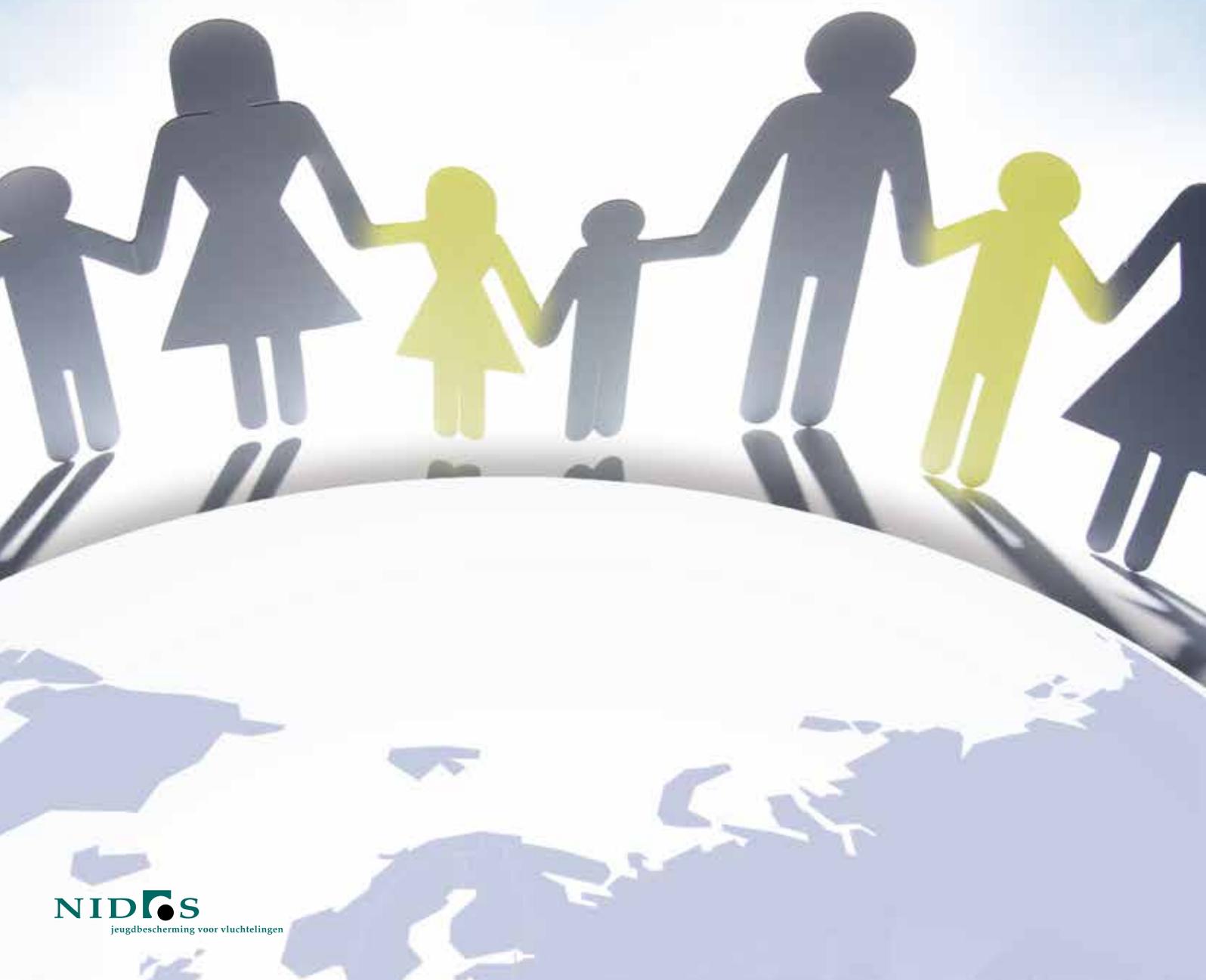


STICHTING NIDOS

RECEPTION FAMILIES

FOR UNACCOMPANIED
CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM



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In this booklet we describe the way in which Nidos arranges reception and living in families (Opvang en Wonen in Gezinsverband - DWG) for unaccompanied children seeking asylum. We hope it will give you a good idea of all that is involved. But if you have any questions or would like further explanation, please get in touch with us.

1 Nidos and guardianship

1a Nidos

Nidos is a national agency responsible for family supervision and guardianship for unaccompanied children. Child protection workers at Nidos carry out the supervision. The Nidos head office is in Utrecht, but the child protection officers are based at regional offices in different parts of the Netherlands.

Each regional office has a regional manager and approximately 15 child protection workers, each of them responsible for between 21 and 24 children.

Nidos does not provide day-to-day care for the children. Unaccompanied children live with a reception family (OWG), or at a special children's reception facility (KWG), children's centre where they live independently with some supervision (KWE), or small-scale residential facilities (KWV) run by the COA (the central agency for the reception of asylum seekers).

The Nidos OWG unit for Reception and Living in Families is responsible for recruiting, screening and matching reception families with the children.

1b Guardianship

Every year, many children come to the Netherlands without their parents and apply for asylum. They have had to leave their country of origin because of very difficult circumstances there. Nidos works for the Dutch government as these children's guardian, acting in their best interests.

As a child's legal representative, Nidos does all it can to protect their rights. Nidos supervises and guides the children until they reach the age of 18 or return to their country of origin.

Nidos helps the children with all kinds of things that would normally be arranged by their parents or family. Dutch lessons, education and proper social contact are very important. Most importantly, of course, the child needs somewhere to live where they will feel safe and secure.

Nidos acts as a guardian on the child's behalf, taking steps and making adjustments in situations where action needs to be taken. All Nidos supervision and guidance aims to help the child develop in the best way possible, so that they are able to look after themselves by the time they reach adulthood.

Nidos also ensures that the asylum application process goes smoothly.



All unaccompanied children in the Netherlands have Nidos as their guardian. Their ages are anywhere between 0 and 18, with the largest group between 14 and 18. They come from many different continents and countries. These children have fled from their own country because they feel unsafe as a result of war, chaos, unrest or other difficult living conditions. Some of them have been sent by their parents or family to a safe country. Others left themselves by boat, plane or truck. A small number of these children travelled with brothers, sisters or other family, but most of them came with a travel companion of some kind or by themselves.

2 Unaccompanied children

2a. Reception of unaccompanied children in the Netherlands

On arrival in the Netherlands, the children report to an asylum application centre. Here they are registered and the asylum procedure will begin. (Temporary) accommodation is arranged for the children as soon as possible. For children under the age of 15, this will be a reception family. For older children, it will be a special processing reception centre (POA) followed by a facility where children live in groups such as a KWG, KWE or KWV.

Children who have arrived in the Netherlands with adult family members will go with them to a reception centre for asylum seekers. If other family are already living in the Netherlands, it is always best for the child to be reunited with them and this option will be explored. In some cases it is not possible and another suitable home will need to be found.

During their stay at initial reception facilities, the asylum application procedure will continue, including medical screening. Guardianship will be applied for and arrangements made for school, health care and insurance. The child protection worker will then look at the options for finding the best possible home for the child. Preference is always given to placing a child with family members. If this is not possible, a placement

in a family with the same or a similar ethnic background is the preferred option.

2b. The asylum application procedure

An unaccompanied child applies for asylum in the Netherlands on their arrival, with help from a lawyer. Based on interviews with the child, and possibly information received from other sources, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) will decide whether they are eligible for a residence permit.

It may take a long time before it is clear whether the child will be allowed to stay. There is also a possibility that they are granted refugee status but this is cancelled again at a later date. That may be the case, for example, if the residence permit has been given because of an unsafe situation in the country of origin. If the situation changes, and the country is considered to be safe again, the residence permit may be cancelled.

Uncertainty about the asylum application is very much a part of the child's life. And if they are not granted a residence permit, this will give them a lot of anxiety. There may be certain restrictions too, like not being allowed to go on holiday outside the Netherlands.

3 Reception and Living in Families

3a. Background

Before Nidos started recruiting reception families, we placed unaccompanied children with foster families who were registered with youth care services. But we found that these families were not always the right place for them to live, as the young asylum seekers are a very special group, with different needs to other children in foster care. They are children who have gone through hard times, but most of them have experienced 'normal' family life too, with all they needed for their emotional development. War or another kind of threatening situation, however, had an effect on their development. So we consider these children to be 'normal' youngsters who find themselves in an 'abnormal' situation. This calls for a specific type of reception, which helps the child to deal with:

- missing or losing their family;
- difficult, sometimes traumatic, experiences;
- missing their own country;
- an uncertain future in the Netherlands;
- the new culture with new customs, rules and a different language.

Parenting problems are not usually the biggest issue.

3b. Current situation

Many children who have Nidos as their guardian live in a family. Nidos has reception families all over the country. Most of these families have an ethnic background.

3c. Requirements for becoming a reception family or parent

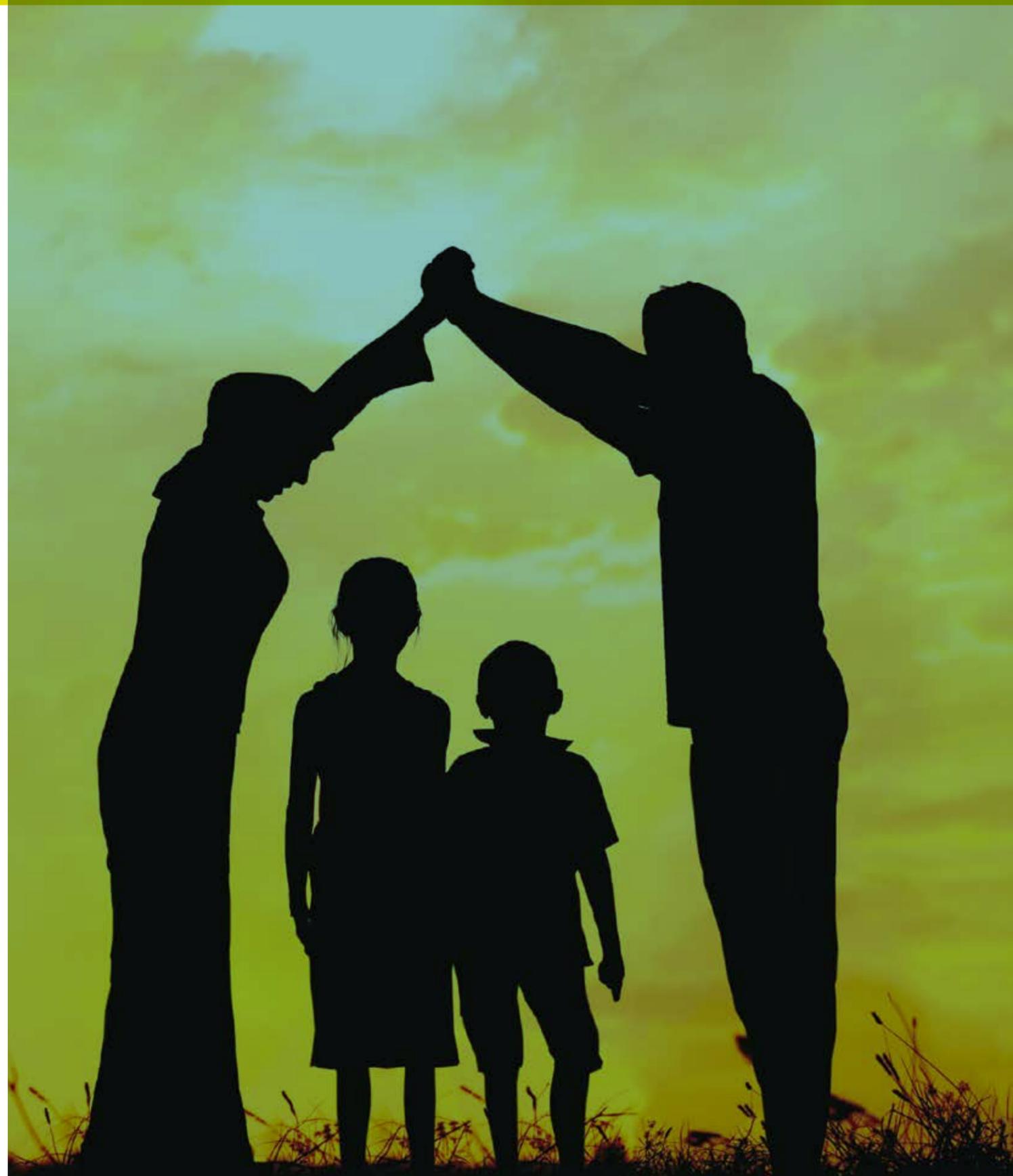
Nidos is looking for families or single people who are prepared to take a child into their home for a short or longer time. Families with an ethnic background have our preference. They need to be able to offer the child:

- safety and security;
- adequate care and upbringing;
- contact with their own family and/or culture;
- support with their emotional development.

Also:

- they need to be able to deal with the uncertainty of the child's future: integration in Dutch society or return to their country of origin;
- all members of the family must support the placement;
- it must be a stable family environment;
- close cooperation with Nidos is a requirement;
- reception parents must not have committed any sexual or violent offences;
- reception parents need to be physically and mentally healthy enough to take care of the child.

There are no requirements for the size of someone's home, their income or the composition of the family. Nidos does need to be convinced that the family is a safe and suitable place for the child.



4 Types of reception

4a Families for initial reception

On their arrival in the Netherlands, children under the age of 15 are immediately placed with a family who provide initial reception. Then the asylum application begins, they undergo medical screening and guardianship is applied for. While the child is staying with this first family, Nidos looks for a permanent home for them. That may be a long-term reception family. Families who are willing to provide initial reception should realise that:

- the child may not speak any language other than their own;
- nothing is known about the child's character or behaviour;
- they have not yet undergone medical screening;
- a lot will need to be done or arranged for the child.

4b Short-term reception

Short-term reception is provided in all kinds of emergency situations, for example a sudden housing problem or an acute social problem. This kind of reception is usually for a period of six weeks.

4c Families for long-term reception

These families are willing to look after a child until:

- they are sent back or decide to return to their country of origin;
- they are reunited with their family;
- they are old enough to live independently (or they reach the age of 21)

4d Rented rooms with support

For unaccompanied children who are already quite independent, we are looking for people who will rent them a room and give them any care and support they may need. This could vary from listening to their troubles to helping them with cooking or filling in forms. If children live in 'rented rooms with support', they usually look after their own finances and pay a sum of money to their reception parents. This may have an effect on any housing benefit or employment benefit the family is entitled to.

4e Host families

Even if a young refugee has somewhere to live, it may be good for them to spend some time in a different environment where they can get more attention and also get to know other people. This is something a host family can offer. It is often for a weekend or during the school holidays. Host families do not receive any payment.

Nidos is looking for families for initial reception, short-term reception and long-term reception. We are also looking for possibilities for 'rented rooms with support'. Host families are welcome to apply too.

5 Role of the guardian

Role of the child protection worker until the child's 18th birthday

Nidos has guardianship of the children until they reach the age of 18. A child protection worker will therefore visit the family and the child each month to see whether everything is going well. If this isn't the case, then the child protection worker will talk to all

concerned about what can be done. The child protection worker is not a care provider. Their responsibility for the child involves identifying any problems, and arranging and coordinating the necessary referrals to other services

6 Financial arrangements

Reception parents receive monthly payments to cover the cost of foster care for the child. The amount they receive depends on the child's age. Some other expenses are also paid, such as school-related expenses. You will receive a financial handbook in which all this is explained.

The foster care payment is regarded as an expenses allowance, and not as income. So taking care of a young asylum seeker does not affect any amount you may receive as employment benefit, housing benefit or health insurance allowance.

A contract will be drawn up which includes all the agreements on supervision, cooperation and how the foster care payments are to be spent.

If children live in 'rented rooms with support', they usually look after their own finances and pay a sum of money as rent to their reception parents. This may have an effect on any employment benefit and/or housing benefit you are entitled to. Host families do not receive any payment.

You cannot apply for any child benefit for children in your care.



7 Procedure for becoming a reception family

7a. Intake

If you are interested in becoming a reception family, you can apply to Reception and Living in Families (OWG) at Nidos by telephone or email.

The OWG-worker will make an appointment with you. At this first meeting, they will give you further information about the organisation, the children and reception parenting. And you will, of course, have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

If both you and the OWG-worker wish to continue to explore the options for you to become a reception family, a new appointment will be made for screening.

7b. Screening

During one or more interviews, the OWG-worker will have detailed discussions with you about parenting, your living situation, your background, your motivation and your attitude to other cultures. Return to the country of origin and medical procedures are two of the many topics that could be discussed. You will also talk about any preferences you may have for particular types of reception. The OWG-worker will write a meeting report. This will include all the points discussed and should give a good picture of your family situation and your ideas.

7c. Verklaring van Geen Bezwaar (security clearance)

Another requirement for being eligible for reception parenting is a 'Verklaring van Geen Bezwaar' (Certificate of No Objection), issued by the Raad voor de Kinderbescherming (Child Care and Protection Board). This Dutch authority will apply for information from the Justitieel Documentatieregister (criminal records register) before giving clearance. You will be asked to sign an authorisation form to give permission for that.

Once the screening has been satisfactorily completed, and the Child Care and Protection Board has issued the Certificate of No Objection, you will be added to the pool of reception families.

8 Matching and placement

8a. Matching

The child protection worker applies for a family placement by filling in an application form. An OWG-worker then looks for a family that would be the best match for the child. In doing so, they take aspects like background, lifestyle and religion into account, but their choice is mainly based on whether they think the child and the family will get on with each other. Where one child may feel completely at home, another may feel uncomfortable. They also look at practical issues, such as the composition of the family, where their home is and how far that is from where the child's family live, if they have any in the Netherlands. Careful selection is crucial for good matching.

8b. Placement

When the OWG-worker has found a suitable family, they will discuss this with the child protection worker. The child protection worker decides whether there should be a meeting with the family concerned. If that is the case, the OWG-worker will get in touch with the family to ask if they are interested in taking on the child. If all parties are positive, then the child protection worker will arrange a meeting between the child and the family. If necessary, there will be several meetings to give them the chance to get to know each other.

If this all goes well and everyone is satisfied, the child protection worker will arrange the placement.

9 Supervision and guidance

Nidos remains responsible for the child during the placement. This means that the child protection worker will take care of everything that can affect the child's life now and in the future, such as the asylum application, arranging healthcare insurance and finding the right school. The family will provide day-to-day care for the child. Obviously, many aspects of this will be discussed with the child protection worker, who usually visits a family each month to see how the placement is going.

If particularly difficult problems arise, it is the child protection worker's task to help the family solve them. For their job is not only to supervise the child's care, but also to give the reception parents support.

All agreements between the reception parents and Nidos about the placement are included in an OWG-contract.



10 Contact with the OWG-worker

Most of the OWG-worker's job is done once the child has been placed. After that, it is the child protection worker who arranges everything and keeps in touch with the family. The child protection worker will keep the OWG-worker informed with regular evaluation reports, and the OWG-worker will come to visit you six weeks after the placement to see how it is going and to ask you whether you were

sufficiently prepared for the placement. After the placement has ended, the OWG-worker will get in touch with you to hear how the placement went, and whether you have any specific comments or wishes for possible future placements.

The uncertain future of unaccompanied children

Some of our young asylum seekers may not be allowed to stay in the Netherlands. They will eventually have to go back to their country of origin, even though the situation there may be uncertain. It is up to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service to make that decision. Neither the child protection worker nor the reception family can influence this.

Another possibility is that the child's family come to the Netherlands unexpectedly. In cases like these, Nidos will always try to reunite a child with their family. We hope that reception parents can deal with all these uncertainties, while giving the child the stability and support they need to be able to deal with their own uncertain future.

We must point out that reception parenting is not the same as adoption.

N.B. In this leaflet we use the term unaccompanied children to mean all unaccompanied minors who have fled from their country of origin.

Are you interested?

If you are interested in becoming a reception family and would like more information, please send us an email or contact us by phone at:

Email: opvangouders@nidos.nl

Tel.: 088 5011200

Nidos

OWG Reception and Living in Families

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This is the address of our head office. Our staff work all over the country.