

# *Nieuwe kansen voor vrijwilligerswerk*

DE INZET VAN VRIJWILLIGERS BIJ HET COA

Marjan de Gruijter  
Inge Rازenberg



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Inge Razenberg

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# Summary

## The study

In this study, we take stock of the added value and (im)possibilities of the use of volunteers for the aim of COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) at their locations for temporary accommodation and asylum seekers' centres. With the results, COA, the study's commissioner, wants to gain insight into the added value, possibilities and impossibilities of the deployment of volunteers at the aforementioned locations. Based on this, COA aims to formulate a well-founded policy in pursuance of the use of volunteers for the activation of the centres' inhabitants.

The study's main question is: *What is the possible added value, and what are the (im)possibilities of the use of volunteers for the activation of inhabitants at the locations for temporary accommodation and asylum seekers' centres, from the point of view of volunteers, civil society organizations, inhabitants, and COA staff?* To answer this research question, we have carried out a literature study, organized an expert meeting to get a clear picture of the experiences with the use of volunteers in other sectors, and carried out fieldwork at four of COA's reception locations. At these locations, we spoke with professional COA staff, volunteers and inhabitants, as well as with volunteers and professional staff from other volunteer organizations active at the reception locations.

## Volunteer deployment in and around COA locations

In and around COA locations, we have distinguished four kinds of volunteer deployment for the benefit of refugees. The first kind is the deployment of COA volunteers. It relates to the volunteers who check in with COA individually to do voluntary work for it, and whom COA then 'employs'. COA uses these volunteers to realize one of the COA aims: the activation of the centres' inhabitants. At the reception location, these volunteers take care of a structural and continuous offer of activating activities for inhabitants. These include language lessons; work with toddlers; artistic and recreational activities; sports activities; a bicycle workshop and computer activities. Mid 2016, more than 1,900

volunteers were active under COA's direction, exceeding the number of volunteers at the same moment a year earlier by more than 900. This sharp increase is attributed to the rise in social interest in refugees. The majority of the volunteers 'employed' by COA is female (two thirds) and aged over fifty (60%). These volunteers often work for COA for a long time.

The second kind of volunteer deployment relates to volunteers who are 'employed' by organizations with which COA has entered into a nationwide agreement, such as VluchtelingenWerk, De Vrolijkheid or the Red Cross. These organizations are active at COA locations and play their own, independent role. This especially pertains to VluchtelingenWerk; its volunteers assist asylum seekers throughout their asylum procedure and act as their advocate. This kind of volunteer deployment falls outside the scope of our study.

The third kind of volunteer deployment relates to activities carried out by informal volunteer organizations such as religious organizations, sports clubs and residents' associations. These volunteers are organized concerned citizens who, - often caused by the increased influx of asylum seekers during 2014 and 2015 and the polarized social response triggered by it -, want to do something meaningful for refugees. In the meantime, new informal organizations that co-ordinate the deployment of these concerned citizens have sprung up as well, mainly in the vicinity of the temporary accommodations set up in 2015. An example is 'Welkom in Utrecht' ('Welcome in Utrecht').

The fourth kind of volunteer deployment relates to individual citizens living in the vicinity of COA locations, who check in with COA to do voluntary work for refugees once or only briefly, and who are often interested in building up a personal relationship with refugees.

In our conclusions, we will make a distinction between COA's volunteer policy regarding its own COA volunteers, and the (possible) involvement of COA in the deployment of other volunteers and volunteer organizations.

### COA's volunteer policy

The COA volunteers make an important and indispensable contribution to the realization of one of COA's aims: the activation of inhabitants. According to COA, the volunteers and the inhabitants, the volunteers greatly contribute to the quality of life at the location and the inhabitants' well-being. Using volunteers has enabled COA to offer a varied assortment of activities. Without volunteers, this offer would not exist: COA's professional staff members lack the time and resources to carry out these activities. COA expects from all of its employees – both professional staff and volunteers – that they keep a professional distance and refrain from getting personally involved with inhabitants. This has been laid down in the COA code of conduct, which all volunteers must abide by from the moment they start doing voluntary work. COA strongly adheres to its code of conduct, since it is responsible for inhabitants in a dependent and vulnerable position. Yet, for the inhabitants and a part of the volunteers, this code of conduct is at odds with their wishes and ambitions regarding the voluntary work. Inhabitants want to get acquainted with Dutch society and enter into meaningful relationships with Dutch people, for instance with volunteers. Part of the volunteers would also like to have more room for such an involvement.

In our study, we have looked at the experiences of other organizations that use volunteers to work with the refugee target group: VluchtelingenWerk and De Vrolijkheid. They also emphasize the importance of a code of conduct for volunteers, yet they wish to note that they have positive experiences with making room for volunteers' intrinsic motivation of wanting to do something good for a vulnerable other. A precondition for this to go well is, however, that volunteers must be soundly equipped and supervised to enable them to fulfil their role.

Both COA's professional staff and volunteers agree that this is to a large extent lacking in their organization. At COA, the time, resources and expertise are lacking to pursue

its volunteer policy. In practice, the volunteers hardly receive any supervision; for the most part, there are no (formalised) consultations and performance interviews, and volunteers do not get any feedback regarding their functioning. There are no training courses or a professional development programme to speak of. Expressions of appreciation for the voluntary effort made, apart from a Christmas box and an annual outing, are not a fixed part of the daily co-operative practice between professional staff members and volunteers. We have observed that, in this regard, COA resembles organizations in the field of care and welfare, which aim to transfer an increasing number of tasks to volunteers that were formerly carried out by professional staff. These organizations, too, struggle with the fact that the management of volunteers often is not a part of the organization's core activities. Given the acknowledged value of the activation activities carried out by volunteers for COA, the volunteers and inhabitants, in our view it is necessary that COA, *in co-operation with its volunteers and inhabitants*, develops a new outlook on the use of volunteers. It then needs to elaborate its volunteer policy in more detail, based on this new outlook. The current, nationally developed policy is just a rough framework that provides insufficient leads to go by for the local practice. The involvement of volunteers in the development of an outlook on the deployment of volunteers is a necessity: central to the present use of volunteers is solely the realization of COA's aim of activation, while almost no attention is paid to the (specific) motivations, experiences and expertise of volunteers. A detailed volunteer policy should at least include a clear view on the co-operation between professional staff and volunteers, and on the specific contribution to be made by each group to a shared goal. This would make it possible to formulate preconditions under which each group can carry out their tasks. At this moment, the facilitation of the use of volunteers does not come up to the mark. COA should provide (and earmark) sufficient resources for (the supervision of) volunteers and should create the outlines of a framework. Next, the various reception locations may tailor the volunteer policy in more detail to their specific situation.

At this moment, COA volunteers carry out the lion's share of the voluntary work *within* the reception locations. After the increased influx of asylum seekers in 2014 and 2015 and the polarized social response to it, a great social demand has arisen for contexts in which citizens can voluntarily help refugees. This was shown, for example, by the more

than 37,000 people who presented themselves within a short period of time to the 'Ready to Help' network of the Red Cross. COA was also confronted with individual citizens who checked in with an offer to help. At COA, this has resulted in the aforementioned, substantial increase in the number of volunteers. With these numbers, COA has been amply provided for with regard to the execution of present activation activities at COA locations. An increase in the number of volunteers under the direct responsibility and locally organized supervision of COA is neither feasible nor desirable. Nevertheless, citizens and social organizations expect COA to do something about the wish of persons and organizations to be able to help refugees. Below, we will discuss the experiences of COA, volunteers and volunteer organizations.

#### COA and the deployment of other volunteers and volunteer organizations

At and around COA locations, volunteers are active who are not 'employed' by COA. We already mentioned VluchtelingenWerk Nederland and De Vrolijkheid, organizations with which COA has entered into a nationwide agreement and which perform independent functions at the reception locations. Besides this, to a modest extent COA co-operates at the reception locations with, for instance, religious organizations and sports clubs. This co-operation for the most part relates to volunteers used for once-only or short-term COA activities for inhabitants. Up until now, COA's experiences with this kind of volunteer deployment have not been very positive. Often, this deployment has not been well organized and co-ordinated, tasks that eventually ended up burdening the shoulders of professional COA staff, who are not equipped for them. COA therefore views the use of once-off volunteer activities 'from outside' as too burdensome for the scarce resources and time of professional staff. In addition, according to COA, these volunteers are not always willing to abide to COA's code of conduct. The volunteers are eager to 'help' or 'mother', or they want to befriend refugees. In doing so, they transgress the requirement of professional detachment and do not contribute, in COA's opinion, to the ability to cope and well-being of its inhabitants.

Yet, in our study we have also found examples of co-operation between COA and external volunteers/volunteer organizations that did work out well. In these cases, solutions were found for the obstacles and complaints mentioned earlier. For individual citizens who

want to get acquainted with refugees, for example, a COA location organizes a weekly morning coffee break, where citizens and COA inhabitants can meet to their hearts' content. Here, nobody is doing 'voluntary work': meeting each other is the central goal.

For the co-operation with volunteer *organizations*, an important success factor turns out to be that there is a clear agreement on who co-ordinates and supervises the volunteers: these are the tasks of the volunteer organization. Furthermore, we have seen that volunteer organizations offer activities outside the reception location. In this situation, the natural course is for the volunteer organization to take the lead while COA keeps its distance. Although COA will want to establish that it is dealing with a trustworthy co-operation partner, this set-up in practice provides more room for adult asylum seekers to judge for themselves whether they want to make use of what the volunteer organization is offering. COA's role regarding the use of volunteers 'from outside' is thus very different from that regarding its own COA volunteers: COA acts as a chain partner of one or more volunteer organizations. With these organizations COA enters into agreements at a local level, about the content of the co-operation and the deployment of volunteers in and around reception locations. A successful co-operation between COA and volunteer organizations will not only contribute to the realization of 'matches' between COA inhabitants and involved citizens. It may also help to make the contribution of volunteers to the integration (of residence permit holders living at a COA locations) bigger. Volunteers/volunteer organizations may, for instance, serve as guides to (in)formal organizations in the municipality, such as sports clubs and hobby clubs. Volunteers may become a 'buddy' for a residence permit holder. For this, guaranteeing the safety of the COA inhabitants is a precondition.

Colofon

Opdrachtgever

Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek - en  
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Auteurs

Drs. M.J. de Grijter  
I. Razenberg, MSc

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Ontwerppartners, Breda  
Verwey-Jonker Instituut

Uitgave

Kromme Nieuwegracht 6  
3512 HG Utrecht  
T (030) 230 07 99  
E [secr@verwey-jonker.nl](mailto:secr@verwey-jonker.nl)  
I [www.verwey-jonker.nl](http://www.verwey-jonker.nl)

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Het Verwey-Jonker Instituut onderzocht in opdracht van het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum van het ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie de meerwaarde van de inzet van vrijwilligers bij het Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers (COA). Het COA maakt op hun opvanglocaties gebruik van een vaste groep vrijwilligers. De meerwaarde hiervan is groot. Door de inzet van vaste COA-vrijwilligers kan het COA aan bewoners een structureel en gevarieerd aanbod aan activeringsactiviteiten bieden. Dit draagt bij aan de leefbaarheid op de opvanglocaties en het welzijn van bewoners. De meerwaarde kan worden vergroot door een betere begeleiding en facilitering van de COA-vrijwilligers, waardoor hun motivatie en specifieke deskundigheid beter tot zijn recht komt en de kwaliteit van het activeringsaanbod wordt geborgd.

Onder invloed van de grotere instroom van vluchtelingen in 2014 en 2015, en de maatschappelijk gepolariseerde reacties hierop, hebben veel nieuwe vrijwilligers zich bij het COA gemeld. Zij hebben andere verwachtingen en wensen dan de COA-vrijwilligers: men wil zich graag snel, vaak kortdurend inzetten voor praktische hulp. Daarnaast wil men kennismaken met vluchtelingen en (vriendschaps)relaties aangaan. Dit laatste sluit aan bij de sterke wens van bewoners van COA-locaties om 'gewone' Nederlanders te leren kennen. Op diverse plaatsen is het COA de samenwerking aangegaan met bestaande of nieuwe vrijwilligers(organisaties) om 'vraag en aanbod' van deze vrijwillige inzet met elkaar te verbinden. In de praktijk is hier echter nog een wereld te winnen. Een belangrijke sleutel tot succes is dat betrokkenen wederzijdse verwachtingen delen en op basis hiervan taken en verantwoordelijkheden helder beleggen.