

“Due to his difference we have ignored him, neglected him to such an extent that we didn’t even invite him to draw from a cigarette. But we are the only people he has during this time, even if he knows us a little. We are his solace.”

Lonely Together

“About Refugees, Loneliness, Helpful Organizations and Religion in Groningen and Drenthe”

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Introduction

“After taking a few more steps he turns his head and looks over at our bus. It is as though he has left something or someone behind. Perhaps during this moment of vulnerability he can’t find refuge in anything except us. Truth is, throughout this half-day he hasn’t spoken a word to any of us. Due to his difference we have ignored him, neglected him to such an extent that we didn’t even invite him to draw from a cigarette. But we are the only people he has during this time, even if he knows us a little. We are his solace.”¹

This is a passage from the book “No Friend but the Mountains” written by the Iranian writer Behrouz Boochani. Boochani was a refugee from Iran who sought asylum in Australia. Right after arrival he was imprisoned on Manus Island, which he describes in the book. This particular passage describes the forced transport to the Island. Boochani writes here about a Rohingya boy being lifted to the plane. The boy is all alone and is unable to make contact with the other prisoners due to the language barrier.

The passage entered deeply into my mind when I read it and it has made a long lasting impression on me. I wondered what could have given the boy some comfort or allowed him to connect to others. Why was the boy unable to connect with the other people around him? One way for the boy to feel less alone could be to focus on religion. On the boat trip from Indonesia to Australia, religion was a savior. It kept people from panicking, keeping their hope. Why didn't religion have the same effect on the boy? As many Rohingya adhere to the Islamic faith, just like many Iranians, religion could also have been a way of connecting to the other refugees. Religion, on the other hand, can also be a reason for conflict: a difference marker, a reason for not making contact with another. In response to this thought, in this thesis, I would like to delve into the role of religion for lonely refugees. Does practice show that religion can indeed have a positive influence on lonely refugees, or is it more of a theoretical idea? The main question I want to answer in my thesis is: “What is the place of religion in combatting loneliness amongst refugee populations in Groningen and Drenthe?” In my essay I mainly want to focus on the Dutch provinces of Groningen and Drenthe because very little research has been published in this region, while the central registration point for refugees and most asylum seekers centers are located here. There are also many aid organizations active that support refugees from a social or ecclesiastical interest. In a rural area like the Northern Netherlands, I can imagine that making contact with locals is more difficult than in Amsterdam, for example. Therefore, it seems to me a good region to conduct my research.

¹ Boochani, Behrouz. *No friend but the mountains* (Sydney: Picador, 2018): 95-96.

But what exactly is religion? Religion can be defined in a lot of different ways. By some definitions, religion must be organized, with an institution like the church. While other definitions also add less organized forms of faith to religion. In this essay I start from the following definition of religion: A set of ideas, symbols and ritual practices in which a belief in the supernatural is expressed. By using this definition a broad form of religion can be followed. Also religions that do not fall within one of the major religions can be regarded as religion with this definition. It also allows me to examine both belief and activity through this definition.

Loneliness is a major problem for refugees. Research conducted in London in 2014 shows that most of the respondents suffer or have suffered from loneliness.² 58 percent of respondents describe loneliness and isolation as their biggest challenge living in London.³ Research conducted by a group of Australian researchers in 2019 shows that humanitarian refugees who have difficulty integrating often also have serious mental problems. These mental problems would be further aggravated by loneliness. Refugees who report loneliness, and manage to overcome this loneliness, have more mental problems afterwards than refugees who have not reported loneliness. Loneliness therefore has enormous consequences for refugees, also in their later lives.⁴

There are many reasons why refugees in the country of arrival can feel lonely. Research conducted in Portugal in 2006 shows that loneliness among former refugees mainly depends on the degree of self-esteem, length of stay and the degree of discrimination experienced.⁵ According to Refugee Action, research conducted and published in London in October 2017, the inability to speak English is one of the single most important causes of feelings of loneliness and isolation among refugees in England.⁶ However, according to a Reuters study, this can be counteracted by linking volunteer-friends with refugees. In this way, refugees are less isolated and therefore less alone.⁷

² Christodoulou, Panos. This is how it feels to be lonely, A report on migrants and refugees' experiences with loneliness in London. The Forum. London, 2014.

³ Loneliness is the "biggest challenge" facing refugees and migrants in London. *Campaign to end loneliness*. March 2015. <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/blog/loneliness-refugees-migrants/>

⁴ Chen, Wen, Shuxian Wu, Li Ling and Andre M.N. Renzaho. Impacts of social integration and loneliness on mental health of humanitarian migrants in Australia: evidence from a longitudinal study. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 43, Issue 1, January 2019, Pages 46-55.

⁵ Neto, Felix. "Loneliness and Acculturation among Adolescents from Immigrant Families in Portugal." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 32, no. 3 (2002): 630-47.

⁶ Refugee Action. Save but Alone, The role of English language in allowing refugees to overcome loneliness. London, October 2014.

⁷ Taylor, Lin. How to tackle loneliness among refugees in Britain? Match them with friends. *Thomson Reuters Foundation*. London, July 2017.

Research among first-generation migrants in the Netherlands shows that migrants are more socially and emotionally lonely than native Dutch. This is mainly because migrants are less satisfied with their social relationships, even though there are about the same number as those of the native Dutch. One solution that is suggested is to expand the social network of refugees.⁸ Religious institutions could help refugees to expand their social network. In the Christian Bible there is a lot written about loneliness, such as the following examples; "*Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.*" –Psalm 25:16. "*It lets you know that you should be courageous and know you are not alone, since the Lord God is always with you.*" - Deuteronomy 31: 6. These kinds of verses can also be found in the sacred texts of other religions.⁹

A number of Dutch Churches have set up the project "Een tegen loneliness" (One against Loneliness), in which they are committed to combating loneliness among believers. The churches are concerned about the lonely. Based on the idea that every person wants to be "known and seen", they try to make contact with the vulnerable. The greatest good they invest is time, time in which they meet up and make contact with lonely people.¹⁰ Based on what I see happening in some churches in the Netherlands, I expect religious institutions to deal with loneliness among refugees also. Also, in religious texts help to foreigners is often described, both in Judaism/Christianity and in Islam.¹¹

Arbuckle explains in his book "Loneliness: Insights for healing in a fragmented world" how, for example, Pope Francis calls to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate migrants in societies and churches. According to Arbuckle, Pope Francis argues that refugees should be supported so that they don't have to feel alone. But they don't have to integrate so far that they lose their own culture.¹² Research conducted by Swiss and Dutch researchers shows that both "social networks provided by religious communities and the intrinsic belief of being cared for

⁸ Rowan L F ten Kate, MSc, Başak Bilecen, PhD, Nardi Steverink, PhD. A Closer Look at Loneliness: Why Do First-Generation Migrants Feel More Lonely Than Their Native Dutch Counterparts?, *The Gerontologist* 60, Issue 2, March 2020, Pages 291–301.

⁹ "*Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah, for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction.*" Surat Arraad 13 verse 28, Quran.

¹⁰ Houten, Maaïke Van, "Tijd, Dat Heeft De Kerk Voor Eenzame Mensen," Trouw, April 6, 2019.

¹¹ Goodall, Christine. Shouting towards the Sky: the role of religious individuals, communities, organisations and institutions in support for refugees and asylum seekers. UNHCR, Policy Development and Evaluation Service. April 2015 Pages 8-10.

¹² Arbuckle, Gerald A. Loneliness : Insights for Healing in a Fragmented World. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018, Chapter 5.

by a loving divinity appear to protect against loneliness and related mental health dangers from depression to contemplating suicide.”¹³

However, an opposition to the usefulness of religion as a solution to loneliness comes from Steyn. Steyn writes that religion can be a good way to feel like you belong, not being all alone. But this only works if one follows exactly the teachings of a particular church, otherwise religion can actually create a feeling of loneliness.¹⁴ This is shown in Boochani’s book. Boochani describes that men of the same origin and the same religion, Kurds, live together in the prison camp on Manus Island. The group is close-knit and people who do not belong to the group are chased away from the area where the Kurds live. By creating a group of people with the same origin and religion, there is less loneliness. However, people who do not belong to the group can suffer more from loneliness and feelings of exclusion.¹⁵

A religion can (depending on context, communities and individuals) ensure that you can join a group, namely the group with the same religion. This could lessen a feeling of loneliness. However, if you don’t belong to that group, this could intensify a sense of loneliness. Religion can also affect a more individual form of loneliness. For example, belief in God can cause a person to not feel alone, because God is always with them. But at the same time one can also feel more lonely because of the feeling that God has left them. In my research I want to find out what the role or place of religion is in dealing with loneliness amongst refugees.¹⁶

There are scientific studies showing that religion can be helpful against loneliness. However, I have not yet come across extensive studies specifically targeting loneliness among refugees. In the Netherlands, the influence of religion seems to be seen as something negative,¹⁷ which means that research into the positive contribution of religion to society appears to be very limited. With this thesis I want to add to the existing research, I hope to find out what we as a society could do to ensure that loneliness among refugees decreases. By examining what helps a refugee against loneliness, the approach could be improved.

Through ethical considerations, I will conduct research on refugee loneliness and their religion through religious institutions and mental health organisations. I will do this because

¹³ Ciobanu, Ruxandra and Tineke Fokkema. The role of religion in protecting older Romanian migrants from loneliness? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43, issue 2. 2017. 199-217.

¹⁴ Steyn, J. “Religion and Our Loneliness.” *Religion and Theology* 2, issue 3 (1995): 323–33.

¹⁵ Boochani, *No friend but the mountains*, Chapter 9.

¹⁶ A good example of churches that help refugees is the concept of a church asylum (sanctuary movement). Church asylum is based on different verses in the Bible and means that churches can be used as sanctuaries for the innocent who are persecuted. In this case, churches open their doors to all innocent people who are persecuted, regardless of religion or origin.

¹⁷ Bijstra, Ans. “Maak Van Nederland Een Religievrij Land!,” *NieuwWij*, January 21, 2013.

refugees are often vulnerable and often do not feel they can say all that they want for security reasons, or fear of it being used against them in hearings.¹⁸ By using the religious institutions as intermediaries, refugees will be protected. By focusing on institutions and not on individual refugees, the safety (and health in connection with Corona) of refugees is guaranteed. On the other hand, the use of religious institutions means that refugees themselves may not really be heard. That is why I will also use written sources, such as Boochani's book, to give first hand perspectives.

In this thesis, I will focus on refugee mental health, specifically loneliness. I want to specialize the essay by tackling loneliness from the common topic of mental health. In this way the subject does not become too broad. I will deal with refugees and religious institutions in Groningen and Drenthe. I do this to delineate the research. Groningen and Drenthe are interesting to investigate because many refugees are received here. The general application center for refugees is in Ter Apel, in the Province of Groningen. Many asylum seekers' centers have been built in the areas outside the cities. I expect that the location of these asylum seekers centers could increase loneliness because they are placed in rural areas. The provinces of Groningen and Drenthe are also actively opposed to the closure of Bed-Bad-Brood facilities¹⁹, against the will of the government. As there are so many different facilities, as well as different "types" of refugees, Groningen and Drenthe are interesting to investigate.

In chapter 1 I will discuss the mental health of refugees and the reluctance to use religion in the field of mental health and psychosocial support for refugees. I will explain the chapter different concepts, such as loneliness. The chapter will be primarily philosophical and will highlight multiple sides of the problem.

In Chapter 2 I will focus on loneliness and refugees and, where relevant, the place of religion. How are refugees dealt with in the asylum process? How does this process create loneliness among refugees? What is known about how refugees experience loneliness and the specific causes of it? What does this tell us about the place of religion? Is religion a source of loneliness? Is it a factor that helps to ease a sense of loneliness, or is it just not mentioned? If it is not mentioned, why is it not mentioned? Is it not relevant? Ultimately, my research focuses on what institutions do for lonely refugees and how religious ideas, symbols and ritual practices play a

¹⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. "Guidance note — Research on refugees, asylum seekers & migrants," 07-01-2020.

¹⁹ Facilities in which rejected refugees who cannot return to their country of origin are provided with shelter and food.

role in this. In this chapter I will deal with all organizations that deal with refugees, so both religious organizations and aid organizations.

Chapter 3 will be written based on interviews with religious institutions, health and psychosocial care providers, organizations, NGOs and religious organizations that support resettled refugees. The research will be fully explained in the chapter. The results will also be illustrated with diagrams.

Finally, Chapter 4 is an analytical chapter, explaining the material in Chapter 3. This chapter shows exactly what is being done in Groningen and Drenthe to help lonely refugees, how loneliness is viewed here and what can still be improved.

With this research I want to gain insight into how important religion is as both a cause of and a remedy against loneliness and I could also provide some insight into how more attention and role for religion could be developed in aid to refugees. I would like to show what things are already being done for refugees and what could be improved. I would like to involve religion in this improvement/change where it can make a positive contribution.

Chapter 1: The Mental Health of Refugees

This chapter first examines the mental health of refugees in general. What follows will be a subchapter on loneliness as a specific part of refugee mental health. I want to show what exactly is the problem and I want to address why this problem exists.

Refugees and Mental Health

Refugees arriving in the Netherlands must apply for a residence permit. During that application, they tell their story and wait for approval. It can take years to get an approval and appeal against a rejection can make this even longer. A refugee spends these years in an asylum seekers' center, for example. In recent years, policies and the political discourse towards refugees has become increasingly tougher and waiting times have been greatly extended. Rich Western countries have turned their backs on the large refugee flows from the Middle East and Africa. "Humanitarian solutions" in the region were the main goal.²⁰

"The enormous waiting times drain all the energy from the refugees, making it increasingly difficult for them to remain active." - Churchwarden, Elder.

²⁰ Arbuckle, Loneliness, Chapter 5.

In the Western media,²¹ refugees are criminalized, shown as a threat to border security.²² The conditions under which refugees live in camps in, for example, the Mediterranean and the Greek Islands are appalling. There is too little food and drink, health care is poor, causing people to die from curable diseases and exploitation is lurking.²³

Ioanna Papanikolaou, Greek Council for Refugees social worker on Lesbos, said: *“The security situation for women is of particular concern. Women in the camps say they do not feel safe. Some do not feel safe enough to leave their tents to shower, so instead, they are bathing inside their tents. Lack of lighting, the accessibility of their tents and the challenges in reporting cases of harassment, are among the issues that create an unsafe atmosphere for women. For those who have already experienced sexual abuse, the scant support services and sense of fear can be a retraumatisation.”*²⁴

On the other hand, refugees are portrayed as helpless, passive victims. People who do nothing and are just waiting for rescue from the West. These stereotypical views are two sides of the same face; a process of dehumanization in which refugees are the object of other people's actions and interpretations. In this process of dehumanization, religion is politicized and used to justify the two opposing stories: the dangerous refugee is a (bad) Muslim, who threatens Christian civilization; the vulnerable refugee is a (good) victim Christian or a (good) poor Muslim, who patiently waits in camps for Western salvation.²⁵

Negative political pressure, long waiting times, bad living conditions, and so on. All of this contributes to a toxic atmosphere for refugees, leading to loneliness, isolation and vulnerability. For migrants and refugees who often suffer from mental health problems, loneliness poses an additional risk to mental health.²⁶

The detention of refugees in detention centers is extremely bad for their mental health. In detention centers they are exposed to an additional set of stress factors: loss of freedom, social

²¹ Akyol, Özcan. “Voor Criminele Asielzoekers Is Ons Land Een Plek Waar Ze Lekker Tekeer Kunnen Gaan.” *Algemeen Dagblad*, April 23, 2020.

²² Hartog den , Tobias. “VVD Wil ‘Desnoods’ Grens Sluiten Voor Migrant: ‘Risico Dat Ze Nederland Kiezen Vanwege Onze Welvaart.’” *Algemeen Dagblad*, November 25, 2020.

²³ Kampouras, Asterios et al. “Child Morbidity and Disease Burden in Refugee Camps in Mainland Greece.” *Children* (Basel, Switzerland) vol. 6,3 46. 17 Mar. 2019.

²⁴ “Closure of Model Camp on Greek Islands amidst Horrific Living Conditions Is Cause for Concern.” Oxfam International, April 21, 2021.

²⁵ Gomasca, Paolo. The Uncanny “Religious” Refugee: a Post-Secular Perspective on Ethics of Hospitality. In: *Migrants and Religion: Paths, Issues, and Lenses* by Laura Zanfrini. November 2020. 53-73.

²⁶ Christodoulou, This is how it feels to be lonely, Page 6.

isolation or uncertainty about returning to their country of origin. They are more depressed and suicidal, dealing with anxiety, extreme post-traumatic stress, panic, increased physical pain / discomfort and emotional distress. These detrimental effects of detention persist, despite the initial improvement upon release, and may worsen if there is persistent uncertainty about their immigration status.²⁷

Existing research by a number of Australian researchers has found that humanitarian migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, have worse general and mental health than the general population. During the first three years of resettlement, psychological and general health problems are particularly high. This highlights the adverse effects of increased social integration stressors and increased loneliness on both general and mental health.²⁸

Research conducted by Sinnerbrink²⁹ and Porter and Haslam³⁰ has also shown that displaced persons and asylum seekers worldwide report high rates of pre-migration trauma and that refugees are more likely to have psychopathological disorders than non-refugee groups. The asylum procedure is a major cause of this, because refugees are looking for protection in the West, but are not protected by procedures.³¹

Refugees have worse mental health than the general population in, for example, the Netherlands.³² This is due to a traumatic flight, but also due to detention and the asylum procedure. Loneliness is one of the reasons / components of refugees' poor mental health, and will be highlighted in the next section.

Loneliness

Research conducted in 2014 among immigrants in London shows that 58 percent of those polled see loneliness as the biggest problem in their London lives.³³ Especially the elderly, the unemployed, people with long-term mental health problems, people who live in poverty and immigrants are the most vulnerable to loneliness.³⁴ Loneliness is a deep feeling of sadness about being alone or feeling disconnected from the world around you, felt over an extended period of

²⁷ Christodoulou, Panos. This is how it feels to be lonely, Page 11.

²⁸ Chen a.o., Impacts of social integration and loneliness on mental health of humanitarian migrants in Australia, Pages 46-55.

²⁹ Sinnerbrink, Silove, I., Field, A., Manicavasagar, V., & Steel, Z. Anxiety, depression and PTSD in asylum-seekers: Associations with pre-migration trauma and post-migration stressors. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 170(4) (1997), 351-357.

³⁰ Porter M, Haslam N. Predisplacement and Postdisplacement Factors Associated With Mental Health of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: A Meta-analysis. *JAMA*. 2005;294(5):602-612.

³¹ Christodoulou, Panos. This is how it feels to be lonely, Page 10.

³² "Asielzoekers, Vluchtelingen, Statushouders - Lichamelijke En Psychische Gezondheid," Pharos, December 3, 2018.

³³ Mayfield, D.L. The architecture of loneliness in refugee communities. Comment. June, 1018.

³⁴ Christodoulou, Panos. This is how it feels to be lonely, Page 10.

time.³⁵ Since loneliness is a subjective state of negative feelings about having too low a level of social contact, it is possible to feel lonely in a crowd.³⁶ Loneliness is therefore different from Social Isolation, where someone is separated from other people and their own environment, as a result of personal decisions or circumstances.³⁷ Some definitions include loneliness as a form of social isolation, while others state that loneliness is an emotional response to social isolation.³⁸

Loneliness is a subjective feeling, so it is difficult to pin down or define. Gerald Arbuckle describes loneliness as:

“It can be a feeling of isolation, of belonging, emptiness, a feeling that no one cares, no one notices. ... a desire to belong, a thirst to be connected, a restlessness, a panting - to use St. Augustine's expression - to finally belong, build a satisfying relationship, be appreciated. to feel, to feel that there is a pervasive meaning in someone's life, if only it could be found Longing or thirsty for a relationship is often and poignantly expressed by the psalmist: O God, you are my God, I seek you soul thirsts for you ... as in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Ps 63: 1).”³⁹

There are two different forms of loneliness, namely emotional loneliness and social loneliness. When the number of social relationships and contact frequency is lower than desired, social loneliness can develop. When social relationships are not as intimate as desired, it can lead to emotional loneliness. Dutch studies show that migrants have a greater amount of social contacts than the native Dutch, but the loneliness among migrants is higher. This means that migrants experience more emotional and social loneliness as a result of, among other things, a lower satisfaction with social relationships and a lower participation in social activities compared to the native Dutch.⁴⁰

Loneliness in general has two close relationships for individuals, cultures and subcultures. First, as a result of a provocative action, people feel abandoned and excluded from belonging. Triggers include racism, fundamentalism or difference in appearance, orientation or religion. Second, a lonely person has a tremendous desire to belong and be connected to people and

³⁵ Arbuckle, Loneliness, Introduction.

³⁶ Neto, “Loneliness and Acculturation among Adolescents from Immigrant Families in Portugal,” Pages 630–647.

³⁷ Healey, Justin, ed. Loneliness and Social Isolation. Issues in Society, Volume 459. Thirroul: Spinney Press, 2020. Introduction.

³⁸ Healey, Loneliness and Social Isolation, Chapter 1.

³⁹ Arbuckle, Loneliness, Chapter 1.

⁴⁰ Rowan a.o., A Closer Look at Loneliness, Pages 291–301.

things that are important to that person. Hope to make these connections in the future can prevent loneliness from leading to depression or despair.⁴¹

Migrants and refugees are among the most vulnerable groups when it comes to experiencing loneliness. When they arrive in the reception country, they face a completely different life in a strange new environment. This situation, combined with government policies, can make the journey of migrants and refugees traumatic and detrimental to their well-being. Restrictions on the right to welfare services and exclusions in the field of employment and housing, together with the possibility of detention and removal, are factors of social disconnection associated with loneliness that can further affect health and well-being. These restrictions make migrants and refugees feel discriminated against, excluded, unloved and lonely.⁴²

However, loneliness is more than an emotion. A lonely person is more likely to become mentally and physically ill. Current multidisciplinary research has found that chronic loneliness "is a serious risk factor for illness and premature death, in addition to smoking, obesity and lack of exercise".⁴³ There is also a greater chance of depression and reduced cognition.⁴⁴ Several studies have shown that loneliness exposes a person to stress. Loneliness is linked to sleep deprivation, leads to self-destructive habits and addictions (such as alcohol and drugs), weakens willpower, and increases the likelihood that people indulge in behaviors that are harmful to their health. Lack of social networks and support has a significant impact on health as it causes long-term damage to physiological health. A 2013 study found the link between loneliness and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, increased blood pressure and cortisol, and increased inflammatory responses to stress.⁴⁵

There are many reasons why refugees and asylum seekers experience loneliness. For example, they often do not know the language of their new homeland and the cultural differences are big. Culture change, or even contact with different cultures, can cause loneliness.⁴⁶ In addition to a change of environment, refugees often also miss social contact. For example, they are often separated from family and friends.⁴⁷ The experience of being forced to flee your own country and move to a new unknown place is often a lonely experience in itself. Leaving family behind in a vulnerable and insecure environment also contributes to

⁴¹ Arbuckle, Loneliness, Chapter 1.

⁴² Christodoulou, This is how it feels to be lonely, Page 10.

⁴³ Arbuckle, Loneliness, Introduction.

⁴⁴ Rowan a.o., A Closer Look at Loneliness, Pages 291–301.

⁴⁵ Christodoulou, This is how it feels to be lonely, Page 11.

⁴⁶ Arbuckle, Loneliness, Chapter 1.

⁴⁷ Christodoulou, This is how it feels to be lonely, Page 15.

people's feelings of isolation and helplessness.⁴⁸ Finally, it is often difficult for refugees in the country of arrival to be socially involved. They only get a small amount of money per week to live on, so they have no money to travel by bus to a city, for example. As a result, they rarely come outside of an asylum seekers' center.⁴⁹

To summarize, loneliness is a subjective feeling of a lack of valuable social contacts. Loneliness can have a major impact on both the mental and physical health of a refugee. It is caused, among other things, by language barriers, loss of family and culture and lack of money. Already existing trauma can strengthen loneliness, while hope for a better future can counter loneliness.⁵⁰

Politics as a Problem

Why is so little being done about this problem now? This has everything to do with the aforementioned political situation. Western countries have turned their backs on this major problem and are focusing on reception in the region.

The official policy of the EU is to promote reception in the region. To achieve this, deals have been concluded with North Africa and Turkey.⁵¹ An example of such a deal is the Turkey deal from 2016. In this deal it was agreed that refugees traveling to Europe via Turkey may be sent back to Turkey. For every returned refugee, the EU would take in a vulnerable refugee from Turkey. It also became more difficult for Syrians to apply for refugee status in Turkey, as a result of which they have fewer rights. The Turkey deal is one of the many ways the EU wants to keep refugees out.⁵²

Even though the focus is on reception in the region, there are also large refugee camps in the EU. For example in the Balkans, the Greek Islands, the Mediterranean and around Calais. Conditions in these camps are extremely bad. Little money goes to the camps, so many people have to live in self-made tents. There is little food, poor health care and great insecurity. The waiting times to be admitted to an EU country or returned to the country of origin are long, often years. The asylum system in Europe has been designed in such a way that returning to the

⁴⁸ Refugee Action. Save but Alone, Page 2.

⁴⁹ Carter, Matthew. Living with loneliness as a refugee. British Red Cross. October, 2017.

⁵⁰ Velden van der, Peter G et al. "Potentially traumatic events have negative and positive effects on loneliness, depending on PTSD-symptom levels: evidence from a population-based prospective comparative study." *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology* vol. 53,2 (2018): 195-206.

⁵¹ Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, "Waarom Worden Asielzoekers Niet Opgevangen in De Regio?," Rijksoverheid.nl (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, April 7, 2020).

⁵² Alonso, Stephane, "Dit staat in de Turkije-deal, punt voor punt", *NRC Handelsblad*, 18 March 2016.

country of origin is encouraged. This encouragement is not done by improving circumstances in the country of origin, but by making the asylum procedure extra burdensome.⁵³

In addition to a tough asylum procedure, the life of refugees after acceptance of a Western country can also be very difficult. This is because many people in the West have a problem with Muslims. It is expected by them that most of the refugees are Muslims. However, this is not always the case. Populist politicians claim Muslim men oppress women, want to introduce Sharia law and want to take us back in time. In the Netherlands, these thoughts are expressed by politicians Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet, populist politicians.⁵⁴ But negativity about Muslims is also increasingly being expressed by more moderate politicians.⁵⁵ Together with negativity in the media, this creates a hostile climate towards refugees.⁵⁶

However, prejudice does not only stem from religion. Race, class and nationality also play a role, for example. Prejudices about people from the non-Western world, the “Orient”, have existed for many centuries. In the colonial period, the Orient stood for the Middle East, Asia and Africa, everything that was different. The image of the Orient was like a tropical and sensual place, which was barbaric and brutal at the same time. The Orient was a projection of Europe's own fears and desires.⁵⁷ Prejudice from hundreds of years ago still has influence today. Sexualization of black African people⁵⁸ and brutalization of Muslim men⁵⁹ is still a prevalent image. These prejudices have little to do with religion, but they do play a role in asylum policy, European politics and behavior of the masses.⁶⁰

All in all, the focus on reception in the region makes for a tough asylum procedure in Europe. When arriving in a future home country, public opinion is often disappointing. This hostility system, deployed by the EU, increases the likelihood that refugees will have to deal with mental and physical problems. The arduous migration process of refugees can be influenced by

⁵³ Carter, Living with loneliness as a refugee.

⁵⁴ “Wilders: Willen Jullie Meer of Minder Marokkanen? ,” *AD*, February 6, 2016.

⁵⁵ Charmaine, Dieleman. “De Evolutie Van Nieuw Rechtse Politiek En De Problematisering Van De Islam: Een Nederlandse Casestudy .” Universiteit Gent, Faculteit Recht en Criminologie. Petintseva Olga and Raets Sigrid , 2018.

⁵⁶ “Why Muslims Should Still Be Afraid of the Dutch Election Outcome, Even Though Wilders Lost,” *The Independent* (Independent Digital News and Media, March 16, 2017).

⁵⁷ Lowe, Lisa. "Orient as Woman, Orientalism as Sentimentalism: Flaubert." In *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*, 75-101. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1991.

⁵⁸ Shefer, Tamara & Ratele, Kopano, “Racist Sexualisation and Sexualised Racism in Narratives on Apartheid”, *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*. 2011.

⁵⁹ Sardar, Ziauddin, The Shadows of Muslim men. *Critical Muslim 8* (Hurst & CO, October/December 2013) Pages 3-18.

⁶⁰ Gallup. “Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West.” Gallup.com. Gallup, May 7, 2021.

religion. Religion can provide support, but it can also make the journey more difficult. However, it is not only the view of certain religions that makes life more difficult for refugees in Europe. Old prejudices about people of the Orient, which have to do with nationality, race and class, also make acceptance more difficult. The next chapter explains how loneliness, isolation, and mental problems are dealt with in different religions.

Chapter 2: Loneliness and Religion

This chapter describes the role of loneliness in religion. According to Ager, French, Fitzgibbon and Ager, nearly ninety percent of the global population identifies as religious of some kind.⁶¹ Religious books, such as the Bible, give many examples of lonely people. In these stories it is often God who, as a support or friend, pushes back loneliness. What examples are there in different religions? How can these stories affect lonely believers? And does it help against loneliness?

The place of Loneliness in Religion

“Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.” - Psalm 25:16.

“There is no one who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for me.” - Psalm 142:4.

Religious people and communities with many different faith traditions have a long history of helping those in need, including those fleeing war, poverty or persecution. Religious orders and monasteries of different traditions provided places of security and aid to the poor, and from the 19th century onwards, religiously based charities with many different religious backgrounds have been involved in humanitarian aid of various kinds.⁶² Although their beliefs and practices are very diverse, the teachings of the major world religions have many similarities regarding charity, benevolence, and the help of those in need. Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, and Sikhism all have a tradition of love for humanity, giving and compassion, and religious figures such as saints or prophets provide examples of behavior to followers.⁶³

⁶¹ Ager, Wendy, Michael French, Atallah Fitzgibbon and Alastair Ager, The case for—and challenges of—faith-sensitive psychosocial programming, *Intervention* (Vol. 17, Is. 1, 2019): Pages 69-75.

⁶² Goodall, Shouting towards the Sky, Pages 8-10.

⁶³ Goodall, Shouting towards the Sky, Page 8.

There are many different examples in Christianity. Jesus himself, the prophet of Christianity, was once a stranger.⁶⁴ For example, in the Bible the following is written:

“I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me... insofar you did these things for the least of brothers and sisters, you did them for me.” “insofar as you have failed to do these things for on off these, however humble, you did not do them for me.” – Psalm 25:35-40.

This verse was cited by Pope Francis, among others, as a motivation for Christians to support strangers. He argues that Christians' response to the refugee crisis should be expressed by four verbs: “welcome, protect, promote and integrate.”⁶⁵ Welcoming is about choosing the personal safety of refugees over national security. Protection defends the rights and dignity of migrants. According to promotion, migrants, refugees and the communities that welcome them must be enabled to realize their full potential as human beings, in all the human dimensions the creator intended. Finally, integration is about the possibilities of intercultural enrichment. So not assimilation, but contact with and openness to other cultures.⁶⁶

There are many passages in the Islamic Quran that demonstrate hospitality to strangers. Like Abraham and Moses, the Prophet Muhammad had to flee from persecution and seek refuge with strangers. Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina, called the Hijra, is a very important and celebrated part of Islam and the beginning of the Islamic calendar. In Islam it is important to be a good host, also to strangers. The relationship between host and guest is a triangular relationship, in which God is a part. The host owes God a duty for the guest's concerns. Partly because of this, it can be concluded that the Koran and Islamic law strongly support the rights and protection of refugees. Asylum is a right for anyone seeking protection, and anyone seeking protection must offer protection. So this is not only a responsibility of the state.⁶⁷

As in Christianity and Islam, stories of Abraham and Moses are influential. These important prophets themselves fled and were taken in by strangers. Through the history of the Jewish people, the reception of the oppressed has become extra important. Jews often see themselves

⁶⁴ Goodall, *Shouting towards the Sky*, Pages 8-9.

⁶⁵ Arbuckle, *Loneliness*, Page 71. And

Francis. *A Stranger and You Welcomed Me : A Call to Mercy and Solidarity with Migrants and Refugees*. Edited by Robert Ellsberg. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018.

⁶⁶ Arbuckle, *Loneliness*, Chapter 5.

⁶⁷ Jureidini, Ray, and Said Fares Hassan, eds. *Migration and Islamic Ethics: Issues of Residence, Naturalization and Citizenship*. *Studies in Islamic Ethics*, Vol. 2. Leiden: Brill, 2020, Pages 13-28.

as potential victims, which makes them want to do their best for other victims. For example, Jews are very active on the border between America and Mexico, where they provide shelter for people fleeing from Central America to the US. There is a common memory of Jewish history, including Holocaust experiences, cited by Jewish communities as motivating current relief efforts.⁶⁸

Support for foreigners emerges as an important aspect in the three major world religions. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, stories of Abraham and Moses (complemented by Jesus and Mohammed) are cited as great examples of refugees seeking refuge with strangers.

Religion: Curse or Savior?

How does religion really affect loneliness? In this subchapter I discuss a number of studies on loneliness among refugees. If you are to believe the above story, all religions are good and welcome to strangers. In practice, however, this is not the case. J. Steyn, for example, describes how one small difference in religious belief can cause exclusion. A sense of acceptance in a new religious community can cause acute loneliness if it turns out that the religion doesn't quite fit in after all.⁶⁹ Certainly churches in the Netherlands, for example, are often more liberal than churches in the Middle East and North Africa. Acceptance of homosexuality, for example, can cause great tensions, which only increases a feeling of “not belonging”.⁷⁰

"We are Christian, the ex-refugees who often come to us are not. When they are Christian, it first feels nice and familiar to them, after which they notice that we are a bit more modern than in the home country and we notice that they go to draw together (country by country)." - Missionary Worker, Community Pastor.

An in-depth study by Swiss and Dutch researchers shows that both the social networks provided by religious communities and the intrinsic belief that a loving deity takes care of them seem to protect against loneliness and the associated dangers of mental health, from depression to suicide. This is complemented by a study from the University of Michigan showing that more attendance at worship services is linked to receiving more informal spiritual support from Church members. Receiving that support, in turn, is accompanied by greater humility. Humble people are generally more sympathetic and tend to receive more emotional support. And more

⁶⁸ Goodall, *Shouting towards the Sky*, Page 10.

⁶⁹ Steyn, “Religion and Our Loneliness,” Page 327.

⁷⁰ Goodall, *Shouting towards the Sky*, Pages 10-11.

emotional support is associated with reduced loneliness.⁷¹ This same study also shows that among those who feel lonely, those who believe in a religion are less likely to feel isolated. That's because faith fills that void: they literally see God as a friend.⁷²

Several other studies have also consistently found that portraying God as distant and judgmental, rather than personal and caring, can lead to deterioration in mental health. You could view loneliness as a divine punishment.⁷³

“By believing in God and praying to God, they can better deal with everyday concerns and overcome difficult moments. ... We therefore strongly advocate for practitioners to pay more attention to emotion-focused coping strategies, especially when the loneliness problem is caused by circumstances beyond one's control and in cases of limited personal resources.”⁷⁴

Regular involvement in organized religious activities provides an important social context in which friendships with church members and supportive exchanges can be built and strengthened. Involvement in organizations can also give people a sense of belonging to a community, feeling valued and protected, important in the lives of others, and "at home".⁷⁵

"Depending on which religion and how they experience the bond with others of the same religion, this can turn out positively or negatively. We often come across people who are Muslims but do not find connection in the Mosque, or Christians who do not find a connection with Dutch churches but do find this at a migrant church, which is positive for feeling at home but sometimes has a negative effect on integration. In addition, we sometimes come across people who consider themselves part of a religion that cannot be counted as a major world religion, so that they have few relationships to other people of the same religion in the Netherlands, except in the home country/region." – Stichting Groningen Verwelkomt

The goals of many refugee organizations are based on religious values. Basic values of refugee organizations, which are based on religions, are for example: providing hospitality,

⁷¹ Briggs, Farewell my lonely: Science reveals how faith can help meet social needs. Huffpost. October, 2017.

⁷² Journal of Personality, DailyMail. “Lonely religious people are less depressed than atheists because they see God as a friend replacement, study finds.” September 2018.

⁷³ Briggs, Farewell my lonely.

⁷⁴ Briggs, Farewell my lonely.

⁷⁵ Ciobanu, The role of religion in protecting older Romanian migrants from loneliness, Pages 199-217.

divine care for refugees, service to people in need and sanctity of human life.⁷⁶ Because these values occur in all religions, it is precisely religious organizations that can come to the rescue. You see this in both Christianity, where it is normal to go to poor countries through the church to build schools and houses, and in Islam, where money is raised for the refugees and the poor during Ramadan.

Social Services within Religious Institutions

A large part of religious institutional life consists of social contact with other members of the church.⁷⁷

This contact can take place around and during the service, during parties or during other types of activities. For example, hours for the study of religious text are offered in most churches, synagogues and mosques. Organizing the Christmas party or Ramadan takes a lot of time and is done by members of the religious community. It is also normal in Christian churches that child services are offered, a kind of childcare during the church service.⁷⁸ All these activities involve social contact. This contact is extra important for people who have to deal with loneliness.⁷⁹

The umbrella Protestant Church in the Netherlands is strongly committed to combating loneliness among its members. For example, it recommends organizing communal meals, planning walk-in moments and starting buddy projects.⁸⁰ Through these projects, church members get to know each other better and they can learn more about each other's culture. These activities are of great importance to refugees, because it ensures that they can participate in Dutch society. A good example of a project in which people eat together is the Wereldkeuken in Groningen. Refugees and Groningen residents cook food together for guests, which promotes the integration of refugees and allows them to earn their own money.⁸¹

In addition to organizing all kinds of fun, it is also possible at some religious institutions to take language lessons or receive homework assistance. These kinds of activities in the churches

⁷⁶ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007, Chapter 10.

⁷⁷ Taylor, Graham. "The Social Function of the Church." *American Journal of Sociology* 5, no. 3 (1899): 305-21.

⁷⁸ Duijf, Miriam. "De Kindernevendienst: Onmisbaar of Onnodig?" *Visie EO*.

⁷⁹ "20 Dingen Die Je Kan Doen Om Eenzaamheid Te Bestrijden," Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, November 14, 2018.

And

Nawyn, Stephanie. *Faithfully Providing Refuge: The Role of Religious Organizations in Refugee Assistance and Advocacy*. The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies. April 2005.

⁸⁰ "20 Dingen Die Je Kan Doen Om Eenzaamheid Te Bestrijden," Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, November 14, 2018.

⁸¹ "Vluchtelingen Houden Wereldkeuken Open," Groningen Verwelkomt, October 15, 2020.

are mainly the result of the efforts of “Kerk In Actie”.⁸² In many mosques it is also customary to offer Dutch lessons in addition to Arabic lessons. Support in the Dutch language or homework help for children is especially important for the future of refugees in the Netherlands. It is not a great necessity to learn this for religion, but it is necessary to function in society.

Finally, many religious institutions employ social workers who can connect with members of the religious community to lend a listening ear and seek solutions to problems. As informal support structures, religious institutions provide support through community activities. Precisely because the threshold to ask for help from one's own church is lower, the church is a good means of making contact with the less fortunate and newcomers.⁸³

The subject of loneliness occurs in the religious books of various religions, mainly through stories about prophets or special people. Among other things, these stories show that God is always there to support the lonely.⁸⁴ However, religion brings advantages and disadvantages over solitude. For example, difference in religion between that in the country of origin and that in the country of arrival can increase loneliness.⁸⁵ Also, the idea of a punishing God can reinforce the feeling of being alone and having failed.⁸⁶ An advantage, however, is that God can be seen as a friend or lover who is always there for you, so that you are never really alone.⁸⁷ The social side of church life can also reduce loneliness. By performing activities together and taking language lessons, the social network can be expanded.⁸⁸

Chapter 3: Research Results

This chapter will discuss the research that I have conducted myself. The questions I want to answer here are: To what extent is there loneliness among refugees in Groningen and Drenthe? What is being done about loneliness in Groningen and Drenthe? How does religion fit into the loneliness problem in Groningen and Drenthe? How can combating loneliness in Groningen and Drenthe be improved? First, the method will be discussed, after which the questioned organizations a.o. will be explained and the results will be shared.

⁸² “Hulp En Perspectief Voor Mensen Zonder Papieren,” Kerk in Actie.

⁸³ Lam, Elize, “Ruim Baan Voor De Kracht Van Kerken,” Sociale Vraagstukken, July 24, 2017.

⁸⁴ Goodall, *Shouting towards the Sky*, Page 8.

⁸⁵ Goodall, *Shouting towards the Sky*, Pages 10-11.

⁸⁶ Briggs, *Farewell my lonely*.

⁸⁷ Journal of Personality, “Lonely religious people are less depressed than atheists because they see God as a friend replacement, study finds.”

⁸⁸ Taylor, “The Social Function of the Church.” 305-21.

Methodology

In this essay I want to find out what religious institutions dealing with refugees do and can do to combat loneliness among refugees. In activities that help lonely refugees, I mainly focus on those that have to do with religion. Since little has been written about the connection between loneliness and religion in relation to refugees, I did my own research.⁸⁹ Through interviews and questionnaires I contacted all kinds of institutions that deal with refugees. Due to the corona situation, unfortunately, we were unable to conduct interviews, but a number of questionnaires have been completed. Due to the pandemic, it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews. However, people did not feel the need to conduct the interviews online or over the phone. A number of respondents had wanted to conduct the face-to-face interview after corona.

In order to protect the identity of refugees and to take into account their sometimes extremely vulnerable situation, I mainly focused on organizations during the research. People who are committed to refugees have completed the questionnaires. These are people who are employed by social, religious and health organizations in Groningen and Drenthe. The people who completed the questionnaires have knowledge of their relationship with refugees and which activities are organized for refugees in their organization. Nine questions were asked in the completed questionnaires. Below are all the questions asked and the exact reason why I asked that question. The questions were asked in Dutch, but because I am writing this essay in English, they have been translated. The Dutch version of the questions and the answers on the questions can be found in the appendices at the back of the thesis.

Before starting the research, I read “Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First Time Researchers”, written by Judith Bell and Stephen Waters.⁹⁰ This book describes which research methods can be used for research in social science. Due to the current situation, in which many people cannot see, I have decided to focus on interviews and questionnaires, of which only questionnaires remain. Questionnaires can be extremely useful because they allow you to reach a large and diverse audience. At the same time, this also makes the use of questionnaires difficult, because people who do not fall within your research group can also fill in the questionnaires in one way or another.

In the book, Bell and Waters describe that questionnaires should consist of different types of questions. For example, open and closed, or why and how. I could not use closed questions for my research, but I did argue with why, how and to what extent questions. I also tried to keep

⁸⁹ Bell, Judith, and Stephen Waters. *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First Time Researchers*. Sixth ed. Maidenhead, Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014.

⁹⁰ Bell and Waters. *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First Time Researchers*.

my own opinion out of the questions as much as possible, as was also recommended by Bell and Waters. Finally, I kept the questionnaire short, under ten questions, as recommended. In addition to reading this book, I also looked at the questions asked in other loneliness studies. These studies are mentioned in the Introduction of the thesis.

1. Can the name of your organization be used in my master's thesis?

For privacy reasons, there are a lot of organizations that prefer not to be named in a survey. Because the questionnaire is completed by one person from an organization, that person's answers may not be representative of the entire organization. Because an organization knows that the name of the organization will not be mentioned, this person can speak more freely. Other organizations do not object to showing their name.

2. What is the name and function of your organization?

By asking what the organization exactly entails, it becomes clear in what category the organization falls. Is it a church, a social organization or, for example, a health institution? Various organizations can mean different things to refugees. It is also more obvious that, for example, churches offer more help in the religious field than any other type of organization. By clarifying what kind of organization we are dealing with, it is possible to clarify which organization offers what and could offer the best. Whether something is religious is based on the definition of religion as described in the Introduction: A set of ideas, symbols and ritual practices in which a belief in the supernatural is expressed.

3. Does your organization have to deal with refugees?

In Groningen and Drenthe there are a lot of organizations that deal with refugees, but also a lot of organizations that deal with religion. For my research I contacted more than 40 institutions. However, not all religious organizations have experience with refugees. Through this question it is possible to filter the organizations with experience from the organizations without experience. However, religious organizations with no experience with refugees can have interesting insights into loneliness. These organizations are therefore also useful for my research.

4. What do you notice about loneliness among refugees in your organisation?

Some organizations deal with refugees, but only focus on certain aspects. Of course, loneliness or mental health may not be a part of this. If loneliness is not noticed, there is little chance that something will be done about it. It could of course also be that organizations notice loneliness among refugees, but still do nothing about it. Then why is this? And could something change so that lonely refugees in the organization can still be helped? Or can such refugees be referred

to one of the other organizations in Groningen and Drenthe that are committed to lonely refugees?

5. What is your organization doing to combat loneliness among refugees?

With this question we find out, in relation to the previous question, whether organizations that work with lonely refugees really do something about loneliness. It also becomes clear which type of organization offers which type of activity. By making connections between types of organizations and types of activities it could be possible to make recommendations. Which activities exist, which organizations offer them and what works where?

6. Are the activities for lonely refugees organized by your organization effective?

By asking about effectiveness, we ask for the opinion of the person completing the questionnaire. From his view and his feeling. These kinds of questions can shape recommendations for new activities in the future. What kind of activities do most people attend and what activity gets the most positive response? The respondent can elaborate on emotional questions and put more thoughts on paper than in the previous questions.

7. From your experience with refugees, does religion have a positive or negative effect on the degree of loneliness and why?

In this question and the next question, the respondents are asked for their opinion based on their own experiences. It's a big question, with answers that can be debated. However, I find it interesting to see what care providers themselves think about the influence of religion. Do they see in their work that religion has a positive effect or not. My expectation is that religious institutions perceive the influence of religion as more positively than social or health organizations. If non-religious organizations see religion as a negative or insignificant factor, this explains why they do or do not use religion in activities for lonely refugees. This question has yielded very interesting answers.

8. From your experience with refugees, to what extent can religion play a role in combating loneliness?

This question also asks for the answerer's opinion based on their own experiences. Unlike the previous question, this question is about how big the role of religion could be in reducing loneliness. This question is aimed at refugees, but can also be answered in a broader sense. It could be a question that a counselor has never thought about. However, the experiences of people in the field are a good addition to the scientific literature.

9. What more could be done to combat loneliness among refugees?

Through this question answerers can explain what they see as the best solutions and the best activities for lonely refugees. The people who fill in these questionnaires speak from experience

and can therefore give extremely useful tips. In the first chapter, it is shown which factors lead to or increase loneliness among refugees. Aid workers see these problems in practice. It is precisely they who can tell what needs to be done differently.

Responses

More than forty institutions were contacted by email, asking them to conduct an interview or to fill in a questionnaire. Unfortunately, only eleven responses were received, all via the questionnaires. One reason for the low response could be the corona situation. Due to the obligation to work from home, to close churches and to keep a distance, many institutions have been closed and activities have been stopped. In addition, many social organizations are always extremely busy.

The organizations I have contacted are either concerned with refugees or with religion. In seeking contact with churches, I focused on various Christian movements, such as Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, etc. I also sought contact with a mosque. There is a synagogue in Groningen where services are still held, but they are not concerned with refugees because no Jewish refugees come to Groningen. Besides churches and the like, I have been in contact with health organizations in Groningen and Drenthe, both for physical health and mental health. Doctors and general practitioners see all kinds of people, including refugees. Since loneliness can cause various ailments,⁹¹ health has to do with loneliness. Finally, I contacted various social organizations that are committed to refugees. These are both asylum seekers' centers and independent aid organisations.

By targeting different types of institutions, I hope to have involved all types of support for lonely refugees in my research. Unfortunately, the response is not as great as I had hoped. However, I will continue my research with the response I received, because church organizations, health organizations and social organizations are represented in this. Also, some of the answers are so helpful that I can continue with this. As a result of my research, more extensive research could be done in the future, after the corona pandemic.

⁹¹ Christodoulou, This is how it feels to be lonely, Page 11.

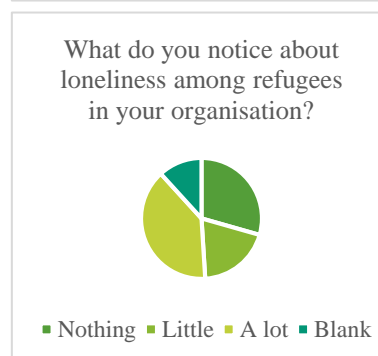
Outcome

In this subchapter the results will be shown in diagrams. A brief explanation is given for these diagrams. The results are further analyzed and supplemented with existing research and literature in the next chapter.

The name of the organization may be used for slightly less than three-quarters of the respondents. Respondents whose name may be used are mainly religious institutions. No permission has been given mainly by large social or municipal organizations.

The largest part of the response comes from religious institutions, namely the Missionary Center Het Pand, the ecumenical Martinidiensten for Student and Stadjer, the Protestant Nieuwe Kerk Groningen, the Reformed Church vrijgemaakt Rafajeh, the Roman Catholic Statie Rolde and one church without a name. Only one response comes from a health organization, namely the GGD Drenthe. Finally, there were four responses from civil society organisations, of which only Groningen Verwelkomt⁹² and Thuis in 050⁹³ can be named.

Not all organizations I surveyed deal with refugees. About one-fourth of them have no contact with refugees. Just over half of all religious institutions have contact with refugees. The current corona situation is mentioned as the reason for not having contact.



⁹² Groningen Verwelkomt: Groningen Welcomes is active in the municipalities of Groningen and Zuidhorn. It focuses on integration and participation of new and old Groningen residents. They do this by forming communities that share life, eat together (at home or during an organized Eat & Meet) and work towards work (Redevelop and Wereldkeuken).

⁹³ Thuis in 050: Thuisin050 is the coordination point for status holders. Tuisin050 is the place where support for status holders in the municipality of Groningen comes together. They help the status holders in Groningen to integrate, feel at home here and guide them on their way to work. So that they can build a good life in Dutch society.

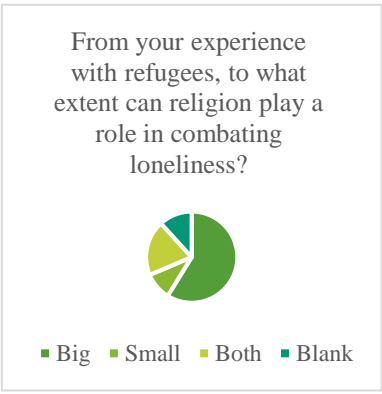
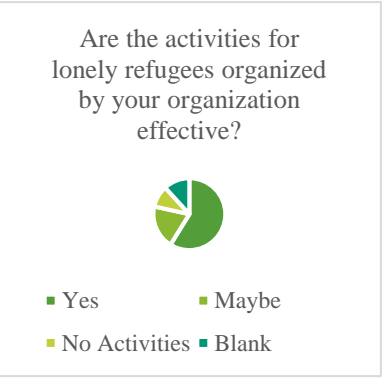
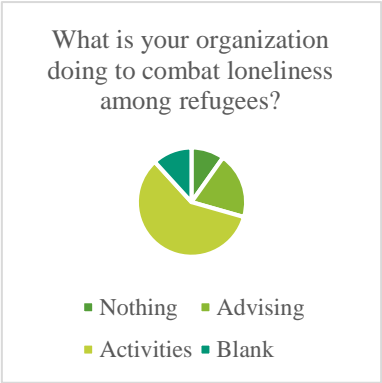
Organizations that have no contact with refugees have often left blank answers in this and the following questions. When asked whether anything is noticed about loneliness among refugees, almost half of the respondents indicated that they did not know or did not notice anything. Just under half said they notice a lot.

When asked what is being done to help lonely refugees, the organizations that have no contact with refugees gave a blank answer or are not organising anything. Municipal organizations mainly provide advice, while religious organizations organize activities such as language lessons.

When asked whether the organized activities really work to combat loneliness among refugees, the response is mainly positive. More than half of the respondents say the activities are working. About a quarter say they may work, with the added note that it works for some, but not for others. Again, the organizations that do not organize activities have given a blank response or filled in that they do not organize anything. This is about a quarter of the responders. Ultimately, however, only the refugees themselves can say whether the activities being organized reduce their sense of loneliness.

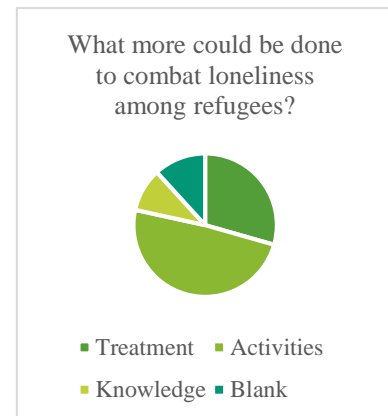
The majority of the respondents expect that religion can have both a positive and a negative influence on the degree of loneliness among refugees. Reasons given for this are, for example, country of origin and type of religion. Nearly a quarter expect religion to make a positive contribution. No respondent expects that the influence of religion is mainly negative. Institutions that do not come into contact with refugees have filled in a blank or Unknown as answer.

More than half of the respondents expect that religion can play a major role in combating loneliness among refugees. A social organization that does not deal with religion but does with refugees expects religion to play only a small role. About a quarter of the respondents expect that religion can play a major role for some people, and a small role for others. One



reason given to explain why religion can play a major role is primarily the social environment of the church, where newcomers can get to know new people.

Finally, about half of the respondents state that organizing activities for refugees is the most important to reduce loneliness among refugees. Activities include language classes, eating together, and attending church services together. More than a quarter say it is important that refugees are treated better, as people rather than as refugees. If they were treated better, loneliness would be counteracted. Finally, knowledge about each other's culture could also contribute to combating loneliness, according to the Martinidiensten. It is good to know about each other's existence and there must be an opportunity to establish contact with each other.



After making contact with more than forty organizations, there are finally eleven with which the analysis in the next chapter can be carried out. However, a lot of information has emerged from eleven responses. We can see that a lot of religious institutions in Groningen and Drenthe are dealing with lonely refugees. Health organizations and social organizations are also committed to them. The various organizations have provided a lot of information about how refugees are helped and how this could be done even better, through activities, better treatment and knowledge transfer between cultures for example. You will read more about this in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Religious Institutions against Loneliness

In this chapter the answers given in the conducted research are analyzed. This is done on the basis of existing research. Statements made by respondents are substantiated and examined in the text or via footnotes. The chapter is divided into several subchapters, appropriate to the questions asked. The first subchapter focuses on the presence of loneliness among refugees, the second on the connection between loneliness and religion and the third on the necessary changes. Finally, there is a short piece about the influence of corona.

Loneliness among Refugees in Groningen and Drenthe

Loneliness among refugees is a major problem, but it is not always noticed. About half of the respondents indicate that they notice a lot or a little of loneliness among refugees. This can mean several things. It may mean that some organizations are not paying attention. However,

it can also mean that different organizations attract different "types" of refugees. One type of organization may attract more lonely refugees than another. It is also possible that in one organization refugees are more open about their feelings than in another. Various institutions indicate that they organize activities for lonely refugees and state that these activities work to combat loneliness.

As there have been several lockdowns during the pandemic, some organizations are saying that loneliness among refugees has increased. Newcomers have fewer contacts and are afraid to send their children to school.⁹⁴

*“In Corona time, contact is less than before. The children have not been to school for a while. Due to the fear of Corona, certain refugee groups are very reluctant to send children to school.”*GGD Drenthe.

However, having few contacts is a much bigger problem. Many refugees arrive in the Netherlands without acquaintances, so they have no network and know few people. For some, the activities organized by social organizations and church organizations are the only moments of social contact. The network of people who are eventually able to find their way in Dutch society will grow through these kinds of activities, while people who cannot find their way will remain lonely.

“We see more and more that our customers find it difficult to keep up with society. No network of friends and acquaintances except social organizations.” Social Organisation.

“During conversations with status holders, they often say that they know few people when they are new to the city. Most people build their own network at some point. But there are always people who remain lonely.” Thuisin050.

Various measures are being taken to combat loneliness among refugees. For example, advice is given about the options that refugees in Groningen and Drenthe have in the field of policy and education. They can also obtain information about all activities that are organized for refugees. To learn the language, it is possible to take language lessons in many different places in the provinces. This can be done at schools, social organizations and in churches.

⁹⁴ “Integration despite Isolation,” Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, December 14, 2020.

Some churches offer homework assistance especially for children. Children can also participate in the reading express in the Groningen and Drenthse libraries. Finally, children and youth can join youth groups at church, where they do chores and social activities. Research by ‘Refugee Action’ shows that learning the language is crucial in the fight against loneliness. The UK institution recommends creating a language fund for refugees so that both men and women can learn the language. Their research also shows that organizing meetings with other refugee families works well against loneliness. Meeting people who are going through the same thing makes one feel less alone.⁹⁵

“We open the church and the church services to them. We open the church (outside corona) for weekly language lessons and meetings.” Christian religious institution.

Another popular means of combating loneliness among refugees is matching a buddy to a refugee.⁹⁶ In Groningen and Drenthe there are various social organizations and religious institutions that are committed to buddy projects. A buddy and a refugee meet once or twice a week in this type of project. Also, a fun activity is conducted to teach the refugee how Dutch society works and to make social contacts. An example of such a project is the Walking Buddies from Groningen Verwelkomt, among others. In addition to walking, buddies and refugees do other activities together in large groups, such as cooking and sports.⁹⁷

It is precisely the combination of different activities, such as church services, buddy projects and sports that, according to a number of respondents, ensure that the activities work. Thanks to the cooperation between churches and social organizations, there is a wide range of offers for refugees.

*“As an organization you don't do it alone, in collaboration with, for example, refugee work (volunteers), looking at the possibilities of sports, etc.”*GGD Drenthe.

Because many activities are offered over a longer period of time, it is possible for participants to keep in touch over a longer period of time and thus to build a real bond. However, it is also noticed that for many refugees participating in many different activities is too big a step, precisely because there are many options, the step to participate is increasing. However, it is an

⁹⁵ Refugee Action. Save but Alone.

⁹⁶ Taylor, Lin. “How to Tackle Loneliness among Refugees in Britain? Match Them with Friends.”

⁹⁷ KerkSPOT, “Vlucht Voorwaarts Met De Integratie,” Missie 050.

important goal of the EU and the UNHCR to involve refugees in society and the activities that take place in it. They focus on organizing activities for young people, who can help through their parents. People who find it difficult to participate in activities could still be involved through the youth.⁹⁸ In Groningen and Drenthe you see that many activities are aimed at young people, such as homework guidance, the reading express and child & youth services in churches.

Many different activities are organized for lonely refugees in Groningen and Drenthe. Research shows that learning the language is crucial for integration and increasing the social network. There are therefore various social and religious institutions that organize language classes for refugees. Refugees can also work on the language with a buddy. Buddies exist in various areas and can ensure that a refugee forms a larger social network. Refugees in Groningen and Drenthe are especially lonely because they know very few people and therefore have few contacts. In many activities the focus is on the youth, for them both fun activities and educational activities are organized. They can also work within churches. However, the current corona situation has ensured that refugees, including young people, have less or no contact with the Dutch, causing integration and language skills to decline.

Loneliness and Religion

Most respondents expect that religion can have both a positive and negative influence on lonely refugees. Whether it has a positive or negative influence depends on several factors. The argument that religion can have a negative effect if someone just falls outside of it is often used. For example, the Christian church in North Africa is very different from both Protestant and Catholic churches in the Northern Netherlands. So the Christian religion is available to people, but not as they know it. People may realize that their religion in the Netherlands has a very different policy than in the country of origin, which makes them feel isolated from their religion. It is also possible that the religion from the country of origin doesn't exist at all in the Netherlands, so that there are only few like-minded people to be found.

"Both positive and negative. Religion can make contacts, but "putting off" your religion can make you isolated." Social Organisation.

⁹⁸ UNHCR's Strategy and Activities concerning Refugee Children, UNHCR, (Geneva, October 2005).
And
Integrating Refugees Through Youth Work Activities, Institute for Policy Research and Analyses, 2016.

The reason for the flight is also of great significance when you consider the influence of religion. Some refugees have left their country of origin because of their religion, which can lead to religion becoming something negative for them.⁹⁹ This is especially evident in Judaism, where some Jews have lost their faith after centuries of persecution and genocide. This is because their hope in God has disappeared and they no longer feel a connection. By fleeing from the country of origin and building a new life in another country, it is possible to renounce religion. For these people religion has no positive meaning.¹⁰⁰ For others fleeing can mean a new chance to practice their religion something that was not possible in the country of origin. For them, religion has a positive effect.

The way in which religious organizations deal with refugees has a positive or negative influence on religion. Conversion and exclusion can increase loneliness among refugees, but integration into the community and making new connections with other members of the Church can actually reduce loneliness. The institution and purpose of the religious institute is therefore important.¹⁰¹ The church as a social institution, which receives refugees and offers a social network, has a positive effect on loneliness among refugees. It is precisely the accessibility and recognizability of religion that can help to build bridges between different cultures.¹⁰²

“Religion is something that binds together. Religion is something that provides a set of values and norms for how to approach the world. Religion can give hope.” Groningen Verwelkomt.

Religion can have both a positive and a negative effect on loneliness among refugees. If someone falls outside religions that are big in the Netherlands, or the religion from the country of origin does not exist in the Netherlands, religion can cause an increase in loneliness, the feeling of not belonging completely. Also if someone has fled because of his or her religion, religion can have a negative influence. The way in which a religious institution deals with its religion is also important. When conversion is a primary goal, it often negatively affects refugees. However, if a church is a social institution where refugees are received and can make new contacts, it is positive. Finding like-minded people, people with the same standards and values, can counteract loneliness among refugees.

⁹⁹ Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism*, Anti-Semitism today.

¹⁰⁰ Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism*, Anti-Semitism today.

¹⁰¹ Akcapar, Sebnem Koser. “Religious Conversions in Forced Migration: Comparative Cases of Afghans in India and Iranians in Turkey.” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 10, no. 1 (January 2019): 61–74.

¹⁰² Taylor, “The Social Function of the Church.” 305-21.

How can we Better Combat Loneliness?

The respondents have a number of recommendations from their own experience to better combat loneliness among refugees. These improvements relate to the treatment of refugees, the organization of activities and the knowledge about each other. In the field of treatment, it is especially emphasized that refugees should be treated more humanely. Due to the long waiting times, all the energy is sucked out of refugees, making it difficult for them to remain active. Due to shorter waiting times, there is more perspective for the future and refugees will do their best to integrate more actively.¹⁰³

“Seeing refugees not as refugees, but as people.” Groningen Verwelkomt.

It is also important that schools and volunteers know what help can be offered to refugees. They should be aware of the huge network. In Groningen there are many organizations and institutions that want to work for refugees, aid workers can forward refugees to each other. Different organizations offer different activities. In principle, therefore, there is a suitable activity for every refugee. However, they must be supported in finding the right organization. For example, activities can be started at the reception location, after which someone, if he or she is ready, can be forwarded to activities in, for example, a city. In this way, more tailor-made activities can be delivered.¹⁰⁴

“Low-threshold activities such as an eatery, coffee morning. Preferably at the site itself, the outside world will come later.” Social Organisation.

Important activities are mainly language projects, which must be intensively organized with physical meetings. During the lessons, finding work, an internship or Education must also be discussed. Lessons must therefore be truly future-oriented.¹⁰⁵

Finally, it is important that there is knowledge about the culture of refugees. Refugees and Dutch people have to talk to each other about their culture. Where there is more knowledge, there is more understanding. From this point, better social contacts can arise.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Hainmueller, Jens et al. “When lives are put on hold: Lengthy asylum processes decrease employment among refugees.” *Science advances* vol. 2,8 e1600432. 3 Aug. 2016.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Tailoring Projects to Suit Refugee Needs in Southern Chad,” UNHCR.

¹⁰⁵ Council of Europe, “Language Support to Adult Refugees: the Council of Europe Toolkit,” Language policy.

¹⁰⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Teaching about Refugees,” UNHCR.

“ Mutual awareness of each other's existence. Of course, the Martini visitors know that there are refugees, but mutual accessibility is not optimal, partly due to corona.” Martinidiensten.

An important necessary change in Dutch refugee policy is the way refugees are treated. Refugees must be treated more humanely, waiting times must be shortened and there must be prospects for the future. With the help of intensive language lessons and a focus on work and education, prospects should be created for refugees. Aid workers must also be aware of all activities that are organized in the area for refugees. Activities should start at the residence location, after which it will be possible to follow activities in other places, such as the city. In this way there are large and small possibilities, suitable for each individual. Finally, it is important that refugees and Dutch people have knowledge of each other's culture. Good social ties can be built from a point of knowledge and understanding.

Corona

Due to the current corona situation, it has not been possible for me to conduct interviews with employees of all kinds of organizations. It was also not possible for me to make contact with refugees. Since it has been very difficult for me as a Dutch person to make contacts, I expect that this has been even more difficult for newcomers. Several respondents indicated that they often received refugees before the corona epidemic but not anymore now. Research conducted by the RUG also shows that refugees had minimal contact with Dutch people during the lockdowns. For example, because of the little contact, the Dutch language skills of many refugees deteriorated. Contact with Dutch people is crucial for integration and its absence can increase the feeling of loneliness.¹⁰⁷ I therefore hope that now that the epidemic is coming to an end, more attention will be paid to refugees by both governments as religious institutions. Because refugees they are probably the hardest hit by the epidemic, along with children and young people.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ “Integration despite Isolation,” Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, December 14, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ “Nearly 14 Million Internally Displaced Persons, Refugees and Migrants Hit Hard by COVID-19 in East and Horn of Africa, New IOM-WFP Study Finds.” International Organization for Migration, June 22, 2021.

Conclusion

"Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah, for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction." Surat Arraad 13 verse 28, Quran.

What or who do you fall back on when you are all alone in a country you don't know? If you had to leave all your family behind on your flight? If you don't speak the language and don't understand the culture? At such a time, the ever-present God can be of great support. But is that support big enough to prevent mental problems and loneliness? But is this God really so helpful? Or is the all-devastating stern God more dominant?¹⁰⁹

Loneliness is a complicated concept. Because loneliness is subjective and the feeling varies from person to person, it is difficult to describe what it is exactly. It can be described as a deep feeling of sadness about being alone or feeling disconnected from the world around you, felt over an extended period of time. There are two different forms of loneliness, namely emotional loneliness and social loneliness. When the number of social relationships and contact frequency is lower than desired, social loneliness can develop. When social relationships are not as intimate as desired, it can lead to emotional loneliness. Migrants and refugees are among the most vulnerable groups when it comes to experiencing loneliness, loneliness therefore is a major problem among refugees.

Several studies show that the mental and physical health of refugees is lower than that of non-refugees. There are several reasons for this problem. Firstly, the flight of a refugee can cause trauma and physical comfort. Many refugees are taken overseas or via dangerous country roads by human-smugglers to a "safe" country, this journey is very traumatic. Eventually, upon arrival in Europe, for example, refugees end up in a refugee camp, where they live with far too many people and far too little food in tents or homemade huts, waiting to be accepted by a European country. Once accepted, they end up in an asylum seekers' center, where the long wait continues. Secondly, loneliness among refugees is caused by few contacts. In their country of origin they have left all their loved ones behind, to leave for a place where they do not know anyone. Because the language in the country of arrival is often different, many refugees find it difficult to make contact with new people. Finally, the Media often is not very helpful either. Refugees are portrayed as helpless or criminal. Negative reporting brings with it a lot of nasty

¹⁰⁹ Briggs, Farewell my lonely.

prejudice, creating a toxic atmosphere for refugees, especially Muslims, in large parts of Europe and the US. This makes it difficult for refugees to feel at home and to be part of society.

Since refugees are having a hard time in Europe, the Netherlands and specifically Groningen and Drenthe, it is important that solutions are found for this. Using religion could be a solution. What place does religion play in combating loneliness among refugee populations in Groningen in Drenthe? Texts about loneliness can be found in religious books of different religions. The opening quote of this conclusion points out to people that God/Allah is always there. It is especially this message that is emphasized in various religious texts, God is always there, you are never really alone. On this basis, Pope Francis calls on his followers, for example, to support and help refugees. Religious organizations such as churches and mosques also feel called upon by religious texts that call to be kind to foreigners. It is known in Islam that the Prophet Muhammad was a stranger when he left Mecca for Medina in his Hijra. In Medina he was well received, he was respected and cared for. Jesus Christ, too, was a stranger when he and his parents fled from the murderous King Herod. Finally, Abraham, the ancestor of Jews, Christians and Muslims, was also a stranger. He left his country to live in Canaan. The proper treatment of foreigners is thus a common theme in the various religious books. From these texts many churches and the like act for refugees. For example, religious institutions often make donations to refugee aid, activities are organized for refugees and social workers are often present with whom refugees can talk. However, many stories in Religious Texts are mainly about welcoming strangers, not about solving the problem of loneliness.

However, religion can have both a positive and a negative influence on lonely refugees. Religion can be negative if God is seen as strict and judgmental.¹¹⁰ Religion can also exclude, if you just don't fit in it can cause loneliness. Religion and belief in God can be positive if God is seen as loving and nurturing. God as a friend. Also, belonging to a specific religion or church can provide a social network, where it is possible to meet like-minded people. The influence of religion depends on the person, the religion and the country in which this person lives.

The research conducted in this thesis focused on institutions that help lonely refugees in Groningen and Drenthe. By focusing on institutions and not on individual refugees, the safety (and health in connection with Corona) of refugees is guaranteed. Various religious, social and health organizations were contacted via email with nine different questions. The focus of the questions was the presence of loneliness among refugees, what is being done for them and what still needs to be done. Eleven responses were received from more than forty organizations

¹¹⁰ Briggs, Farewell my lonely.

contacted. Six of these respondents are religious institutes, in this case all Christian. One responder is a health organization and four responders are social organisations. Not all respondents have ever or currently had to deal with refugees. I have continued with all responses, because also institutes that have little or no contact have knowledge about religion or refugees.

The research conducted shows that there is loneliness among refugees in Groningen and Drenthe. According to some organizations, the degree of loneliness among refugees is very high. Organizations that work against loneliness do this in different ways. The health organization and various social organizations provide advice on the possibilities for refugees in the region. Other social organizations and religious organizations organize talks, buddy projects, and youth projects within churches. Especially language projects with an extra addition aimed at the future (education, work) seem to be useful in offering refugees a vision of the future. It is important that refugees are given the opportunity to make new contacts through organized activities. They are often alone and know few people. Increasing the social network is an important step against loneliness. Projects aimed at young people are also important. Because young people are still able to get used to a new environment more easily, it is important to organize activities especially for them. It is also important for their own development to have contact with peers. They are also able to help their parents with integration. Finally, the respondents state that it is important to offer many different activities over a long period of time. Bonds are formed over a long period of time.

The respondents state that religion can have both a positive and a negative effect on loneliness among refugees. If someone falls outside the big and common religions in the Netherlands, or the religion from the country of origin does not exist in the Netherlands, religion can cause an increase in loneliness, the feeling of not belonging completely. Also if someone has fled because of his or her religion, religion can have a negative influence. Finally, the way in which a religious institution deals with its religion is important. When conversion is a primary goal, it often has a negative effect on refugees. However, if a church is a social institution where refugees are received and can make new contacts, that is positive. Finding like-minded people, people with the same standards and values, can counteract loneliness among refugees.

An important necessary change in Dutch refugee policy is the way refugees are treated. Refugees must be treated more humanely, waiting times must be shortened and there must be prospects for the future. With the help of intensive language lessons and attention to work and education, perspectives must be created for refugees. Aid workers must also be aware of all activities organized in the area for refugees. Activities should start at the accommodation

location, after which it is possible to follow activities in other places, such as the city. There are large and small options, suitable for every individual. Finally, it is important that refugees and Dutch people have knowledge of each other's culture.¹¹¹ Good social ties can be built from a point of knowledge and understanding.

The questionnaires showed that the current corona pandemic has a major impact on the degree of loneliness among refugees. Due to the pandemic, social organizations are organizing fewer activities and church services are taking place online. Research by the RUG, among others, shows that newcomers had virtually no contact with Dutch people during the first lockdown. Getting in touch with aid organizations was very difficult in this study, I can imagine that this is even more difficult if you have difficulty with the Dutch language. Now that the corona pandemic is coming to an end, a lot can be done again for lonely refugees. Church services can be attended again, language lessons can be organised, and so on. To make all this as useful as possible, changes suggested by respondents can be implemented. However, for this to happen, a great deal of effort must be made to convince both government and organizations of the necessary changes. More research needs to be done before life returns to normal.

And how does religion affect lonely refugees? It is difficult to answer this question because the influence can be both positive and negative. For refugees who need religion, it is important to find a church that suits them. They could be helped with this by religious aid organizations. Because if a refugee finds a church in which he or she fits, religion can have a very positive influence. More room could be made for refugees who just don't fit in with a particular religion. So that they can still participate in a religious congregation, without being excluded. There seems to be tolerance within municipalities, but this could be shown even more exuberantly.

In the future, more research could be done on the connection between loneliness and religion among refugees. Refugees should also be questioned in future surveys. By finding out more precisely how religion can combat loneliness, various organizations can apply their methods even better.

¹¹¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Teaching about Refugees," UNHCR.

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Attachments

Interview Questions

Geachte Heer, Mevrouw,

Bedankt dat u deze vragenlijst over de relatie eenzaamheid/religie onder vluchtelingen wilt invullen! Door het invullen van deze 5-10 minuten durende enquête, helpt u mij de beste resultaten te behalen.

Vriendelijke groet,

Audrey Takens, driebroertjes@hotmail.com

Met "organisatie" worden ook instellingen en centra bedoeld.

Met "vluchtelingen" worden ook asielzoekers en nieuwe Nederlanders bedoeld.

1. Mag de naam van uw organisatie gebruikt worden in mijn master-scriptie?
2. Wat is de naam en functie van uw organisatie?
3. Krijgt u in uw organisatie te maken met vluchtelingen?
4. Wat merkt u in uw organisatie van eenzaamheid onder vluchtelingen?
5. Wat doet uw organisatie om eenzaamheid onder vluchtelingen tegen te gaan?
6. Hebben de door uw organisatie georganiseerde activiteiten voor eenzame vluchtelingen effect?
7. Heeft religie, vanuit uw ervaring met vluchtelingen, een positief of een negatief effect op de mate van eenzaamheid en waarom?
8. In welke mate, vanuit uw ervaring met vluchtelingen, kan religie een rol spelen om eenzaamheid tegen te gaan?
9. Wat zou er meer gedaan kunnen worden om eenzaamheid onder vluchtelingen tegen te gaan?

Interview Answers

Vragenlijst 1:

1. Ik heb geen bezwaar.
2. Bert Scholten, jeugdverpleegkundige GGD Drenthe
3. Ja.
4. In Corona tijd is het contact toch minder als voorheen. De kinderen zijn een periode niet naar school geweest. Vanwege de angst voor Corona zijn bepaalde vluchtelingen groepen zeer terughoudend om kinderen naar school te sturen.
5. Uitleg over de risico's bij kinderen en het landelijk beleid. In contact met de ouders, kijken naar mogelijkheden op gebied van onderwijs (Nederlandse taal), aansluiten naar de mogelijkheden. O.a. vrijwilligers inschakelen voorlees expres van de bibliotheek.
6. Dat doe je als organisatie niet alleen, in samenwerking met bijvoorbeeld vluchtelingenwerk (vrijwilligers), kijken bijvoorbeeld de mogelijkheden van sport etc.
7. Religie heeft mogelijk invloed, daarbij speelt cultuurachtergrond ook een rol. Afhankelijk van de herkomst van de vluchtelingen. Er zijn ook vele vluchtelingen die vanuit Nederlandse religieuze instellingen op worden gevangen, dat kun je positief noemen zolang de belangen niet te groot worden.
8. De ondersteuning in het dagelijks leven van het vluchtelingen gezin kan helpende zijn op allerlei fronten.
9. Continue aandacht vast houden richting ouders, scholen, andere disciplines en vrijwilligers. Het goed weten welke netwerken die je kunt aanspreken.

Vragenlijst 2:

1. Nee
2. Diverse taken: ouderling, coordinator kosterij
3. Regelmatig
4. De mensen die ik ontmoet zoeken hun contacten al en ervaren daardoor minder eenzaamheid. Ws is eenzaamheid onder vluchtelingen die hun weg niet kunnen vinden veel hoger
5. We stellen de kerk en de kerkdiensten voor hen open. Wij stellen (buiten corona) de kerk open voor wekelijkse taallessen en ontmoetingen
6. Ik denk van wel, maar niet expliciet gevraagd
7. Mijn meeste cotacten heb ik met hen die komen voor ontmoeting en taallessen. Daarim speelt religie geen rol. Enkelen ontmoet ik ook in de kerk, voor hen heeft religie een zeer positief effect
8. Zie vorige antwoord
9. Een betere procedure. De enorme wachttijden zuigen alle energie uit de vluchtelingen waardoor het voor hen ook steeds moeilijker wordt actief te blijven.

Vragenlijst 3:

1. Nee
2. Maatschappelijke organisatie
3. Wij voeren het project maatschappelijke begeleiding vluchtelingen uit voor de Gemeente Groningen.

4. Wij zien steeds vaker dat onze klanten zich moeilijk staande kunnen houden in de samenleving. Geen netwerk van vrienden en bekenden behalve maatschappelijke organisaties.
5. Gevarieerd aanbod van maatjesprojecten tot taalondersteuning
6. We verwachten van wel maar vaak zie je dat de klant ook een eigen weg kiest waardoor het contact wordt verloren
7. Het verschilt enorm per land van herkomst. Op de bovenstaande vraag is niet zomaar antwoord te geven. Ook zijn er vluchtelingen gevlucht juist vanwege hun religie. Echter bij een andere groep kan religie de verbindende schakel zijn tussen vluchtelingen omdat ze een plek hebben om naar toe te gaan.
8. Niet, "Naam Organisatie" is een organisatie waar religie geen rol speelt
9. Zelforganisaties ondersteunen, meer verschillende maatjesprojecten op maat georganiseerd. Intensieve taalprojecten met fysieke bijeenkomsten. Werk, stage of opleiding versterken.

Vragenlijst 4:

1. Ja
2. Evert Sulman, stichting Groningen Verwelkomt
3. Onze doelgroep zijn nieuwe gevestigde Groningers, dat wil zeggen vluchtelingen met een status en Nederlanders
4. In ons onderzoek dat we samen met de rijksuniversiteit Groningen hebben uitgevoerd, zagen we dat vluchtelingen ((ex)-statushouders) tijdens de eerste lockdown geen nederlandsstalige contacten meer hadden. https://www.rug.nl/gmw/research/labor-market-integration-of-refugees/projects/-integration-despite-isolation?fbclid=IwAR1KNBsLacHBth9Rtx2_IUs6JLhXa-N45DUfHKhdeK4XPXw_hjr8lonpReU
5. We zijn gestart met het koppelen van wandelmaatjes, die we ook weer in een groep laten samenkomen: www.vluchtvoorwaartsgroningen.nl
6. We denken van wel.
7. Afhankelijk van welke religie en hoe zij de band beleven met anderen met eenzelfde religie, kan dit positief dan wel negatief uitpakken. We komen best vaak mensen tegen die moslim zijn maar geen aansluiting vinden in de moskee, of christenen die geen aansluiting vinden bij een Nederlandse kerk en soms wel bij een migrantenkerk, wat positief is voor het thuisvoelen maar soms negatief voor de integratie werkt. Daarnaast komen we wel eens mensen tegen die zichzelf rekenen tot een religie die niet te rekenen valt tot een grote wereldgodsdienst waardoor zij weinig relaties hebben tot andere mensen met dezelfde religie in Nederland, behalve in het thuisland/regio.
8. Religie is iets wat samenbindt. Religie is iets wat een set waarden en normen geeft hoe je de wereld tegemoet kan treden. Religie kan hoop geven.
9. Vluchtelingen blet zien als vluchtelingen, maar als mensen

Vragenlijst 5:

1. Ja
2. Missionair werker/buurtpastoor in Het Pand
3. Wanneer ze een status krijgen en in onze wijk komen wonen ontmoeten wij ze op enig moment
4. Niets

5. Sommige komen op een viering, anderen brengen de kinderen naar huiswerkbegeleiding of doen mee aan het kinder&tienerwerk
6. Tuurlijk, met name de huiswerkbegeleiding
7. Geen idee
8. Wij zijn christelijk, de ex-vluchtelingen die bij ons komen vaak niet. Wanneer ze wel christelijk zijn is er eerst een warm bad, waarna ze merken dat wij toch wel wat moderner zijn dan in het thuisland en merken we dat ze elkaar gaan opzoeken (land bij land)
9. Iets actiefs doen met elkaar, verbinding zoeken

Vragenlijst 6:

1. Ja
2. Martinidiensten, vieringen voor Student en Stadjer
3. Niet, zeker niet in coronatijd
4. /
5. /
6. /
7. Voor zover wij weten hebben vluchtelingen zich niet gemeld bij onze vieringen, maar dat is dan ook moeilijk omdat al onze vieringen al ruim een jaar online plaatsvinden. Ik denk dat de contacten anders goed zouden zijn.
8. Ik kan dus niet uit ervaring spreken, maar ik ga ervan uit dat waar de overheid allerlei barrières opwerpt, juist de laagdrempeligheid en herkenbaarheid van religie kan helpen een brug te slaan
9. bekendheid over en weer van elkaars bestaan. Uiteraard weten de Martinigangers dat er vluchtelingen zijn, maar de over en weer bereikbaarheid si niet optimaal, overigens wederom mede wegens corona

Vragenlijst 7:

1. Ja
2. Nieuwe kerk Groningen, wijkgemeente van de PGG
3. We hebben wel contact met Inlia, via de diaconie
4. Geen ervaring
5. Niets voor zover bekend
6. Wij organiseren gaan activiteiten speciaal voor vluchtelingen
7. /
8. /
9. Nabijheid en betrokkenheid zijn voor ieder mens goed

Vragenlijst 8:

1. Ja
2. Rafajehkerk
3. Een enkele keer via leden die bijvoorbeeld vrijwilligerswerk doen
4. Hier heb ik zelf geen ervaring mee
5. Koppelen aan een maatje, taallessen
6. Ja, mensen hebben onderling contact, ook voor langere tijd
7. Negatief als het gaat om bekering. Er is dan uitsluiting. Positief als het gaat om opname in de gemeente en nieuwe contacten met broeders en zusters

8. Verbinding
9. Mensen in het vizier hebben en heel concreet uitnodigen

Vragenlijst 9:

1. Nee
2. Maatschappelijke Organisatie
3. Wij vangen asielzoekers op
4. Bewoners die alleen komen, familie verblijft nog in land van herkomst of in een vluchtelingenkamp. Alleenstaande minderjarige vreemdelingen komen alleen. Sommige vereenzamen op een azc.
5. We proberen ze te betrekken bij de verschillende programma's en activiteiten.
6. Sommige wel en voor sommige is het een stap te ver. De drempel om mee te doen wordt steeds hoger.
7. Zowel positief als negatief. Door een religie kunnen er contacten worden gelegd, maar als je je religie "aflegt" kun je geïsoleerd raken.
8. Nieuwe contacten maken dmv religie. Hulp van bijvoorbeeld actieve kerkgemeenschappen bij het leren van de taal, kinderactiviteiten etc.
9. Laagdrempelige activiteiten zoals bijvoorbeeld een eetcafe, koffie-ochtend. Liefst in eerste instantie op het terrein zelf, de buitenwereld komt dan later wel.

Vragenlijst 10:

1. Ja
2. Gemeente Groningen Thuisin050
3. Wij begeleiden inburgering plichtige statushouders naar een studie of werk
4. Tijdens gesprekken met statushouders vertellen zij vaak dat zij weinig mensen kennen als zij net nieuw zijn in de stad. De meeste mensen bouwen op een gegeven moment een eigen netwerk op. Maar er zijn altijd mensen die eenzaam blijven.
5. Wij nemen contact op met Humanitas en vragen of zij diegene willen helpen om activiteiten te zoeken of aan te bieden waardoor diegene weer wat meer onder de mensen komt.
6. Dat denk ik wel.
7. Ik denk een positief effect, omdat ze vaak mensen leren kennen bij een kerk of moskee. daar is echt sociale netwerk waarin ze elkaar kunnen helpen
8. Dat kan in een zeer hoge mate.
9. /

Vragenlijst 11:

1. Ja
2. RK Statie Rolde
3. Niet
4. /
5. /
6. /
7. /
8. /
9. /

Interview Elaborations

Organisation	Contact	Reaction Try 1	Reaction Try 2
AZC Assen	assen@coa.nl	Nee	Nee
AZC Delfzijl	delfzijl@coa.nl	Nee	Nee
AZC Emmen	emmen@coa.nl	Nee	Nee
AZC Algemeen	info@coa.nl;	Nee	Ja
AZC Hoozevee	azchoozevee@coa.nl	Nee	Nee
AZC Musselkanaal	musselkanaal@coa.nl	Nee	Nee
AZC Zwelloo	zwelloo@coa.nl	Nee	Nee
Vluchtelingenwerk Noord	info-noord@vluchtelingenwerk.nl	Nee	Nee
Inlia	info@inlia.nl	Nee	Nee
Humanitas	mip.groningen@humanitas.nl	Ja	X
Groningen Verwelkomt	contact@groningenverwelkomt.nl	Ja	X
GGD Drenthe	info@ggddrenthe.nl	Ja	X
Plutozaal Groningen	r.f.mulder@gmail.com	Nee	Nee
Orthodoxe Kerk Groningen	orthodoxekerkgroningen@yahoo.com	Nee	Nee
St. Martinus Parochie	secretariaat@smartinusparochie.nl	Ja?	X
Moskee Groningen	moskeegroningen@yahoo.com	Nee	Nee
Wijkgemeente Martinikerkerk	dominee@wijkgemeente-martinikerk.nl	Ja?	X
Kerk Pand	janwaanders@pandvoordewijk.nl	Ja	X
Martinidiensten Student/Stadger	info@martinidiensten.nl	Ja	X
Nieuwe Kerk Groningen	scriba@nieuwekerkerk.org	Ja	X
Mormonen Groningen	info@gemeentevanjezuschristus.nl	Nee	Nee
Refajah	kerkelijkbureaufajah@gmail.com	Nee	Ja
Stadskerk Groningen	info@destadskerk.nl	Ja?	X
City Life Church Assen	info@clcassen.nl	Nee	Nee
Vredenoord Assen	hennipmanmijntje@kpnmail.nl	Nee	Nee
Vredenoord Assen	fred@veldwisch.com	Nee	Nee
GGD Groningen	Website GGD	Nee	Nee
GGZ Drenthe	https://ggzdrenthe.nl/contact	Nee	Nee
GGZ Groningen Lentis	Website Lentis	Nee	Nee
Christian Church Groningen	info@ccg.nu	Nee	Nee
De Fontein Groningen	webmaster@defontein.info;	Nee	Nee
Baptisten Groningen	Website	Nee	Nee
Thuis in 050	thuisin050@groningen.nl	Ja	X

New Life Choir Groningen	contact@newlifechoir.nl	Nee	Nee
Stichting op Stee	optstee.info@gmail.com	Nee	Nee
GGZ Drenthe Evenaar	Website	Nee	Nee
Protestantse Kerk Beilen	Website	Nee	Nee
Fransiscus Parochie Assen	kerkbankassen@franciscusparochie.nl	Nee	Nee
Fransiscus Parochie Rolde	ronald.ernens@home.nl	Ja	X
Fransiscus Parochie Roden	secretariaat-roden@franciscus-parochie.nl	Nee	Nee
Fransiscus Parochie Zuidlaren	secretariaat-zuidlaren@franciscus-parochie.nl	Nee	Nee