registration can be included in a flyer and this information can easily be shared via websites including the project website. An event can also be a reason to discuss a specific topic in more detail. With Plan Einstein, the effect of a number of participants' applications for residency being rejected was very noticeable on the various employees of the organisations. It raised many questions and feelings of helplessness because they did not have the power to influence the situation.

**DIVERSITY OF
ACTIVITIES CAN
OFFER GREAT VALUE**



3. |

RECOMMENDATIONS

In a project like Plan Einstein, the various organisations involved with the residents at a reception centre and the diversity of activities they can offer are of great value to the refugees.

The role that volunteers can play in this is essential. As mentioned earlier, volunteers are the bridge between refugees and society and provide support for reception and integration, and that is of great importance in the current political climate where the theme of asylum seekers and refugees evokes many different reactions and emotions. In addition to training volunteers, it is also important to make use of the experience and knowledge of the organisations that are already familiar with working with the target group and with volunteers.

The Council for Refugees, for example, offers accessible information on its website and has developed a special website for refugees themselves in which the themes that asylum seekers and refugees face in the Netherlands are explained in various languages. With this guide, the Council for Refugees hopes to offer a number of tools to organisations that want to implement a project for asylum seekers and refugees following on from Plan Einstein, and we hope we have highlighted the importance of effective education and training for volunteers about working with this special and inspiring target group.

MORE INFO



PLAN EINSTEIN

Website

uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/utrecht
plan-einstein.nl

Follow us on Twitter or Facebook

Plan Einstein

Email planeinstein@vluchtelingenwerk.nl



PARTNERS

The innovative approach to reception and integration, the Utrecht Refugee Launch Pad (URLP), was developed by the municipality of Utrecht together with the housing corporation for young People SOCIUS, the Utrecht Center for Entrepreneurship (Utrecht University), the Utrecht Council for Refugees, the Utrecht People's University and the Social Impact Factory. The Universities of Oxford University and University College London are responsible for the research and evaluation of the impact and results of the project on the district, its participants and the city. Wherever beneficial, the municipality also involves other district parties in the implementation of Plan Einstein.



This project is co-financed by the European Regional and Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative



**VluchtelingenWerk
Nederland**

al 40 jaar ❤️ voor vluchtelingen

vluchtelingenwerk.nl/westenmiddennederland