

Plan Einstein: Utrecht's Urban Experiment on Asylum Seeker Reception

Executive summary of Independent Evaluation

November 2019

The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad was an innovative solution to the issue of asylum seeker and refugee reception, conceived during the 2015-2016 refugee 'crisis'. The city government, benefiting from direct European funding, built a partnership with NGOs, social enterprises and educational institutions. Between November 2016 and October 2018, the project housed asylum seekers and refugees in the same complex as local young people in the district of Overvecht. It used co-learning, inviting residents from the neighbourhood to take courses together and engage in social activities in a shared social space. Courses in English and entrepreneurship were offered as subjects of 'futureproof' value, useful to participants' professional future regardless of the country they would ultimately reside in.

The co-housing and co-learning reception facility, known locally as 'Plan Einstein', aimed to develop asylum seekers' social networks with neighbours, while providing opportunities for participants to develop their skills, to enhance wellbeing and improve community cohesion in the neighbourhood. As such, the project aimed to engage with concerns from receiving communities, activate asylum seekers 'from day one', as well as reverse the negative spiral of boredom, anxiety, and worsening mental health that existing approaches to reception generate.

The research

A theory-based evaluation of the project was conducted, where researchers worked alongside the Plan Einstein partnership as the project unfolded. The evaluation sought to assess the project's effectiveness, benefits and early outcomes. Equally important was to generate insight into what worked and what worked less well for national government and localities across Europe to consider when rethinking asylum seeker reception. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, interrogating a range of quantitative and qualitative data. This report presents the findings of the evaluation on the project in Overvecht, and some insights into the scaling of the project as it continues nearby in Plan Einstein Haydn.

Results

The summary provides an overview of activities provided, outcomes that Plan Einstein contributed to, and observations on governance of the project, followed by recommendations for similar projects elsewhere.

The research involved:

1. Two face to face surveys of residents at 300 addresses near the centre (one year apart);
2. Two online surveys with the young people living at Plan Einstein (one year apart);
3. Monitoring process indicators e.g. numbers of participants on courses & in social activities;
4. Analysis of asylum seeker intake assessment data;
5. Evaluations of course activities,
6. 163 Interviews with all groups involved;
7. Participant observation in centre activities, events and meetings.
8. Additional data from the national agency for asylum seeker accommodation (COA) and the Work and Income department of the local government.

Plan Einstein Activities

Who participated in Plan Einstein?

- **296** asylum seekers and refugees from the adjacent Einsteindreef asylum seeker centre (ASC) took part in Plan Einstein activities. This represents **53% of the 558** adults who lived at the asylum seeker centre. Of the total population of the asylum seeker centre, 40.9% were from Syria, with 12.2% from Eritrea, and others from countries including Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Ethiopia.
- Initially a small group of 40, young, male asylum seekers lived at the asylum seeker centre from February 2017. The majority arrived from August 2017 and included many more families.
- The population of the asylum seeker centre was rather atypical. Approximately **60%** of asylum seekers housed at the centre had, or knew they would get a permit to stay in the Netherlands. This was a different population to that for which the project was conceived in the emergency context of early 2016.
- **53** young tenants lived in the complex, renting rooms in the building adjacent to the asylum seeker centre. **40%** of tenants responding to the survey lived in the Overvecht neighbourhood before.
- Between **40-50%** of course participants came from the neighbourhood, or elsewhere in Utrecht.

Plan Einstein Outcomes

Plan Einstein's theory of change stated that the project would create good relations in the neighbourhood, as well as deliver increased skills and connections and higher levels of mental wellbeing for asylum seekers and neighbourhood members taking part in the project.

What was delivered by Plan Einstein in Overvecht?

- **117 social activities** bringing asylum seekers, refugees, tenants and other neighbourhood residents into contact with each other.
- Flexible educational activities operating at different times:
 - **38 x 8-week classes in English**, with **558** class places and **281** unique participants.
 - **13 x 8-week classes in Entrepreneurship**, with **200** unique participants.
 - **A business incubation programme**, including workshops, courses, coaching and networking, reaching **229** unique participants.
- The centre engaged participants in broader initiatives like drama, music, Dutch language-learning, and higher education. It became a hub for external stakeholders.

Who delivered it?

A partnership comprising:

- The City of Utrecht local government
- Socius Wonen
- The Dutch Council for Refugees (VluchtelingenWerk West en Midden-Nederland¹) with Welkom in Utrecht (NGOs).
- Utrecht University's Centre for Entrepreneurship
- The VolksUniversiteit (People's University)
- Social Impact Factory
- University College London, University of Oxford and Roehampton University.

What results came from the project?

- There was good retention on courses. In the English classes, almost half (49%) of participants took a second course or more, indicating evidence of progression between levels.
- **18** people achieved advanced Cambridge certificates in English, a qualification of value for further study.
- By October 2018, there were **nine** business ideas in developed planning, some registered at the Chamber of Commerce. Most of these were from neighbourhood members (including several refugees living in the city).
- Participants commented on the high quality, enthusiastic and motivational teaching and coaching received in the Plan Einstein project. **89%** of respondents to course evaluations (both residents of the neighbourhood and asylum seeker centre) reported that they had improved their English speaking and listening skills. **74%** of respondents felt their networks had enlarged and networking skills had improved.

Key findings: good relations:

The research first examined how far relationships between asylum seeker and neighbourhood residents improved following the Plan Einstein project.

In the neighbourhood, research showed:

- Initially negative sentiments dominated public debate around the asylum seeker centre. However, this hostile narrative did not reflect the views of the majority once the centre opened. By Autumn 2017, **the attitude of the neighbourhood to the asylum seeker centre was moderately positive**. It remained so until the centre closed in October 2018. This finding is in line with other research, which shows it is common for hostility to occur before an asylum seeker centre opens, but resistance decreases once it is established.
- **Neutral or benign attitudes** at the neighbourhood level **stemmed from the absence of expected negative experiences**, rather than from close involvement in the centre or contact with asylum seekers there (see Jantina, in the box).
- **Most neighbourhood survey respondents did not actively seek the closure of the asylum seeker centre:** 14.9% were happy that the ASC was closing, 41.4% neutral and 43.7% negative (see Roos, in box).

Jantina, a Dutch neighbourhood resident in her late 20s said: 'So while it is 300 metres away, if it hadn't been for those leaflets, I wouldn't have noticed it. In that sense, my experiences are neutral, I don't really notice it that much'.

Roos, a Dutch neighbourhood resident in her 60s said about Plan Einstein's closure: '[It's] a waste of the money you have invested. Of the energy you have put in. And also of the neighbourhood. Because as a neighbourhood, you are being taken along in those innovation projects....For a moment you are in the picture, you are on the map. And then it remains the question whether that will still be the case'.

- **The ambitions to create Plan Einstein as a vibrant neighbourhood centre facilitating positive encounters between asylum seekers and neighbours were partially met.** Plan Einstein exceeded its targets to include 20% of non-ASC residents in classes. Engagement of the neighbourhood in Plan Einstein picked up over the course of 2017-2018, although in the broader neighbourhood, the survey shows that a minority attended and most people visited on occasion, rather than regularly. Many found the threshold of visiting an asylum seeker centre to be high. There was also relatively little time to build a community centre. As such, surveys show that Plan Einstein did not lead to a significant increase in contact at the level of the wider neighbourhood.
- **Plan Einstein attracted specific segments of the neighbourhood to courses and activities.** The initial intended beneficiaries of young people not in education, employment and training (NEETs) shifted, and many residents of the neighbourhood attending courses and activities had refugee or other migrant-background themselves. There were also some locals of Dutch origin, of whom many had prior interests in refugees.
- **Residents of the neighbourhood and asylum centre experienced the mixed courses as positive.** Sharing a goal in learning helped lead to some meaningful encounters (see Fatima, in the box).

Fatima, an asylum seeker in her twenties, from Syria said: 'We used to study together with other refugees and other Dutch people. All refugees and Dutch people who attended the course went together to the [Cambridge] exam. We felt that we were one group, although we are different. Although they were so different from us [...], the course gave us the chance to meet and interact together. I think it was a clever idea from people who work in Plan Einstein. The course was free, so people came. Sometimes we used to meet after the course to study together'.

Research with young tenants involved in co-housing showed:

- **Engagement by the tenants living on the Plan Einstein site was variable.** A small number of tenants were very active. The majority engaged with the project on a more incidental basis and some were not involved at all.
- **Contact with asylum seeker centre residents fluctuated.** In early 2017, contact was regular and easy. This was the period when equal numbers of asylum seekers, with similar characteristics to the tenants lived there (see Janneke in the box). After higher numbers of people, including more families moved in, contact decreased. Between 2017 and 2018, contact increased again, although tenants did not experience making contact with the same ease as in the early days.
- **Social contacts** between asylum seeker residents and neighbourhood residents (including tenants) **were characterized as neighbourly, convivial relations.** They had value at the time of the initiative, but endured less beyond the lifetime of the project.

Janneke, a tenant in her 20s, from the Netherlands said: 'Yeah, yeah, the first part [...]...Yeah I thought it was really fun. That was by far... For me, the project succeeded there. And that was... That was great in itself, because that made the rest... We can think back like oh yeah that first part went really well, so naturally, so organic, so nice, that it simply... Because you came home and somebody was smoking outside and then you had a conversation about the Quran or so'.

- The research **confirmed the vital importance of shared common, neutral and freely accessible space** (such as a kitchen, living room, workspace and outdoor space) with a welcoming atmosphere, for creating **meaningful social and professional encounters**. In the case of Plan Einstein in Overvecht, that neutrality and openness was achieved through having the space near but separate from the ASC, under the responsibility of the municipality, and managed by a social enterprise. It worked best following co-design with users. For much of the project, the indoor public space was closed, and participants noted this was a missed opportunity for people to begin to forge connections.
- **Co-housing in an asylum seeker centre complex meant ‘adjacent’ co-housing rather than mixed co-living**. The arrangement offered fewer of the conditions vital for meaningful encounters, such as equality in number, shared facilities (such as a shared entrance, and use of kitchens) to encourage habitual contact. The transience of the population was another barrier to contact: asylum seekers’ length of stay was around four months, whereas tenants’ average stay was eighteen months.

Key findings: Increased skills and connections to help with early labour market activation

Salman, an asylum seeker in his 20s from Iran said, ‘All these things that we found I did with the help of [my coach from Berenschot]. I had no idea [about planning to access a university course] It’s not something the average person knows anything about’.

Frans, Dutch neighbourhood resident in his 50s said, ‘Before I come in contact with the people of Plan Einstein, I was a little bit depressed. I could not find a job, everywhere you go ‘no you’re too old, too this, too that’. It’s not nice to hear that. It’s like you are with one leg in the grave, that is how I felt at that moment. So now it’s good, I have no depression anymore, every day I go out of my bed at seven o’clock’.

The research also examined whether, and how far, asylum seekers and local inhabitants had gained skills and knowledge from Plan Einstein. It found:

- **Plan Einstein helped participants make a ‘transition to transition’ into the labour market**. It equipped participants with English language and entrepreneurship skills. It also gave them confidence and insight into Dutch society and skills in team-working. Participants built connections with local business people. They received personal, frank advice on professional plans and business ideas. This helped participants understand Dutch systems and navigate unfamiliar procedures in a

Afwerki, an Eritrean man in his 30s, took only a few English classes, ‘because it was too difficult for me’.

Leilani, an Iranian woman in her 20s reported that many Iranians did not join the classes, ‘especially older men who already had children [...] they didn’t want to feel unconfident, so they didn’t talk’.

One employee of the business incubation strand pointed out they had learned lessons about telling everyone that, ‘they can be great and you can reach for the moon. Actually, the experience points out that sometimes, you can’t reach for the moon...since for example it is impossible for a refugee to go to a bank and ask for money.’

Faisal, A Syrian in his 20s said, ‘Two years in refugee camps, I could not learn Dutch. Now people ask me: ‘For how long have you been here?’ I say, ‘three years’. They say. ‘But your Dutch is not good. Why?’

new country (see Salman, in the box).

- **Entrepreneurship was attainable for some, but not all participants**. 60% of asylum seeker residents in their intake assessments expressed an interest in starting a business. In practice

however, it was faster and easier for neighbourhood participants to turn business ideas into a reality than for asylum seekers or refugees. Some of these benefited from the intensive help at Plan Einstein (see Frans, in the box).

- **Plan Einstein worked best for participants with already good levels of education.** The project specifically opted to make courses open to people regardless of differences in educational level, legal status, age, ethnicity, nationality and gender. However, some asylum seekers found it hard to take advantage of courses (see Afwerki and Leilani in the box). These included people with lower levels of education, language proficiency and experiencing a wide cultural distance to the Netherlands.
- **Almost a year after leaving Plan Einstein,** the qualitative research followed up 35 refugees. It found that **around half of them were actively engaged in making the transition to the labour market.** For a small group this was through work, and for most, it was through accessing formal education and volunteering. **The remainder were learning Dutch,** prioritising improving language skills in order to make a (satisfactory) start in the labour market. Some felt they had lost time at the asylum seeker centre during which they could have been learning Dutch (see Faisal, in the box).
- When the research ended in October 2019, we found **no statistically significant difference in dependence on welfare benefits between the Plan Einstein group of refugees** and the larger refugee population in Utrecht (cohorts 2017 and 2018 combined and controlling for gender, age and duration of being housed). However, most refugees were still in the process of civic integration (*inburgering*). Analyses from CBS (Statistics Netherlands) and the City of Utrecht show that more refugees start to leave welfare benefits after finishing civic integration (on average 32-33 months after being housed and beginning to receive welfare benefits). Only after that time would we expect any difference in welfare dependence between Plan Einstein refugees and others to emerge.
- **Evidence on the value of ‘futureproof’ education (relevant anywhere) is limited.** This is because at Plan Einstein in Overvecht, at that time, a majority of asylum seekers were likely to gain status. They expressed a desire to learn skills relevant to staying in the Netherlands, especially learning and intensively practicing Dutch language (see Faisal, in the box). Most

Wondimu, an asylum seeker from Ethiopia in his 30s referred to his time at Hengelo ASC as a place with ‘nothing’ there, where he spent all the time (day and night) sleeping.

Jamileh, an Iranian asylum seeker in her sixties, arrived at Plan Einstein ‘broken, tired and disappointed’. She credited learning English at Plan Einstein as something that ‘changed everything’, explaining ‘I couldn’t speak Dutch, when I learned English, I could talk to people, I could explain about myself.’

activities and classes in Plan Einstein were in English. Interviews with three migrants who were refused status still felt the skills would be useful for futures they hoped would still be realised in the Netherlands or other European contexts. At this point, they did not wish to consider returning to countries of origin so it is not possible to conclude on the utility of futureproof education in that context.

Key findings: Increased wellbeing

The evaluation research examined whether, and how far, asylum seekers (and neighbourhood residents) experienced greater levels of mental wellbeing. It found:

- **Most asylum seeker and refugee participants reported improved feelings of wellbeing** achieved through

the Plan Einstein project. They felt able to use their time more productively in contrast to the feelings of boredom and depression they experienced in other asylum seeker centres (see Wondimu and Jamileh's perspective in the box). Participants represent a biased sample, already self-reporting quite high levels of mental wellbeing. Some asylum seekers were too ill, anxious or depressed to participate in the first place.

- **Participants felt more connected**, as they gained understanding of Dutch people and their ways. They described feeling relaxed and safe in the physical spaces of the project and felt respected by personnel there. There was an additional outcome of **increased bonding social capital** created for some participants with other asylum seekers and refugees. Those relationships flourished particularly through having access to the living room (incubator) space.
- **At times, Plan Einstein enabled participants to contribute actively as co-producers**, rather than consumers or 'guests'. This increased feelings of reciprocity, equality and feelings of being valued. However, the project could have provided more opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees to share their educational, professional and experiential knowledge in co-produced activities.
- **One year on, research showed that participants experienced varied levels of wellbeing**. Many refugees in the qualitative sample remained reasonably optimistic about the future. This was related to their improved professional outlooks. Many other refugees, of roughly equal proportion, still felt their lives were on hold until they had stronger Dutch language skills. Once they moved into a house, their expectations that 'their lives could begin' were not fully met. Some participants missed Plan Einstein, as they experienced greater loneliness and fewer social connections once they moved into a house in Utrecht or in other municipalities.
- **The project's effects on participants' wellbeing were affected by its operation within the institutional confines of national law and policy**. Participants experienced long delays and uncertainty in the asylum procedure, and felt their agency was limited by living in rule-governed asylum seeker centres. Short stays and having to move suddenly between asylum seeker centres weakened the construction of fledgling social networks. Upon gaining status, 65% of Plan Einstein's refugees were housed away from the city of Utrecht and 55% away from region, in contradiction with the city's preference for local placement in their *doorgande lijn* (continuous line) policy. This made it difficult for relationships made with Dutch people in the project to endure, particularly since they were inhibited already by language barriers.

Key findings: Governance

Plan Einstein benefited from direct European funding, allowing for local experimentation. It brought together a network of organizations from different sectors, managed through the principles of equality and non-hierarchical organization, and supported by evaluation and research. The research found:

- **Funding to the local level directly from the European Commission (through the Urban Innovative Action scheme) was very important. It enabled, and gave legitimacy, to a network of local actors with different expertise, to innovate on asylum seeker reception.** Participants in Plan Einstein were able to benefit from a holistic approach, and a diverse and complementary range of skills and networks offered by a range of people, from different

organizations. The direct communication with the Commission also allowed for the project to adjust and to adapt to unforeseen circumstances.

- **The project management adopted a horizontal network arrangement based on equality, which was appropriate to the challenge. As a result of this arrangement, at times however there was a risk that partners and beneficiaries found the goals, role-expectations and coordination to be ambiguous.** The research found that requests for clearer leadership emerged when decisions needed to be made on those topics, and there were differing opinions in the partnership.
- **The project came under the spotlight** as a result of the European funder's appropriate emphasis on sharing and transferability, an interest in the project from researchers, as well as high media interest. This interest enabled **experimentation and adaptation, but could make it more difficult to highlight areas of the project in need of reform.**
- **Evaluation provided valuable information to feed into the project as it developed, facilitating adaptation.** However, some partners would have welcomed more opportunities for collective reflections on, criticism of, and revision to, the initiative as it evolved. The local government addressed criticisms by funding many new activities as the project went on, and sought to embed lessons learned at the new centre at Plan Einstein Haydn.
- **The local turn in managing asylum seeker and refugee reception has led to tensions with the national agency. These remained challenging to resolve.** At times, the role of the national agency COA was helpful to the initiative, and at other times inhibited the partnership fully achieving its goals. Cooperation became more difficult, especially as the concept of Plan Einstein transferred to another asylum seeker centre in the city. Furthermore, policy shifts and differences in ideology and organisational priorities between the local and national level have created tensions and affected Plan Einstein's scaling to another location across the city.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Amal, a woman in her 20s from Syria said:
'When you feel that there is someone who is trying to get you out of your bubble, you have the desire to go outside and try new things.'

Plan Einstein provides an emerging solution through local level cooperation to some key challenges in asylum seeker reception. Its promise lies in its attention to relationships of asylum seekers: with each other, with people in the neighbourhood that surround reception centres and within local and national business environments. **It recognises the power of connection**, and understands social and professional networking as a key facilitator of integration. There is much evidence to support the investment in skills as a way of improving outcomes, which Plan Einstein did. Plan Einstein however also placed equal weight on developing asylum seekers' (and some neighbourhood participants') confidence, know-how and feelings of

hope. **The innovation recognised those psychosocial aspects as necessities, not luxuries in helping participants make the 'transition towards the transition' to the labour market.** They proved important in facilitating the first steps towards activation and social integration: moving people from the dependency and isolation of 'knowing no-one' and 'having no idea', to 'knowing someone' and having 'some idea'.

The concept of Plan Einstein did not change key characteristics of asylum seeker reception. **National policy choices** of accommodating large groups of asylum seekers together, prohibiting the teaching

of Dutch language, as well as moving populations around and dispersing them beyond the city **inhibited some of the project's outcomes**. Yet in developing alternatives within those conditions, Plan Einstein potentially challenges the dominant rationale and its operational logics.

The next steps are to build on this emerging solution, and to extend it to its full potential. In doing so, the evaluation team offers some recommendations. These are based on what worked well and what could (and is starting to) be done in Plan Einstein Haydn and its surrounding neighbourhoods of Lombok, Kanaleneilnad and Oog in Al. The following suggestions are made to politicians, policy-makers and partners involved in building similar initiatives:

On good relations in the neighbourhood:

- **Be sensitive to, but not be overly driven by dominant narratives of hostility** emerging from the neighbourhood. Negative reactions to an asylum seeker centre may be initially dominant, but do not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the majority. They are also likely to subside once an asylum seeker centre opens. If the presence of the centre in the neighbourhood is too low key, this may mean losing opportunities to engage a silent, receptive, majority.
- **Be clear on the vision for the broader neighbourhood:** is it enough to maintain peace and have asylum seeker centre and neighbourhood populations 'rub along'? Or is the aim to build more substantial relations and create a vibrant community centre? If it is the latter, a strategy is needed, adapted to individual neighbourhoods, to lower the threshold for neighbourhood residents to visit a project such as Plan Einstein. Understanding the dynamics, needs and demographic compositions of both populations would help identify common ground (e.g. by engaging children and their parents from both the centre and the neighbourhood).
- **Think relationally rather than territorially to engage the neighbourhood.** Explore how the project can go beyond the project site and capitalize on existing spaces and sites of activity and connection, such as neighbourhood centres, local playgrounds, schools and sports halls. Consider how it can engage existing social networks in the neighbourhood. Give active and keen participants among neighbourhood residents, tenants, asylum seekers and refugees roles as 'change-makers' and neighbourhood ambassadors. This would help with the development of enduring relationships and enhance the benefits of the project in the neighbourhood even if the project site itself is closed.
- **Invest in comfortable, open, neutral common spaces** (like a living room area, study/workspace, kitchen area and outdoor space). These should be openly accessible spaces without restrictive rules and surveillance. They prove vital in creating conditions conducive for social and professional contact, enabling people to do things together collaboratively, as well as to meet and socialise. The centre's physical design should be really inviting for outsiders as well as to 'insiders' like asylum seekers and refugees, so that they want to come inside. Project managers should consider how the design and institutional environment of fences and car parks of asylum seeker centres might be adapted to become

inviting spaces. The shared spaces should be open beyond office-hours, during evenings and weekends.

- **Facilitate co-housing or adjacent housing of asylum seekers and refugees with tenants** with a similar composition and more equality in the size of both groups and living conditions. Provide access to shared space that allows for casual encounters (see above).
- **Give it time.** A project that sets out to create connections between people needs time for trust to develop and for reciprocal and equal relationships to grow. Plan Einstein was limited by a very constrained time-scale. If a time-scale for closure must be set, do so in terms of project duration rather than by giving a fixed end date, so that a delayed start does not limit the project's duration.

On increasing skills and wellbeing:

- **Be flexible in creating a diverse educational programme offer that fits the asylum seeker centre and neighbourhood populations.** Asylum seekers represent very diverse populations, with vastly different levels of education, skill, language competencies, demographic profiles and likelihood of gaining permits. The profile of centre populations will vary between locations and over time, so adaptability and flexibility is key. Responding to the needs of the population might require separate provision for particular groups at risk of exclusion. It might entail offering more practical skills and vocational training in addition to academic offers. Equally it might call for specialised teaching for (or by) highly-skilled participants. Be prepared to revise the programme if it is clear that populations would benefit from learning the national language. If offering this is politically sensitive, examine how the project can create its own informal opportunities to do so.
- **Develop opportunities for participants to co-design, co-teach or co-organize spaces, activities and courses.** This enhances reciprocity and helps bolster participants' feelings of self-determination and agency. Build a real 'community of practice' that draws former participants back to share experience and knowledge.
- **Extend support beyond participants' time at the centre:** Turning business ideas and labour market access into reality is a medium-term process, requiring extended support beyond the project's territory and time. Longer-term support helps to bridge the gap between the supportive environment of Plan Einstein and the harsh reality of the labour market that some refugees experienced. Follow-up assistance would help refugees who are making the transition maintain confidence in themselves. It would also be valuable in building the centre's community of practice and provide inspiration through examples of success.
- **Empower policymakers to address the vision upstream** on the inconsistencies between policies for asylum seeker reception and the labour market. Expose the contradictions between unstable housing, constant movement through large accommodation centres, dispersal of refugees far from the reception centres where they have forged connections, and proscribing early national language teaching, for early labour market and social integration.

On governance:

- **Develop ‘facilitative leadership’**, whereby leaders function as stewards and mediators of a network of partners. Their role includes enabling partners to reflect on and to discuss preferred outcomes. It also includes acting as catalysts in providing new ideas and ways of working and facilitate agreement of clear ground rules and processes to achieve them.
- **Consider how funders could shift their project reporting towards facilitating and capturing learning.** Build in opportunities to reflect collectively before project action begins. Expect reflection and self-appraisal at specific moments throughout a project to adapt and maximise its reach and effects. Use findings of evaluation in a structured way. Build reporting on outcomes of these times of collective reflection into the project’s reporting structures. This would encourage the self-criticism, reflective learning and adaptability that is vital for innovation, and support the cultural shift towards learning rather than accountability.
- **Create opportunities for regular contact of local policymakers at the national strategic level in order for local experiences to inform and influence policy.** There can be fractures in approaches between local and national government to the question of asylum seeker reception. These relate to their different priorities and organisational logics, reflecting the challenges involved in responding to asylum seeker reception as a ‘wicked issue’. This refers to where policy actors identify the problem in different ways and existing policy solutions have, so far, failed to resolve the challenge. The differences in perspectives are not easily resolved, and cooperative working remains a challenge. However, learning from experiences from local initiatives such as Plan Einstein is highly valuable, especially at moments where more flexibility is being built into the asylum system to respond to people’s needs. The evaluation recommends creating opportunities for regular dialogue, to enable mutual learning to occur.

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