

> Return address Postbus 20301 2500 EH The Hague

To the President of the Hous of Representatives
P.O. Box 20018
2500 EA The Hague

**Directorate-General for
Migration**
Migration Policy Department

Turfmarkt 147
2511 DP The Hague
Postbus 20301
2500 EH The Hague
www.rijksoverheid.nl/jenv

Our reference
2199350

*Please quote date of letter
and our ref. when replying. Do
not raise more than one
subject per letter.*

Date 28 March 2018
Concerning Comprehensive agenda on migration

Background

Migration has a major impact on Dutch society, both now and in the future. Against the background of developments such as the expected population growth in Africa and South Asia, instability on Europe's periphery, climate change, the 'battle for talent', and shifts in geopolitical and economic power, the number of people migrating worldwide is expected to grow. This reality calls for a government that is well prepared and equipped, and that acts to ensure that migration movements are effectively managed. That means a government that provides protection only to those who truly need it and ensures that migration into our country is attuned to the needs and capacity of Dutch society.

The memory of the increased influx of asylum seekers into the Netherlands, and more widely into Europe, in late 2015 and early 2016, is still etched into many people's minds. The government responded to the increase with its letter to Parliament of 8 September 2015 on the asylum situation in Europe.¹ The approach described in that letter remains the government's benchmark position. However, that letter was written in a period that witnessed an increased influx of asylum seekers. It was a time marked by considerable social tension and unrest, but also by expressions of support from all corners of society. For municipal authorities in particular, the influx posed major challenges. Concerns about the influx of asylum seekers still exist today, although the numbers entering the Netherlands, and Europe in general, have since declined.

In addition to asylum migration, there is also regular migration. It should be noted that most of the migrants who enter the Netherlands either have a regular residence permit, for instance for study, employment, or family reunification, or are European Union citizens availing themselves of their right to free movement of people within the EU.² Regular migration too can pose challenges, such as displacement in the labour market and exploitation. At the same time, regular migration also has other facets: it can strengthen the Netherlands' knowledge economy, its innovative

¹ Parliamentary Papers II 2014/15, 19637, no. 2030.

² In 2017 approximately 31,300 applications for asylum and approximately 76,670 regular applications for residence permits were received. Of the regular applications, 84% to 87% were granted. *Source:* Ministry of Justice and Security Immigration Report for January to December 2017 and Asylum Trends for January 2018.

strength and its competitiveness, for instance by attracting 'expats' and foreign start-ups. It is always essential to weigh up the opportunities against the challenges that accompany migration.

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It is this awareness – that migration is a dynamic, multifaceted and complex issue – that has prompted the government to opt for a wide-ranging, comprehensive approach.

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A comprehensive approach means first and foremost that the government's actions in different areas cannot be seen in isolation. Tackling root causes, improving prospects in the region, and emphasising the prospect of return can help to dissuade migrants from undertaking dangerous journeys by boat across the Mediterranean. Stronger border management is necessary not only to combat people smuggling at the external borders of the European Union, but also to promote security and mobility along the Netherlands' own borders, including at Schiphol Airport. The ability of the Dutch asylum system to respond to fluctuations in the influx of asylum seekers has consequences for the availability of jobs, housing, schools, and healthcare services for newcomers, as well as for the level of public support. The length of time spent at a reception facility affects the potential for integration of those granted residence permits as well as the willingness to return of migrants who are not entitled to stay. The problems experienced by municipalities as a result of people staying there illegally can be reduced if countries of origin cooperate in the return of their own nationals, using either positive or negative incentives. And there are countless other interconnections.

A comprehensive approach also means that it is essential to take action at every point of the migration route. Many migrants follow a direct, regulated route, heeding the applicable rules. Others follow an irregular route that leads from countries of origin through transit countries in the region and other parts of Europe to the Netherlands. Regardless of the route followed, interventions at crucial points and times can help to ensure a safe and well-managed migration process.

Finally, a comprehensive approach means a system in which all relevant actors work together, at different levels. Given the complexity of the issue, cooperation is key. This is perhaps the main lesson learned from the increased influx of asylum seekers: only by working together can we meet these challenges. After all, issues such as reception, housing, education, healthcare, participation, integration, public order, and return do not impinge only on national government. It is above all within municipalities that all these issues converge, although other public authorities and organisations have to deal with them, too. The government therefore works closely in these different areas with municipal and provincial authorities, numerous civil-society organisations, member states and institutions of the European Union, as well as with transit countries and countries of origin.

The government has chosen to elaborate its comprehensive approach in a 'six-pillar agenda'. In this agenda, the policy intentions as stated in the coalition agreement are linked, and in some areas elaborated, by means of six connected pillars. The agenda thus supports the government's aim to achieve a humane and effective migration policy. For a number of policy intentions, it should be noted that agreement will have to be reached at international, European, and local level. The plans will be further elaborated in the near future, after which the House will be notified of the costs and how these can be covered.

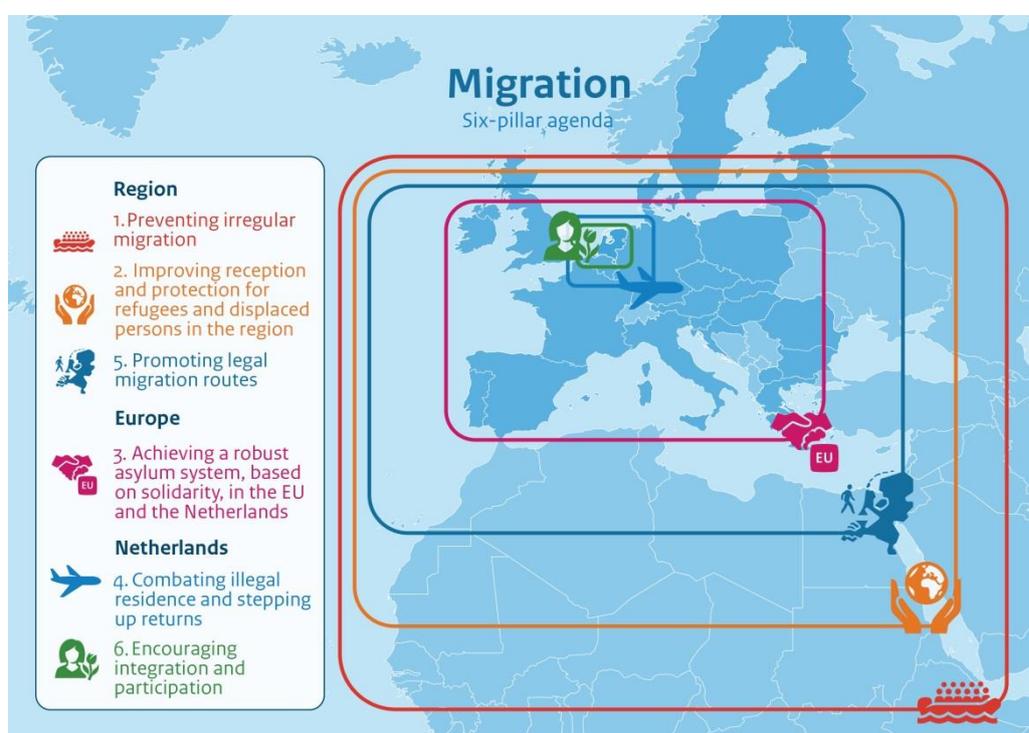
This letter sets out the policy intentions for each of the six pillars, namely:

1. Preventing irregular migration
2. Improving reception and protection for refugees and displaced persons in the region
3. Achieving a robust asylum system, based on solidarity, in the EU and the Netherlands
4. Combating illegal residence and stepping up returns
5. Promoting legal migration routes
6. Encouraging integration and participation.

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1. Preventing irregular migration

Migration occurs all the time. The vast majority of migration takes place along regular, safe channels, within a single region or even within the same country. A smaller proportion involves migration movements that are in breach of the rules, for instance because of a lack of a valid visa or passport, and that lead beyond the region of origin. It is the latter, 'irregular', form of migration, in particular, that is accompanied by human suffering. Many people drown and people smuggling and exploitation take place on a large scale. Irregular migration should be prevented as far as possible by tackling the root causes, regulating migration, setting up asylum procedures in the region, and improving the management of the migration process.

Curbing irregular migration starts with tackling the root causes in countries of origin. Generally, the decision to migrate is not taken lightly. People feel compelled to leave, primarily because of a lack of economic prospects, political factors such as conflict, a lack of security, and repression, and conditions relating to climate change and the living environment. Tackling the root causes calls for good international cooperation and the use of a range of different instruments, including development cooperation, civil-military efforts, and trade and investment. These instruments help to strengthen the rule of law and to create better prospects for potential migrants in

their own countries, thus diminishing their perceived need to migrate. In a policy document to be sent to the House this spring, the government's proposed efforts in the areas of foreign trade and development cooperation will be explained in detail. In any case, the government is prioritising the prevention of instability, conflicts, and irregular migration, partly by stepping up investment in employment opportunities. These priorities are in part what has determined the government's decision to work with focus countries and pursue cooperation within the context of the EU. The government is actively pursuing migration diplomacy and ensuring that the Netherlands has adequate diplomatic representation in the main countries of transit and origin. As regards military efforts, a Defence White Paper and an Integrated International Security Strategy (IISS) have been drawn up with a view to maximum cohesion, partly on the basis of an integrated analysis of domestic and external threats. The House received the Defence White Paper and the IISS on 26 and 20 March 2018, respectively.

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Prevention by tackling root causes is crucial, but its effects will only be felt in the long term. Nor will it suffice on its own. To prevent irregular migration, it is also necessary to manage the migration process as well as possible. The primary aim of migration management is to prevent migrants from continuing their journey unchecked and ending up in a vulnerable position. To achieve this, it is essential for the Netherlands, where possible together with its European partners, to improve and step up its cooperation with countries of transit and origin. These include countries in the arc around Europe, such as Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, but also countries such as Nigeria, Mali, and Niger. It also includes Libya, where cooperation on migration is part of an overall approach aimed at improving security and stability, including the human rights situation. In this context, the government is focusing on joint efforts to combat people smuggling and human trafficking and other forms of transnational crime, strengthening controls along the borders of countries of origin and transit, and promoting return to those countries. The government is also working on campaigns to raise awareness about the migration process and its hazards, and to promote possible alternatives. These should preferably be arranged as part of wide-ranging partnerships, and to this end migration agreements should be concluded, where necessary at EU level. To achieve this, the government is actively seeking cooperation with UNHCR and IOM.

To make migration movements more manageable, effective border management is essential. To achieve this, the government will pursue an integrated border management policy consisting of three parts. The first involves cooperation with a number of countries in North Africa to improve border controls in those countries. This will include a focus on protecting human rights, as well as on combating terrorism and transnational crime. More European cooperation can help to improve border controls in the region. Second, it is important to ensure effective border controls and other measures on the Netherlands' own territory. To achieve this, the government is strengthening the capacity of the Royal Military and Border Police (Koninklijke Marechaussee; KMar). This is mainly intended to reinforce the Netherlands' external borders at airports and seaports. At the same time, it will enable KMar to deploy materiel and personnel, either through Frontex or in the form of multidisciplinary teams, with a view to helping ensure the EU's external borders are managed effectively and improving the situation there. Further details about this deployment will be sent to the House in the year ahead. Third, the digitisation of border management will continue over the next few years, with the aid of European funds. This will strengthen border checks, improve internal security, and promote the mobility of bona fide travellers.

It is impossible to improve border management without having a normative framework that is attuned to the nature and extent of migration. For this reason, negotiations and consultations are taking place within the UN on the drafting of two Global Compacts, one on Migration and one specifically on Refugees. These will involve non-legally binding agreements in relation to migration, the reception of refugees, and the regulation thereof. The basic principle is that both compacts will build on existing frameworks, including the obligations that apply to States. All facets of migration must be addressed since they all affect each other as links in a chain. These include tackling the root causes of irregular migration, ensuring respect for the human rights of migrants, returning migrants who do not meet the statutory requirements for admission and residence, and taking action to suppress people smuggling and human trafficking. Negotiations on both UN compacts are expected to conclude in the autumn of 2018.

2. Improving reception and protection for refugees and displaced persons in the region

Arranging for reception and protection in countries in and around conflict regions is the most desirable solution, including in the eyes of most refugees themselves. This approach makes it possible for them to return quickly to their country of origin as soon as the situation allows, and to rebuild their lives there. At the same time, countries in the region are bearing a heavy burden as a consequence of the large numbers of refugees they are receiving.³ This creates a real risk that these countries may destabilise and hence turn into transit countries or even countries of origin. The necessity for further migration must be removed by providing reception facilities close to home with prospects for the future, in line with international obligations regarding the protection of refugees and bearing in mind the needs of host communities.

To improve people's prospects in the region, providing shelter in temporary camps and improvised accommodation will not suffice. Opportunities must be created for refugees to participate in the local community until they are able to return home. There is a growing willingness in reception countries to create such opportunities. For instance, Jordan has created a special economic zone with job opportunities for refugees as well as Jordanian nationals.⁴ This example embodies an important – if not the most important – condition: it is crucial to support both refugees and host communities, in order to defuse tensions. For this reason, besides providing emergency aid and development cooperation, the government invests systematically in political and economic cooperation. Dutch support focuses specifically on expanding access to education and employment for refugees and host communities in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and the Horn of Africa. The House was informed about this by letter of 7 December 2017 from the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.⁵ The forthcoming Global Compact on Refugees may likewise give fresh

³ In 2016 roughly 84% of refugees were provided with reception in underdeveloped countries, largely in the region of origin. *Source:* UNHCR Global Trends 2016.

⁴ This 2016 initiative is known as the Jordan Compact. Under its terms, Jordan provides Syrian refugees with reception and protection, Syrian children are admitted to the Jordanian education system, and 200,000 work permits have been made available to Syrian refugees, in return for loans, guarantees, and financial support from the European Union (EU) and EU member states (pledges amounting to approximately two billion euros). It also includes greater access to the EU market.

⁵ Parliamentary Papers II 2017/18, 34775, no. 49.

impetus to efforts to substantially improve the reception and protection of refugees in the region.

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The government is working in three ways to improve the reception and protection of refugees in the region. First, the Netherlands is seeking to achieve a better division of responsibility between countries of origin, transit, and destination in terms of the reception of refugees. This means ensuring that countries that are presently doing too little contribute more, for instance in the form of emergency aid or resettlement programmes. Second, it is important to increase refugees' self-reliance. To achieve this, priority is being given to investments in education, and to measures that can boost employment for refugees and their host communities. Third, special attention must be paid to the most vulnerable refugees.

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Through these efforts, the government seeks to improve reception and protection in countries in the region to the extent that they can be defined as safe third countries. Refugees have a right to protection, but that does not include the right to choose which country offers that protection. The government will therefore press for migration agreements to be concluded at EU level with safe third countries pertaining to the reception and readmission of asylum seekers. Each agreement must be custom-made; the guiding principle being that the countries concerned comply materially with the conditions laid down in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Through an asylum procedure based on international law in the third country, it should be determined whether someone is admitted to a safe reception centre in the region. Once admitted, the person may be eligible for resettlement. Asylum seekers who continue their journey in defiance of these rules can be sent back in accordance with the 'safe third country' principle after a short procedure in which they can explain their individual circumstances.

The Refugee Convention laid the foundation for international asylum law. The principles underlying the convention are just as valid today as when it was adopted. Nonetheless, it is worth considering whether the convention should be revised, and if so how, in order to provide a sustainable legal framework for the international asylum policy of the future. The government is therefore commissioning an independent study of the Refugee Convention, including its interplay with European legislation. A detailed study of this kind would reflect the fact that national practice is based on more than the Refugee Convention alone.

3. Achieving a robust asylum system, based on solidarity, in the EU and the Netherlands

The policy intentions outlined under pillars 1 and 2 cannot be achieved overnight. Asylum seekers, some of whom do genuinely need the protection afforded by asylum, will continue to reach the Netherlands and other European countries in the future. The influx of asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016 demonstrated the importance of being well prepared for their arrival. A lack of preparedness comes at a high price: declining confidence in the government, crumbling public support for the protection of asylum seekers, and polarisation in society. That is why it is important to improve the asylum system, at EU level as well as in the Netherlands. In doing so, the emphasis must be on improving the sharing of responsibility and on designing a system that will stand the test of time, even under severe pressure.

In mid-2016, the European Commission responded to the increased influx of asylum seekers by presenting seven legislative proposals, which would together lead to a reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). In this context, the

Netherlands' position is characterized by three goals. First, the government seeks to ensure that the level of protection provided and the framework for asylum procedures are the same in all EU member states. This means further harmonising European asylum policy in order to prevent 'asylum shopping'. Second, it is important to further discourage asylum seekers who have already submitted an asylum application from travelling elsewhere (which is known as secondary migration). By extension, information about an earlier period of residence in a member state should lead more quickly to readmission to that member state. Third, efforts must be made to achieve an asylum policy based on solidarity, in which member states support each other, especially in times of increased flows of asylum seekers, for instance by means of a redistribution mechanism. EU subsidies allocated in the multi-annual financial framework should in future be partly tied to the reception and integration of migrants who are entitled to asylum. Under a European asylum policy based on these principles, protection will be reserved for those who are genuinely entitled to it, while a critical assessment will be made of whether reform does indeed lead to improvement.

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In the Netherlands as elsewhere, the rise – and subsequent fall – in the number of asylum seekers prompted a realisation that the asylum system needs to be better equipped to respond to such fluctuations in size and composition. The government is therefore working on a more flexible asylum system that can respond better and more swiftly to fluctuations and that is more financially efficient and socially responsible than ad hoc measures. This requires redesigning the asylum procedure to make it both more efficient and more flexible, a joint planning system, and closer collaboration between different agencies in the asylum system under one roof at Combined Asylum Seekers' Centres (Gemeenschappelijke Vreemdelingen Locaties; GVLs). The Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) has concluded administrative agreements with the municipal authorities of Cranendonck and Gilze & Rijen to make it possible to establish GVLs there, making use of the experience gained at Ter Apel. The aim is to improve the speed and manageability of the asylum procedure.

Even with a more flexible asylum procedure, there will always be a need for reception facilities that can respond to changes in demand. To achieve this, models for flexible forms of asylum reception are being developed, in consultation with subnational authorities. These models take account of the intended effects as well as costs and possible funding mechanisms.

In addition, some aspects of Dutch asylum procedure are being adjusted within the existing EU legislation. One of these changes is that legal assistance will no longer be provided in an asylum procedure until a notice of intent to reject the application has been issued. Another is that interviews will no longer be held for repeat applications that, on the basis of the documents in the case, have no chance of success. In addition, in accordance with undertakings made to the House, the scope will be explored, in consultation with social partners, for further improving the methods used to assess the credibility of claims of religious conversion or of belonging to an LGBT minority.

A more flexible asylum system cannot be seen in isolation, but must dovetail seamlessly with the phase following reception. For this reason, the likelihood of an application's success is assessed at an early stage, and this will help to determine the procedure and the reception centre to which the asylum seeker is allocated.

For people who have been granted residence permits and asylum seekers who are likely to be granted residence permits, priority will be given to rapid integration and housing in municipalities. Ensuring access to the appropriate public services such as education and healthcare is another area of focus. The newcomers will start learning Dutch and will be moved to smaller reception centres in or near the municipalities where they will later be housed. When choosing the location, occupational qualifications and the local job market will be taken into account. Asylum seekers whose applications are certain or likely to be denied will remain at or near the GVLs, where the return procedure will be instituted immediately, and where their liberty may be restricted if necessary. All in all, this reduces the number of times people are moved, especially where school-age children are involved.

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As the entire asylum procedure is redesigned, the authorities will continue to pay due attention to socially unacceptable behaviour. This will be done in close collaboration with the police and other organisations in the criminal justice system. In the identification and registration phase, the Aliens Police, Identification, and Human Trafficking Department (AVIM) is responsible for improving the cohesion between procedures, with the aim of speeding up alerts and information-sharing on matters relating to national security. During the asylum reception phase, is important to provide those concerned with clear information about the norms and rules that apply here. Asylum seekers who cause a nuisance can be moved to one of several new centres with extra supervision. Any asylum seeker who commits a criminal offence will be dealt with in the customary way by the criminal justice system. The Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) will then take any criminal conviction into account when deciding whether to grant asylum. Suspended sentences and alternative sanctions may also be taken into account, for instance in the case of sex offences. In addition, the IND strives to identify – and then to reject – anyone who has committed a war crime or crime against humanity as referred to in article 1F of the Refugee Convention. Where public policy interests dictate, aliens detention is used in the return procedure as an instrument to facilitate expulsion.

The elaboration and establishment of a flexible asylum system will involve close collaboration between different ministries, organisations in the migration system, and other subnational authorities, especially municipalities. The letter from the Association of Netherlands Municipalities containing an evaluation of the influx of asylum seekers⁶ and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Migration Affairs (ACVZ) in its advisory report *Peaks and Troughs*⁷ serve as valuable input in this regard. Before the summer recess the House will receive a letter from the government containing the details of and timeframe for the steps that will be taken. This subject will also feature in the plans for the Intragovernmental Programme for Central and Subnational Authorities.

4. Combating illegal residence and stepping up returns

Not all migrants who reach the Netherlands will be permitted to stay here. This applies to asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected and to other categories of migrants who are not (or are no longer) entitled to a residence permit. These persons must leave the Netherlands of their own accord, as soon as possible.

⁶ Association of Netherlands Municipalities, 'Evaluatie verhoogde asielininstroom' ('Evaluation of increased influx of asylum seekers'; 9 November 2017).

⁷ Advisory Committee on Migration Affairs, 'Peaks and Troughs: Advisory report on a sustainable system for the reception of asylum seekers and the housing and integration of asylum residence permit holders' (23 May 2017).

In reality, however, it is not always possible to enforce their return, usually because of a lack of cooperation on the part of both the migrants themselves and the countries of origin. The consequences of these migrants' illegal residence are felt mainly at the local level, for instance in the form of public nuisance. This has an adverse effect on public support for migration. It is therefore important to curb illegal residence and to promote return.

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One obstacle to return is the lack of cooperation on the part of migrants who have an obligation to leave the country. To tackle this problem, action will be taken to enable the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V), together with the migration system, municipal authorities, and other relevant parties, to engage more intensively with these migrants. The aim of this more in-depth case management is to remove any barriers that may exist to leaving the Netherlands and where possible to encourage such persons to leave of their own accord and to make the necessary preparations. Although voluntary departure is preferable, forced return remains a real option if the person in question flatly refuses to leave of their own accord, particularly if they are guilty of a criminal offence or public nuisance. To this end, it is important to at least maintain the existing statutory scope for detention, and to widen it where necessary. Since a number of important provisions governing detention are part of the CEAS, the Netherlands will endeavour to increase the scope for detention in this context too.

The government is devoting special attention to unaccompanied minor migrants who return to their countries of origin. They must be protected from ending up in life-threatening situations. It is therefore important to ensure that adequate reception facilities are available for them in the country of origin, in addition to the safeguards that apply to all returning migrants,⁸ so that the children concerned have an opportunity to grow up in a safe environment.

Another complicating factor in relation to returning migrants is that countries of origin often refuse to cooperate in the readmission of their own nationals. This is partly because the financial transactions between family members constitute an important source of income. A strategic approach is therefore called for, preferably at EU level, based on the principle of 'more for more' and 'less for less'. This principle involves the use of both 'carrots' ('more for more') and 'sticks' ('less for less') to persuade countries of origin to take back their own nationals. This is an important argument in favour of concluding wide-ranging migration agreements. Government-wide scrutiny of bilateral relations with a country of origin can help to pinpoint scope for boosting returns. Proposals might include bilateral cooperation or capacity building in areas such as legal assistance, police, and border controls, or offering study grants, for instance. In addition, more use could be made of existing channels for legal migration, as discussed below in relation to pillar 5. Besides 'more for more' cooperation, the government will also develop a 'less for less' approach aimed at actually accomplishing returns, for instance by introducing visa restrictions. However, it is also possible to downgrade bilateral relations in areas other than migration. In both cases the approach will be government-wide and tailored to the situation at hand.

⁸ Under current EU law, before expelling an unaccompanied minor, EU member states must be certain that the child will return to a family, guardian, or adequate reception facilities in the third country. Adequate reception facilities may be provided not only by the government, but also by private or church organisations, in the form of children's homes.

Migrants who are not entitled to stay and who do not leave, for whatever reason, in accordance with the regular return procedure – either independently or through forced return – place municipal authorities in a difficult position. Municipalities are confronted on a daily basis with the impact of illegal residence on society, mainly in the areas of public order and healthcare. Since providing temporary accommodation can sometimes be helpful, in future these migrants will be able to stay, for a limited period of time and subject to certain conditions, in one of the new National Immigration Facilities (Landelijke Vreemdelingen Voorzieningen; LVVs). An administrative agreement will be concluded between central government and municipal authorities regarding the terms governing reception in an LVV and the details of these facilities, in line with the Intragovernmental Programme for Central and Subnational Authorities. When drawing up this administrative agreement, the government will draw on past experience with this issue. Promoting return and alleviating local problems are two objectives that can be linked. Municipal authorities are indispensable partners in this regard. For this reason, the development of LVVs will be co-managed by central and municipal authorities and will take place gradually over the next few years, on the basis of practical experience. It will remain possible to provide emergency accommodation in individual cases on public policy grounds, but not individual food and shelter ('bed, bath and bread') arrangements. You will be informed about the approach that is envisaged in a letter to be sent to the House this spring.

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5. Promoting legal migration routes

Migration encompasses more than just irregular migration and asylum migration. Asylum migration is about providing protection, not facilitating employment. The asylum procedure is not intended for those who want to come to the Netherlands for economic reasons. Any confusion between these groups is undesirable and should be challenged. However, the Netherlands also receives migrant workers who make a valuable contribution to Dutch society and the country's economy, specifically its knowledge-based economy. This type of migration will be facilitated: for highly skilled migrants, for instance by introducing shorter procedures and more digital services, and for other migrant workers by making it possible to grant three-year work permits.

In addition, the government is exploring how better use may be made of existing forms of regular migration to promote return and readmission and hence to curb irregular migration. Examples include the dissemination of information on the existing opportunities for labour migration, internships for foreign students, student grants, and circular labour migration (that is, regulated temporary employment). The basic principle remains that the supplementary use of these channels of regular migration must be part of wide-ranging migration agreements as described in pillars 1 and 4 above, and conditional on the effectuation of return and readmission. The experience gained by Spain and other EU member states will be taken into account here. In addition, the supply of labour from countries of origin will always have to be matched to the needs of Dutch employers. The labour requirements resulting from the tighter labour market will be the decisive factor. It is also important to pay attention to good enabling conditions, such as access to housing and education. Finally, it is also necessary to address concerns and unforeseen effects that may accompany regular migration. It is important, for example, to prevent displacement in the Dutch labour market and unequal pay between migrant and Dutch workers.

Resettlement is another form of legal migration. Resettlement eases the burden for countries offering reception in the region. The Dutch resettlement quota is to be

raised from 500 to 750 persons a year as from 2018. Here, the government's focus is on vulnerable minorities and refugees who are likely to integrate successfully into Dutch society. The national quota is being filled inter alia by means of resettlement missions to Jordan, Lebanon, and Uganda. The Netherlands is also responding to UNHCR's request for the resettlement of urgent individual cases through the Emergency Transit Mechanism. In addition, the government has decided to continue its resettlement effort on the basis of European migration agreements up to a maximum of 1,000 in 2018 and 750 up to the end of October 2019. If European agreements with transit countries and countries in regions of origin reduce the influx into the Netherlands, the government is also prepared to increase resettlement numbers to ease the burden on reception in the region.

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6. Encouraging integration and participation

Managing the influx of migrants, creating a flexible asylum system, and speeding up decision-making in the asylum procedure all help to ensure that asylum migrants who have been granted residence permits can integrate into and participate in Dutch society. Successful integration is contingent both on people taking responsibility for their own lives and on society offering opportunities for everyone, including those who are required to participate in a civic integration programme. For them, the principle must be 'Staying means participating'. People will be offered opportunities, but they need to seize them. They have an obligation to integrate into, and participate in, Dutch society, preferably as soon as possible, even if it later turns out that their residence permit will not be renewed. This is in the interest of newcomers and Dutch society alike, and promotes public support for migration and integration.

The aim is to ensure that those who take part in the civic integration programme become part of Dutch society as soon as possible, preferably by taking paid employment. This means that efforts to promote integration need to begin as early as possible. This objective is not new; the government has already, in response to the influx of asylum seekers, increased its investment in rapid integration and participation on the part of those required to follow the civic integration programme. Municipal authorities have also played a role here via the 'participation procedure and statement' (whereby civic integration candidates sign a statement that sets out the values and basic rules of Dutch society). The government will continue this investment, but it also sees scope for improvement in enabling people to better fulfil their civic integration obligations and to participate in Dutch society. To this end, the current civic integration system will be reformed. In designing this reforms, the government will not look solely at asylum migrants with residence permits, a group frequently mentioned above, but also at others with a civic integration obligation, such as family migrants.

Language acquisition is key in this regard: having a good command of the Dutch language is an absolute prerequisite for full participation in Dutch society. For this reason, the language requirement will be increased from level A2 to B1. People with a civic integration obligation need support, especially in the beginning, which will help them to focus on their integration and participation. The government will therefore help improve both the quality and quantity of support by giving municipal authorities more control over the process. At the same time, benefit recipients who are undergoing compulsory civic integration must comply, like everyone else, with the obligations laid down in the Participation Act. As far as possible, the social services system should both incentivise people and give them peace of mind. Matters such as the housing and healthcare of newcomers are also a key element of

reforming the civic integration programme. These will therefore be taken into account in the detailed elaboration of the reforms.

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The reforms will be shaped in close collaboration with relevant partners, including employers, the COA, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, municipal authorities themselves, the Divosa association of municipal directors, and the Dutch Council for Refugees. The Minister of Social Affairs and Employment will inform the House in writing before the 2018 summer recess regarding the detailed plans for the reforms. The subject will also be incorporated into the plans for the Intragovernmental Programme for Central and Subnational Authorities.

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Civic integration is a requirement for obtaining Dutch nationality. For first-generation migrants obtaining Dutch nationality, the scope for possessing more than one nationality will be expanded. However, subsequent generations must emphatically opt for a single nationality.

It should be added that the aim is not only to ensure the rapid integration and participation of those undertaking compulsory civic integration, but also to improve the labour market position of Dutch nationals with a migration background more generally. The House will receive a letter in the first quarter of 2018, which will set out the details of this approach and pay specific attention to those who are obliged to participate in the civic integration programme.

In order to promote integration and participation, attention will also be paid to temporary housing. It is not only the asylum system that needs to be flexible; the same applies to the housing market, which has to be able to absorb peaks in demand. In this connection, the government is seeking to ensure proper alignment between asylum reception facilities and the housing market.

For the rest, successful integration also depends on people having the scope to develop their talents. For this reason, the policies outlined in the Second Progress Report on Education for Asylum Seekers will be continued.⁹ In addition, the government will place more emphasis on early years education and its policy on educational disadvantages, about which the House was informed on 31 January 2018. The Minister for Primary and Secondary Education and Media will enter into dialogue with the House in order to reach a decision that enjoys wide support.

Conclusion

The government is energetically tackling the elaboration and implementation of the six-pillar agenda. The six pillars build on the focus areas identified in the futures study *Onwards to 2030* that was published by the Advisory Committee on Migration Affairs on 5 March 2018.¹⁰ The report makes it clear that in order to design a future-proof migration model, it is essential to develop an comprehensive, long-term vision. Several of the focus areas in the report have already been incorporated into the six-pillar agenda, such as tackling root causes and contributing to high-quality, forward-looking reception in the region. The report's other focus areas will also be addressed.

The government attaches great importance to maintaining and strengthening public

⁹ Parliamentary Papers II 2016/17, 34334, no. 24.

¹⁰ Advisory Committee on Migration Affairs, 'Onwards to 2030. Migration: futures study' (5 March 2018).

support for migration. To reflect this aspiration, the government will take account of the findings of the study *Draagvlak migratiebeleid* ('Public support for migration policy') when implementing the policy intentions referred to above.¹¹ One of the study's main findings is that public support for migration cannot be detached from the existence of public unease. In other words, it is no good working to maintain and strengthen public support without at the same time seeking to dispel public unease. This poses a challenge for central government as a whole, working in partnership with subnational authorities and civil society partners.

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Migration Policy Department

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In addition, the government is actively seeking partnerships, the intensity of which may vary – as may the precise composition of the network of actors – according to the policy intention concerned. The close partnerships that were forged in response to the increased influx of asylum seekers, especially with municipal authorities, will in any case be maintained. These include, for example, the national and regional coordinating bodies, and the Work and Integration Task Force. The recently launched Intragovernmental Programme for Central and Subnational Authorities merits special attention. The Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations informed the House about this programme on 14 February 2018. As already noted, it incorporates some of the policy intentions outlined in this letter.

¹¹ Postmes, T. et al., 'Draagvlak migratiebeleid' (Public support for migration policy), full text available in Dutch only, Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Justice and Security, 10 January 2018).