A safe and healthy future? Epidemiological studies on the health of asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands

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Preface
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For various reasons, asylum seekers and refugees are considered to be a vulnerable group with respect to their health. However, there is still limited information on the distribution of health problems and risk factors among asylum seekers and refugees, in the Netherlands as well as in other countries. Insight into the health status of and risk factors for a population is a pre-requisite for developing policies and practices that promote their health.

The studies in this PhD thesis were developed and carried out in light of the epidemiological task of the Community Health Services for Asylum Seekers (MOA). This epidemiological task is comparable to the epidemiological task of municipal and regional community health services (GGDs) as laid down in the Dutch Public Health Act. As of 2000 the national-level component of this task for asylum seekers has been the responsibility of the Netherlands Association for Community Health Services (GGD Nederland).

To bring the epidemiological studies at an academic level, I have sought collaboration with the Department of Public Health at the Academic Medical Centre (AMC) of the University of Amsterdam. This collaboration has been the basis for this thesis.

Whereas the studies in this thesis provide data on asylum seekers only, we have extended the scope of this thesis to refugees. We have done so because the health status of asylum seekers is the precursor for the health status of refugees and because there is limited insight into the health of refugees in the Netherlands.

Chapter 1 starts with a short introduction on asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands, including their demographic profile and the health care provided to them. At the end of this chapter we describe the aims of this thesis and give an overview of the studies that are the main body of this thesis. Chapters 2 through 4 contain the scientific papers written about the respective studies. Chapter 5 starts with a summary of the main findings and a discussion of methodological issues. This is followed by overarching reflections, recommendations, and conclusions with respect to the distribution of diseases and conditions among asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands and risk factors that affect their health.