Amsterdam City Rights meets Gemeente Amsterdam

7 november 2018
Pakhuis de Zwijger
Over 60 undocumented people, surviving on the streets and in the shelters in Amsterdam had the chance to give input to the civil servants, working for the gemeente Amsterdam on writing the new city plan on undocumented migrants and 24/7 shelter. This input session was organised and prepared by the Amsterdam City Rights team. This a team of people with and without documents who want to fight for a city where everyone belongs and human rights are being valued.
In six preparational sessions key questions and key demands were formulated around five topics. Every topic was discussed on a table during the input meeting and people switched tables to be able to give input to all aspects of the new plan.
At this meeting no other organisations were invited, only the voice of undocumented migrants was at the center of attention. Testimonials about the harsh life of undocumented were read out loud at the start of the afternoon. Moderator Yusuf made a call for mutual respect and trust. Under his guidance we also paid our respect to the deceased brothers of We Are Here, our sister of the BBB and to our former Mayor of Amsterdam.

We present the notes of the meeting. We thank the gemeente and we look back on this meeting as a starting point for more collaboration with the municipality in the months and years to come.[1]

1. Safety and Healthcare

- We need an information center (or centers in different part of the city) where undocumented people can get **access to information**. Access to information about healthcare, medical facilities, places to go (safe spaces and free meals (the social map of the city), groups to join and where to get support (counseling).
- More information about how to stay safe in the city should be provided. Basic rules about **traffic, work, basic rights** and how to press charges at the police station (in case it's necessary).
- Information should also b e **available in different languages.**
- It is important we know where and how we can **raise our voice** about our situation. Client councils, Amsterdam City Rights Team, (meldcentrum voor klachten en uitbuiting?), ombudsman?)
- There should be **more medical facilities** to get healthcare. (only Kruispost is not enough)

[1] Thanks to Wereldhuis/Protestantse Diaconie for giving us the opportunity to come together to prepare the meeting and to make prints!

- Every undocumented needs a normal General Practitioner (huisarts). The gemeente has to explain to all doctors in Amsterdam **the rules about helping undocumented people**.
- For everyone in the city, and especially undocumented people who live together with other undocumented people, it is important there is **more professional help for traumatised people** and **stressrelease support.**

- We need a guarantee from the police, there will be **no arrests on the streets**. These arrests lead to long periods in detention centers. As long as people are in the shelter or known by the gemeente people should be safe on the streets of Amsterdam.

- **Card for identification and safe registration**. All undocumented people want to carry a card, to show to the police to identify themselves. This registration should be safe (no details to DT&V).

2. Work and Education

- The most important demand of undocumented people is **a working permit**. We want to encourage the city of Amsterdam to start a pilot with this and look at example of other cities (like Barcelona & Germany). Most people want to **contribute to society**. With a work and a salary we can: **pay taxes, pay our own rent, have insurance**.
- As long as the government does not allow work for undocumented migrants we ask the gemeente of Amsterdam to **lobby with us together on the formalization of work (Geneva Model)**

- In the city almost everything is digitalised. More and more places don't accept cash money anymore. Undocumented people have a need for **bank account** and a bank card. With this it is for example possible to buy a busticket or to transfer money.

- The most effective way to integrate a migrant into the society is by education.
  We **don't want practical courses** without the prospect to real work. This should be connected. We think learningplaces (leerwerkplaatsen) or internships are important to realise in connection to education. The offered courses should be **connected to individual needs**, talents and previous education. Many undocumented people express the need for access to HBO or **University education.** It is important to create real education including diploma's.

- **Language classes** should be available everywhere both English and Dutch.

- **Voluntary work** can provide solution to the need of contributing to society and participation with society but it is not fair. There is a high risk of exploitation. Only when there is a good week budget (pocketmoney) and people can take care of first basic needs, voluntary work is something to strive for and offer to undocumented people.

- Can we fill a gap in the marker by doing cheap labour?
- How can we protect people of not being exploited at their workspace? This needs more information and support.

- People with **traumatic experiences** need help to progress in work and education. Some people are not able to do so and should never be forced. We want no sanctions on not joining with work or education. The uncertain situation of undocumented people makes it difficult to make a plan. Only when shelter is a **place of focus, rest and concentration** people can work on education or activities.

- Where in the city can we join already **existing educational institutions**?
- Can we work for the gemeente? Gemeente is providing us with shelter, can we do something back in return?

3. Shelter

- We want **small units** with 20/25 people living together and we want to cook ourselves and care for eachother. We don't need security, we can arrange our own **safety within the group.** One or two persons in the group can take responsibility to help with keeping the place safe. Groups over 25 people are more difficult to manage by ourselves (then we need security). In this case security is an administrative job at a desk. We do not want body searches, no guards, no police inside the building without consent (huisvrede).
- People with **traumatic experiences** sometimes need more special attention. This could mean that these shelters for medical and vulnerable people need more trained personnel.
- Our **home** is a place to **get rest** and to create a real place to live. We don't want appointments about legal situation and meetings with organisations involved in our home. These meetings should be taken place **outside** in another venue.
- Friends and **visitors** should be **allowed** to come over and we have to make an arrangement about sleeping over.
- People who live in the shelter are **free to go in and out** whenever they want.
  Our privacy should be respected. We don't want camara's inside the building. We want keys of the building and room and cupboard with a lock to keep our important stuff safe.
- We need **money for food and sanitary products**. 55 euros weekly just like AZC.

- We want to make our **own house rules**. Cleaning and cooking we can do ourselves as well.
- It is important to have **facilities** a **washing machine** to wash our clothes, **computers** and connection to **WIFI.**
- Every shelter place should have or be part of a client council. We need to be able to raise our voice and come up with our own ideas.
- We need **spaces for selfempowerment** and self organisation in the shelter or outside of the shelter.
- Access to **first aid**, first support on medical issues needs to be available in the shelters.
- All people with **Dublinclaim** and people from so called '**safe countries'** should be able to access shelter and guidance. The safe country criterium is not fair because individuals can be in danger, also in a'so called 'safe country'. The **Dublinclaim** regulation is failing. Europe, the Netherlands and our city need to address this very clear. Now we are the only city in the Netherlands that is giving shelter this group refugees with Dublinclaim in Amsterdam, we should make clear that there are so many people on the street that need help.
- We need a special shelter for women and children who are on the street and don't dare to go to a GOL (gezinsopvanglocatie) because of the fear of being sent back to the country of origin. At this shelter there is time to listen, to find out what is needed - legally and socially - to take the next step.

4. Guidance (Begeleiding)

- Support on a **legal level** is the most important. There are **not enough lawyers** and professional legal support. This is very important to create perspective in legal cases. Make sure information about good lawyers with different expertises are available.
- There are already **existing buddy systems** with **expertise**. These buddies should be included in the new plan. It does not work to have a contact person that has no understanding about the mental health situation of a the person, or that the contact person pushes the person to do specific tasks (as what is happening in the BBB now).
- Make good use of people's capacity, experience and ability. There is already a lot of experience from getting years of support by all different organisations.
- People should have the **freedom to choose their own contactperson/**casemanager. **TRUST IS THE KEY** in collaboration and making steps forward.
- The **time limit of 1,5 years** gives a lot of stress. The goals of individual plans should be reasonable and feasible. People need **time to rest and recover** after sometimes years and decades of being on the streets, living with stress.
- Many people need guidance on medical and mental level, this support is important before pushing on working on our legal file.
- We need a **think tank** on what happens after the 1.5 years of shelter. Municipality, and undocumented people should be part of this think tank. This think tank should be practical (where to have shelter after?) but also think about lobby towards Europe and

National policymakers/politics. What goes wrong and **what to do about asielgat/buitenschuld**?

- We want a **client council** of people who are in the shelter and regular meeting with organisation who are organising the shelter. Same counts for organisations involved in 'begeleiding'. Undocumented people should also be involved in the evaluation and monitoring on a high level. Input from us is very important.
- **Cooperating with DT&V can never be a condition for shelter** and this should not be pushed. Information about an undocumented person can never be shared with other organisations without permission. Permission forms should be **translated** and only signed when all information is provided. We want the undocumented people to have the right to be at any 'veldtafel' session when their own case is being talked about.
- **Provide general information** in every shelter, or provide people the opportunity to know themselves.
- When somebody gets the chance to open a new procedure at the IND, people should be **placed in a COA** in or close to Amsterdam (Alkmaar, Almere). This way people stay connected to the city and the organisations involved. Preferably the casemanager sticks with the person within the procedure.

5. Access to the City

Shelter and guidance in not the only thing undocumented people need. What can Amsterdam do to *really* be an **inclusive city**? A place where undocumented people belong?

See all the input given above about **Work**, **Education** and **Bank account** (point 2). Without work and money to spend a lot of doors are closed. Freedom to express yourself and move freely in the city is restricted this way.

- During the day we need safe spaces to stay and be welcomed. These don't need to be special places for undocumented, we prefer to interact with citizens of Amsterdam.
- We need weekly pocket money or a budget to move in a free way through the city.
- We propose the city of Amsterdam to provide undocumented people with an 'urban citizenship card'/ '**City IDcard**'. With this card the people can get access to services of the city. With this card access to for example: **sports** facilities, **toilets** in the city, **library** (OBA= access to connectivity and information), swimming pool, **cultural** events, voedselbank. neighbourhood centers etc, can be provided. We also need to be able to have a **postal address** and to use **public transport.**
- This CityID card can also use for **identification** and therefore increases **safety** on the streets for undocumented people.
- Opportunities should be organised for undocumented people to start their own business. These **entrepreneurial skills** are an asset for the city of Amsterdam and society.
- Every person is part of the city, undocumented or not. Let's make Amsterdam a **Fearless City**, in which we respect the human rights of everyone.