

The background of the top half of the cover features a dark blue, textured surface. A black silhouette of a person is shown from the chest up, reaching their right arm upwards towards a yellow five-pointed star. Several horizontal strands of black barbed wire are superimposed over the scene. Other yellow stars are scattered across the blue background.

MANAGING THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

RESETTLING THOSE IN NEED

RUMEYSA BOLEL

SOLIDARITY WITH OTHERS

How to manage the thousands of people risking their lives in hopes of resettling in the Netherlands after the government collapsing over the immigration crisis.

Introduction

In the aftermath of governmental upheaval triggered by an intensifying immigration crisis, the Netherlands faces a profound moral and logistical challenge. The collapse of governments in the wake of escalating immigration crises has left thousands of desperate individuals risking their lives in pursuit of safety, stability, and hope within Dutch borders. This opinion paper embarks upon a rigorous exploration of the strategies and principles that should guide the nation in its response to this unprecedented situation.

Background Information

On 7 July 2023 Friday, the Dutch government collapsed due to its inability to come to an agreement on immigration restrictions. This development will lead to fresh elections in the autumn. The crisis emerged when Prime Minister Mark Rutte's VVD party, which leans conservative, advocated for stricter controls on immigration into the Netherlands. However, two out of the four parties in the government coalition did not back this proposal, leading to the government's collapse.¹

"It's no secret that the coalition partners have differing opinions about immigration policy. Today we unfortunately have to conclude that those differences have become insurmountable. Therefore I will tender the resignation of the entire cabinet to the king," Rutte announced during a televised press briefing.²

Tensions reached a critical point this week when Rutte insisted on backing a plan that aimed to restrict the entry of children from war refugee families already residing in the Netherlands and to impose a waiting period of at least two years before reuniting families. This recent proposal crossed a line between the Christian Union and the liberal D66 party, resulting in a deadlock. Rutte's coalition will continue to function as a temporary government until a new administration is established following the upcoming elections. In the fragmented Dutch political landscape, this process typically takes several months.³

The number of asylum applications in the Netherlands surged by 33% in the previous year, reaching a total of over 46,000. The government anticipates that this figure could rise even further

¹Bart H. Meijer, Anthony Deutsch, 'Dutch Government Resigns Over Asylum Policy' (*Reuters*, 7 July 2023) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/dutch-government-resign-over-asylum-policy-anp-2023-07-07/>> accessed 4 September 2023.

² *Ibid* 1.

³Eline Schaart, 'Dutch government falls as ministers clash over migration' (*Politico*, 7 July 2023) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/dutch-government-pm-mark-rutte-in-crisis-over-asylum-measures/>> accessed 4 September 2023

this year, potentially exceeding 70,000 applications, surpassing the previous peak observed in 2015.⁴

Humanitarian Imperative

In the realm of international relations and ethical discourse, few principles hold as steadfastly as the humanitarian imperative. The Netherlands, with its rich history of providing refuge to those in need, stands at a crossroads where its deeply ingrained values of compassion, solidarity, and humanity must guide its response to the ongoing immigration crisis.

Throughout history, the Dutch have opened their arms to persecuted communities and individuals seeking safety and asylum. This humanitarian tradition dates back to the refuge granted to Huguenots in the 16th century and extends to the protection offered to Jewish people during World War II.⁵ These episodes in Dutch history exemplify the moral duty of a nation to provide sanctuary to those fleeing conflict, persecution, or disaster. As such, the Netherlands is not merely making a choice but reaffirming its core identity when it extends support to those risking their lives for a glimpse of safety.

In recent times, this tradition has been manifest in the reception and resettlement of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and other crisis-torn regions. The Netherlands, among other European countries, opened its doors to thousands, allowing them to rebuild their lives in a secure environment. This history serves as a testament to the power of empathy, the realization that borders should not be barriers to compassion, and the understanding that collective humanity transcends geographical boundaries.

Legal and Ethical Framework

The legal and ethical framework governing the treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers is rooted in international agreements and domestic laws. For the Netherlands, adherence to these principles is not optional; it is a fundamental obligation.

At the international level, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol,⁶ to which the Netherlands is a party, set forth the legal definition of a refugee and the rights and responsibilities of both refugees and host countries. These agreements establish the obligation of signatory states to provide protection to those who meet the criteria of refugee status. Additionally, human rights conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, emphasize the right to seek asylum and the prohibition of returning individuals to places where they may face persecution or harm.⁷

⁴ *Ibid* 1.

⁵ Papendorf, Dave. "Review of *Experiencing Exile: Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680–1700* by David van der Linden." Review of History (review no. 1830), DOI: 10.14296/RiH/2014/1830.

⁶ 1951 Refugee Convention (1951), 189 UNTS 137.

⁷ Universal Declaration on Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948) 217 A(III) (UNGA), art 14.

Within the Netherlands, domestic laws and policies are aligned with these international commitments. Dutch asylum and immigration laws, guided by principles of non-discrimination and fairness, provide a legal framework for processing asylum claims and ensuring the humane treatment of refugees. This framework underscores the necessity of upholding the rights of those who seek refuge on Dutch soil, irrespective of their origin.

Capacity and Resources

The issue of managing a substantial influx of people seeking refuge goes beyond mere goodwill and legal obligations. It entails a pragmatic examination of the Netherlands' capacity to provide for the well-being of newcomers while maintaining the welfare of its own citizens.

In recent years, the Netherlands has faced resource challenges in accommodating refugees and migrants.⁸ Housing shortages, stretched healthcare systems, and strained educational facilities have raised concerns about the nation's capacity to provide essential services. Furthermore, the economic implications of integrating a large number of newcomers, including potential strains on the labor market, cannot be ignored.

Efficient resource allocation and planning are vital in addressing these challenges. The Dutch government must collaborate with local authorities, NGOs, and international partners to ensure that the arrival of refugees and migrants does not overburden essential services. This can involve the construction of temporary housing facilities, the expansion of healthcare infrastructure, and targeted investments in education and job training programs.

Balancing the immediate needs of newcomers with the long-term welfare of the Dutch population requires careful consideration and resource management. It is an intricate juggling act that necessitates not only financial resources but also effective policy implementation and public engagement.

Integration and Assimilation

The success of any resettlement effort hinges on the ability to facilitate the integration and assimilation of newcomers into Dutch society. Integration should be viewed not only as a humanitarian goal but also as a means to enrich the nation culturally, socially, and economically.

Experience has shown that well-designed integration programs can lead to positive outcomes for both newcomers and the host society.⁹ Language courses, vocational training, and cultural

⁸Laura Coello Eertink. 'Refugees face housing shortage in the Netherlands' (*European Website on Integration*, 9 January 2019) <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/refugees-face-housing-shortage-netherlands_en> accessed 10 October 2023

⁹ Thomasde Vroome and Frankvan Tubergen, 'The Employment Experience of Refugees in the Netherlands' [2010] 44(2) *International Migration Review* <DOI: 10.1111/j.1747-7379.2010.00810> accessed 10 October 2023

orientation programs can equip refugees and migrants with the tools they need to become self-sufficient and productive members of Dutch society.

Additionally, integration initiatives foster social cohesion and reduce the risk of social exclusion or isolation among newcomers. The Netherlands has a track record of implementing successful integration policies, such as "inburgering" courses, which aim to equip newcomers with the Dutch language skills and knowledge needed for active citizenship.

Moreover, the active participation of the Dutch population in welcoming and supporting newcomers is crucial for integration. Initiatives that promote cultural exchange and understanding between different communities can create an environment where diversity is celebrated and contributes to the overall social fabric of the nation.

Investing in comprehensive integration programs not only benefits refugees and migrants but also strengthens the Netherlands as a diverse and inclusive society that can thrive in an interconnected world.

Diplomacy and Cooperation

As the Netherlands grapples with the immigration crisis and the government's collapse, it's imperative to recognize that this is not a challenge that can be resolved in isolation. Diplomacy and international cooperation are essential components of any effective response.

One of the first steps in addressing the crisis is engaging in dialogue and cooperation with neighboring countries and international organizations. Collaborative efforts can help distribute the burden of resettlement more equitably and ensure that resources are pooled to provide support and security for refugees and migrants throughout their journey.

Moreover, diplomacy can play a pivotal role in addressing the root causes of the immigration crisis. By working together with other nations, the Netherlands can actively participate in diplomatic efforts to mitigate conflicts, reduce the drivers of displacement, and promote stability in regions where many refugees originate. This proactive stance contributes to long-term solutions that go beyond immediate resettlement.

The Netherlands, with its diplomatic experience and reputation for constructive engagement on global issues, is well-positioned to lead by example. By fostering international collaboration and advocating for coordinated responses to migration and refugee challenges, the country can not only manage the current crisis but also contribute to building a more stable and secure world.


Conclusion

In conclusion, managing the humanitarian crisis of resettling those who risk their lives to seek refuge in the Netherlands is an arduous but fundamentally humane task. As we have explored in this opinion paper, the Netherlands' historical commitment to compassion, its legal obligations,

and the practical challenges it faces all converge to underscore the urgency of a thoughtful and comprehensive response.

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OTHERS AISBL, BELGIUM
2023

www.solidaritywithothers.com

info@solidaritywithothers.com

0032 497 32 45 50



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BELGIUM
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