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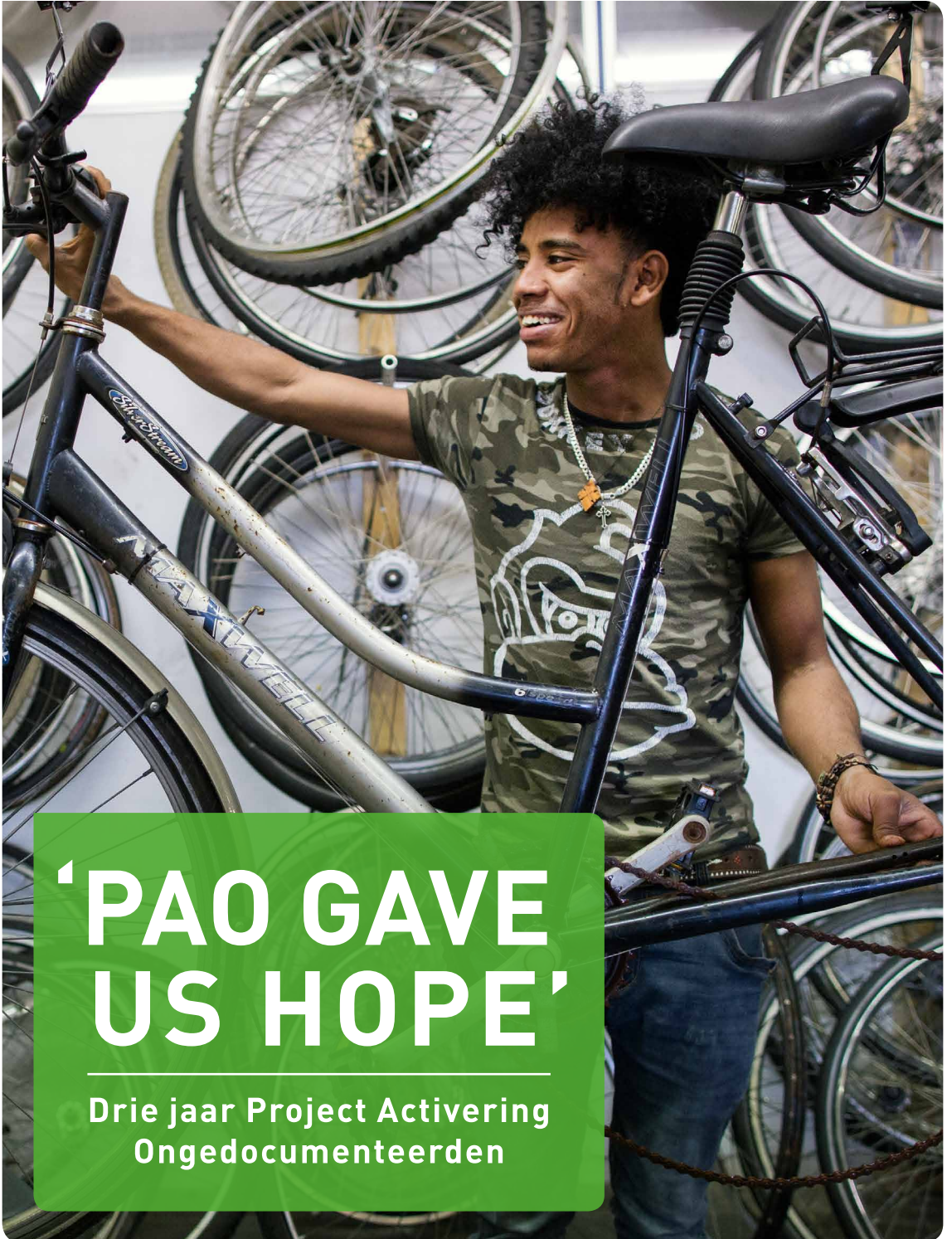
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'PAO GAVE US HOPE'

Drie jaar Project Activering
Ongedocumenteerden

The report you are about to read elaborates on the results of a wonderfully humane and socially important intervention in a badly ill field. It is about an intervention – against most but not all odds – to provide illegalised migrants in the Netherlands with a glimpse of hope for gaining back some of their self-esteem and a modicum of self-worth in a society that mostly casts them away as undesired people.

The term ‘illegalised migrants’ (or undocumented, as they are called in this report) underscores the political and bureaucratic process by which some noncitizens, who fail to obtain certain documents from the state authorities, are denoted an illegal status. The category thus includes visa over stayers, unauthorised migrants, and rejected asylum seekers. The one thing that all illegalised migrants have in common is that they are deportable according to a decision by the state. Consequently, they can also be interned – on administrative ground and not for any criminal act – for up to one and a half year in detention facilities.

Illegalised migrants therefore live in constant fear in Dutch society. Fear for their physical subsistence, for their mental health, for their freedom of movement. Illegalised migrants are treated as liars, parasites, and a “problem”. They are not only prevented from having a status but from being able to have a basic dignified life. Even the fact that many illegalised migrants endure living on the streets for years, without access to basic healthcare or minimum subsistence, is not an evidence for the authorities that these people simply cannot go back and are getting dismantled in front of our wide-open eyes and cold-hearted policies.

How much human misery is a good enough evidence for allowing a person “the right to

have rights” (to paraphrase Hannah Arendt’s daring question in the aftermath of WWII)? As members in Dutch society, we should all ask ourselves how we have arrived at this low point? How can one of the richest countries in the world allow such staggering manifestation of inhumanity to so evidently exist?

Luckily, our society is not only governed by the state but also shaped by the people who inhibit it. Some of these people not only disagree with state policies, but they also put their alternative views into practice. These alternative views are rooted in recognizing illegalised migrants as full human beings, who deserve as a basic and fundamental right – and not as a favor or as an exception – the possibility to learn, recreate, work and receive (medical) care, in the society where they live (sometimes for more than a decade).

PAO is an initiative committed to restoring a sense of a dignified life among illegalised migrants. It thus preciously provides hope. Not “false hope”, as claimed by some politicians and state bureaucrats who believe that “activating” illegalised migrants is contradictory to the final goal of deporting them from the Netherlands. PAO provides crucial hope to illegalised migrants and, not less importantly, it provides real hope to Dutch society. Hope for the possibility of rediscovering true solidarity with some of the most marginalised subjects in our midst. Hope that we help today illegalised migrants, and tomorrow other people in dire situations, not because we pity them or have compassion for their miserable lot, but because we believe in building and living in a just society that is profoundly humane at its core treatment of any human being.

Barak Kalir
*Associate professor of Anthropology,
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Colofon

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Het ASKV is een onafhankelijke organisatie die zich inzet voor de belangen van vluchtelingen zonder verblijfsrecht in Nederland.

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Het ASKV is bereikbaar van maandag tot en met donderdag tussen 10:00 en 17:00 uur



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voor sociale initiatieven

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dioraphte

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