

AUTUMN 2018

REAL PEOPLE, TRUE STORIES

REFUGEES FOR MORE
INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

DISCUSSION PAPER



This publication is part of Friends of Europe's Migration and Integration programme. In this discussion paper, refugees past and present share their personal stories and offer forward-looking, experience-based recommendations for improving integration around the world.

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FOREWORD



THEY TOLD US TO LISTEN – SO WE DID.

Europeans remain embroiled in a passionate debate over the European Union's policy towards refugees and migrants. Even though the number of refugees arriving in Europe is now significantly reduced compared to 2015, the intensity of the political conversation around the subject has not diminished.

The so-called “refugee crisis” continues to dominate media headlines and national debates, especially around elections. Far-right groups and populist politicians are still winning votes on the back of their anti-refugee rhetoric. The over-arching narrative, propagated by the xenophobic forces and an often-docile media, remains that refugees are a burden on Europe’s economy and societies, and that the new arrivals cannot – or will not – integrate.

But is anyone listening to the refugees themselves? Does the conversation on refugee policy include the voices of the newcomers? Do we take account of their needs, concerns and priorities?

This publication tries to do so. We set out to try and tell the real story behind the headlines. And the refugees we approached were more than happy to give us their recommendations on how to make societies more inclusive.

They told us they are starting their own businesses, engaging in charity and activism, learning the local language and throwing their hats into the political arena. In many different ways and despite the obstacles they face, the newcomers are proving that they can be active and valuable members of society.

These stories are not new and not limited to Europe. They are compelling and positive, reflecting the resilience, courage and determination of the newcomers. They also illustrate the resilience, openness and ability to adapt of societies around the world.

These stories need to be told – and they need to be heard. Not just by policymakers but by European citizens, the so-called “ordinary folk” who often go out of their way to create networks of solidarity for the refugees or are drawn to the xenophobic rhetoric of the populists.

At Friends of Europe, we believe that for Europe to flourish and thrive, the conventional and by now tired anti-refugee narrative needs to change. We must take ownership of this narrative back from those who continue to engage with the topic only through the lens of security and victimhood. We must broaden the debate, and to do so we need more than the perusal of facts and figures and cool-headed reflection.

Transforming the negative narrative into a positive one also requires including newcomers in discussions about their own futures as well as listening to and disseminating their personal stories, their hopes and aspirations, their failures and their successes, the challenges they face and how they deal with them. In other words, we must focus on the people behind the statistics.

In order to do this, we asked a select number of refugees to tell us their personal story. We also asked them to give us practical recommendations, based on their experience, on how to change and improve the current system. They told us it was important that refugees were able to work, that they should be given vocational training and be helped to start their own businesses.

They also focused on education and inclusion and pointed out that despite what we think, faith-based institutions can actually help integration. They insisted that it was important to change Europe's anti-refugee narrative and to listen and learn from refugees by including them in policy debates and reflections.

We are very impressed and moved by their contributions. Our contributors took time out of their busy schedules and opened up their hearts to us about their lives, before and after they became refugees.

We hope this publication inspires you as much as it has inspired us.

Shada Islam

Director for Europe and Geopolitics at Friends of Europe



RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations draw on the viewpoints and ideas presented by the authors of the articles in this discussion paper:

- 1.** Streamline the work permit process and recognise and reward companies which hire refugees to encourage a more diverse workforce.
- 2.** Offer vocational training opportunities in order to ease refugees' entry into the workforce.
- 3.** Encourage local communities to embrace newcomers as active citizens – as well as entrepreneurs and job-creators – in their community.
- 4.** Integration is not about forgetting where you are from – offer refugees opportunities to study in their mother tongues.
- 5.** Update education systems to emphasise diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities for all.
- 6.** Start early – teach children about their host countries' colonial pasts, historical migration trends and their civic responsibilities.
- 7.** Improve information on official and informal refugee assistance programmes and networks, and make sure that those tasked with helping refugees are up to speed on national and local bureaucratic procedures.

- 8.** Take a gendered approach to migration and integration and pay attention to the needs of those who are particularly vulnerable.
- 9.** Provide counselling and assistance to refugees who may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological ailments.
- 10.** Take a more integrated approach to welcoming and protecting refugees, including through cooperation with faith-based organisations.
- 11.** Listen and learn – include newcomers in policy debates about their own futures.
- 12.** Narratives matter – craft a more positive, realistic and fact-based narrative around migrants and refugees which does not stigmatise them as the ‘other’.
- 13.** Don’t shy away from a respectful, open and frank dialogue on values and traditions as well as other questions which concern locals and newcomers.



PART 1: WORK

Work is essential for refugee integration and a sense of belonging

I majored in Energy Engineering and Liberal Arts at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimania, the only liberal non-conservative Western university in the country. During my senior year, I was accepted into an exchange programme at the Interdisciplinary Leadership Academy in Greece where I continued my studies on economics, power and energy issues as well as leadership.

At the time of my graduation, Daesh took control over major cities in Iraq, and the country was in chaos. Due to my educational background, connections and networks, and my previous involvement in some religious and socio-political research during my studies, I was advised not to return to my country as people with similar backgrounds were being abducted, accused of treason, and ended up being killed. Additionally, what pushed me to seek protection outside my home country was the sectarian conflict. My parents, being elderly, supported the idea of seeking refuge and thus I decided to head to Northern Europe, to Finland in particular.

MAADH AL-SAMMARRAIE

From: Iraq

Living in: Finland

Profession: International Sales Manager at Fortum and Executive MBA Candidate at Hanken School of Economics

Upon my arrival in Finland in mid-August 2015, after submitting my asylum application, I was assigned a temporary shelter by the immigration services. I decided to take a more proactive role and seek another place to live, at least temporarily. I sought the help of local people and through social media was lucky enough to find a welcoming Finnish family to host me.

I also started to attend Finnish language classes, to make sense of the language and culture in order to establish more contacts. I focused mainly on creating a network in order to become involved in different groups and especially with business people, such as start-up communities. During one of the events I was invited to, I was approached by an export consultation start-up that was looking to hire international talents to promote Finnish companies abroad. I was offered an internship, and thanks to my language assets, I was assigned to promote Finnish machinery and IT products to the Middle East.

I then met a few Finnish entrepreneurs and joined them in establishing a hiring agency, Zcharity, with the purpose of attracting talented people from immigrant backgrounds to work in Finland. While working, I applied – and was accepted – to several master programmes in Germany but could not leave Finland due to the lengthy asylum application process which exceeded a year. I didn't give up, however, and in April 2016, I was lucky to be selected to be a part of the pioneering intensive, university-level business programme *Business Lead* in Finland, established to help refugees and

immigrants integrate into Finnish society through employment. The programme was geared to help us understand Finnish business operations as well as how to network and build strong ties in Finland. The programme participants were offered a chance to intern for two months at leading Finnish corporations, and I was lucky to be placed at Fortum, a leading clean-energy company. Eventually, my internship was extended and by the end of it, I was offered a job as an international market analyst. But it was only then – by mid-January 2017 and 18 months after having arrived to Finland – that I was granted asylum and received the permit to stay.

Through the process, I learned that only with hard work, commitment, openness and the will to integrate into one's new community, would people start to accept and recognise me as a normal human being. I am pleased that I had the opportunity to live with a welcoming Finnish family who supported me and offered me a place to live and continue a somewhat normal life, and I am grateful for opportunities, such as the integration programme in which I participated, as it gave me a chance to prove my credentials. From this experience, I have learnt that work is the key factor when it comes to integrating into a new community. Personally, I felt integrated only once I started to earn my own money and pay taxes and was able to contribute to my host community.

My recommendation to politicians is to construct and support integration programmes similar to *Business Lead*. Receiving work permits should be made easier as work is

key to helping people integrate and hence contribute to the economy. If I were a politician, I would recognise and reward companies that hire talents from refugee communities. Such companies would then serve as role models for other companies that strive for a more diverse work force.

It is also important to mix refugees and newcomers with the wider local community rather than segregating them in special venues. Local people, such as the elderly, should also be encouraged to engage with refugees by assigning one 'role model' of the local community to each refugee in order to guide them through the early stages of arrival in their new host country, thereby creating and strengthening a sense of inclusion and a community spirit.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Streamline the work permit process and recognise and reward companies which hire refugees to encourage a more diverse workforce.



Refugee initiatives need global recognition and support

I am a Congolese refugee in Uganda and have set up an organisation, YARID, which runs many activities such as football, English language courses and sewing which bring members of different communities together. In 2016, YARID was awarded the Oxford-based Ockenden Prize for Refugee Self-Reliance. We won the \$100,000 prize, despite competing against larger international NGOs, and the money has enabled YARID to improve its facilities and professionalise its management while creating new projects to foster refugee self-reliance in Kampala.

I come from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo but because of political instability and troubles in my region, my family and I were forced to flee to Uganda in 2008. We decided to settle in the capital city, Kampala, where we found many other refugees mainly from Congo but also from Rwanda, Burundi and Somalia. The total number of refugees living on their own was estimated to be at 37,000.

ROBERT HAKIZA

From: Democratic Republic of the Congo
Living in: Uganda
Profession: Co-founder of Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID), an organisation which connects urban refugees in Kampala to create livelihoods as well as space to form community networks

The majority of these refugees were women and young people, who were confronted with so many challenges, including language barriers, no access to education and lack of jobs. The Uganda Refugee Policy gives refugees the right to work as well as grants them freedom of movement. It also allows them to access public services, such as healthcare and education. Those who are in the refugee settlements receive a plot of land on which to build their new homes and grow crops.

But because of the high unemployment rate in the country, getting a job was very difficult. Back home, I had a chance to go to school and complete my studies in agriculture, so I tried to get a job related to my educational background but it turned out to be impossible. The only option was to learn a new skill but there weren't many opportunities around. This forced me to become innovative. I realised some Ugandans were interested in the French language, which I speak fluently as I come from a French speaking country. I decided to start providing French classes, and this helped me to start earning some money that I could use to support myself and my family.

Later on, my two colleagues and I started an organisation to support other refugees. Our organisation, named YARID, began as a conversation within the Congolese community. Refugees who move to the city are generally denied international assistance, meaning they are forced to become entrepreneurs to survive. Many face the added challenge of not speaking English, Uganda's main language. We asked

the community how they could organise themselves to respond to these challenges.

YARID's activities progressed from football and English language courses to training in sewing. Introducing football changed the energy of the unemployed youth and helped to bring members of different communities together. The free English classes helped empower people to engage with the Ugandan community, allowing them to get to know their neighbours and sell wares to locals hosting them. Vocational training programmes offered livelihood skills and, together with them, important opportunities for economic self-reliance. As YARID's work has expanded, it has included a growing range of nationalities: Congolese, Rwandans, Burundians, Somalis and South Sudanese. At the moment, there are four main projects, all selected and developed by the community, which support refugees in learning skills to create livelihoods as well as spaces to form community networks in Kampala.

Although Uganda has so many challenges of its own and its policies are not perfect, the measures in place are much more humane than in many wealthy countries.

In reality, what refugees expect when they flee is to find countries that will welcome them, protect them, help them to recover and start a new life. Among refugees, there are doctors, engineers, teachers, and so on; all of whom can make a useful and positive contribution to their host country if they are allowed to live productive lives. Research has shown that

refugees can be great entrepreneurs and their presence can create opportunities for new livelihoods for the local people as well, thus contributing to the economy as a whole. Refugees can contribute tremendously to the development of the host countries if they are given opportunities to do so, and there is no reason to continue considering them as a financial burden.

Developed countries should take the lead in this movement by providing protection to more people affected by conflicts than previously but also by increasing their support to the developing countries that host a big number of refugees. Community-driven interventions should be encouraged and put in place to make sure all the issues of refugees are addressed, and initiatives created by refugees need to be internationally recognised and supported.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Offer vocational training opportunities in order to ease refugees' entry into the workforce.



Peace and solidarity can be showed and shared in many ways

I was born and raised in Damascus, the capital of Syria. Since 1986, my family ran a chocolate empire that sold chocolate all across the Middle East and even to some European countries. Meanwhile, I pursued my passion for medicine and was very close to obtaining my degree. But then the war broke out, destroying my family's ambitions along with my own.

In the blink of an eye, we lost our house, our factory was bombed and family members were killed. In March 2013, my own life was put in danger when a mortar rocket almost hit my brother and me, injuring us both. That was the wake-up call that forced us to leave Syria the very next day: we knew that we didn't want to become just numbers in a death toll. We loved Syria but we wanted to support our country from abroad, we had no other choice. In the process, we lost our sense of identity.

For three years, we lived in a refugee camp in Lebanon where there was little room for hope but plenty of room for frustration. Our luck changed when our family was invited to Canada, sponsored by the Antigonish community. Nova Scotia quickly became a new home for us and allowed us to

TAREQ HADHAD

From: Syria

Living in: Canada

Profession: CEO of Peace by Chocolate

rebuild our passion and continue the work we once loved. We immediately felt that our community believed in our ability to rebuild ourselves and our lives.

Contrary to our own expectations, it only took us two months to rebuild our business. The despair and uncertainty that had been letting me down in the refugee camp were quickly replaced by the motivation and inspiration that had always ignited my entrepreneurial spirit. It was this spirit that influenced us to create something remarkable and unique that could show everyone the potential immigrants can bring to their new communities.

In early 2016, we created *Peace by Chocolate* with the aim to share a taste of peace with each piece of homemade chocolate. It may sound strange, but I was motivated greatly by my background in medicine: both chocolate and medicine have the goal of making the world a happier and less painful place, and both require skills that bring people together instead of tearing them apart.

We created the ‘Peace’ bar which comes in over 20 different wrappings, each displaying the word ‘peace’ in a different language. We also created slogans like ‘One Peace Won’t Hurt’ and ‘Peace Is Beautiful in Every Language’, to remind customers of our backstory and how much we have been through in the last several years to make these little pieces of joy reach their hands.

By September 2016, our story had begun to reach parts of the country we could have never

imagined. Even Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was moved by our story and during the United Nations Leaders’ Summit on Refugees and Migrants that month, he delivered a speech in which he told the world how we had rebuilt our life and business in Canada. Our family’s story went viral, and against all odds, I became the face of the new Canadian Syrians.

I believe that chocolate has been the key ingredient of my integration in Canada, and thanks to chocolate, we have been able to give back to our new community, from offering jobs to locals to sharing new methods. We even donated some of our profits to the Canadian Red Cross when we witnessed the terrible wildfires in Fort McMurray which forced many families out of their homes in 2016. We know that devastating feeling and felt that we needed to help our new fellow citizens.

Newcomers must be flexible, acknowledge the risks and never take any resources available for granted. I believe that it is an immigrant’s responsibility to speak out and share one’s ideas when they arrive at their new home: no one will come knocking at your door to ask what plans you have. One has to be open and give integration a chance.

At the same time, I would love to see more diverse resources for new immigrants to prosper. There are some resources out there for sure, but they are sometimes almost too abundant in some fields while too scarce in others. Governments should acknowledge that it’s important for the country to grow at the same pace in both metropolitan and rural

areas. A fair distribution of newcomers in their new communities is crucial for the sustainability of small towns.

Being an immigrant and starting your own business is not always easy but once the ideas start rolling, things can become clearer. If there's one piece of advice that I can give to any immigrant entrepreneur, it would be my favourite quote: "No one can go back and start a new beginning, but everyone can start today and make a new ending."

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Encourage local communities to embrace newcomers as active citizens – as well as entrepreneurs and job-creators – in their community.



PART 2: EDUCATION

Being open to dialogue is crucial if we want to fight hate speech and racism

In 1992, when I was eight, my family's life changed completely. After the regime change in Afghanistan, a new bloody war broke out. At the time, our family was living in Moscow where my father served as a diplomat. We had left Afghanistan when I was five and suddenly we knew there was no going back. We were now refugees.

Finland granted us asylum, and we were sent to the city of Rovaniemi. It was cold and dark. The beginning of our life in Finland was far from easy, as we didn't know the language and knew very little of the Finnish culture. But we quickly found a Finnish friend, an elderly woman, who was a great help to our family and taught us everything about daily life in Finland, making our integration so much easier. Soon after, we moved to Helsinki but she still stayed in our life and came to visit us. I wish every refugee family would have the same support; I have often wondered how we could have survived without her.

NASIMA RAZMYAR

From: Afghanistan

Living in: Finland

Profession: Deputy Mayor of Helsinki
and European Young Leader (EYL40)

Life was still a struggle for my parents, however. The language was difficult and they could not find jobs. My father had been in a very high position in Afghan politics and my mother was a journalist before I was born. They experienced something that I think is very typical to first-generation refugees: they thought their lives were already lost, so they wanted to give everything to their children. My father had taken us to Finland, because he thought it was safe and could offer his children the best possible education and future. Our parents supported us and really wanted us to succeed in our lives. For me it was crucial that my family always treated us children equally – not all Afghan girls are as lucky.

After graduating from high school, I worked at NGOs. My work with immigrant women was acknowledged in 2010, when I was named Finnish Refugee Woman of the Year. And that's where my path to politics began: a year after this recognition, I decided to run for the Finnish Parliament. I was very close to being elected, but it wasn't my time yet. I didn't let this discourage me and got into politics anyway, working as a parliamentary assistant to a member of parliament. In 2012, I was elected to the Helsinki City Council and in the 2015 parliamentary elections, I became the first Finnish member of parliament with a refugee background.

It was a big day for my whole family: 23 years after we had arrived to a cold and strange country, the Finnish people had elected me to represent them. That was more than any of us could have ever dreamed of. In spring 2017, I

decided to leave the parliament, however, as I was offered an opportunity to become the Deputy Mayor of Helsinki, in charge of the Culture and Leisure Division. Now I have more concrete ways to make people's lives better, including the increasing number of immigrant newcomers in Helsinki, to whom, I feel, I have a big responsibility to be a good example.

Nevertheless, it isn't only about being an example, but about the concrete things we do in politics to make the integration easier. So far, Helsinki has been successful in fighting segregation thanks to our progressive housing policy. To maintain social cohesion, it is very important that all the neighbourhoods are diverse and equal, so that different kinds of people can meet each other in daily life. That is where integration starts: in day care and schools; in parks and streets. After the 2015 influx of refugees, the city of Helsinki established a Skills Centre, which has been a success. The training and services provided by the centre are intended for immigrants who have been granted a residence permit or the right of asylum. Everyone completes a personal evaluation to find out what kind of training they need to get into labour markets. An impressive number of applicants have found a job or a traineeship.

Learning the language is also key when integrating into a new society. That is why it is so crucial to offer language courses and education to newcomers. I highly appreciate the Finnish school system where everyone is entitled to study in his or her own mother tongue, as it is necessary to know your own

language properly to be able to learn new ones. This gave me a strong basis for studying, and I did pretty well in school after learning Finnish. The Finnish library system was also an important factor in my integration and language learning. I will never forget the feeling when I got my library card – it was my very own thing and it opened a new world to me.

Sometimes even learning the language and getting a job is not enough, however. We need to be able to change the attitudes and respond to the difficult question: how can we make our societies more open to diversity? I believe public discussion is the key. We need to fight hate speech and racism with legislation, but also be open to dialogue with those who might be afraid of change.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Integration is not about forgetting where you are from – offer refugees opportunities to study in their mother tongues.



The way we talk of ‘integration’ will lead to segregation, not inclusion

I left Syria in August 2012 as there was no other choice. I had friends in Austria and that is why I ended up in Vienna. At the time, I had no idea what the words ‘refugee’, ‘asylum’ and ‘integration’ meant.

During the first year after getting asylum, I was busy learning the German language and looking for a job. However, I had zero intentions of integrating myself in the new society I was living in, and frequently asked myself why I would need to integrate. I didn’t even know what integrating meant.

After 18 months of hard work invested in learning the language, making new friends and exploring a new country, journalists started contacting me. They wanted to hear more about the Syrian revolution and the factors that had helped me integrate in Austria. That was my first concrete exposure to the world of ‘integration’. Before that, I had thought I already was part of the society, as my friends never asked me to integrate: we were simply all equals living in the same place, yet sharing different experiences.

TAMIM NASHED

From: Syria

Living in: Austria

Profession: Policy Officer on Refugee Inclusion at the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

For me, ‘joining’ the world of integration felt like a burden, enforced by governments, NGOs, public institutions and other key players. I say enforced because it felt like I was sent from one place to another with the argument that certain projects or programmes were designed for people like me – people who are refugees, because refugees have special needs. It’s moments like these when you realise that you belong to a minority and are treated differently from any other individual who simply wants to learn a new language, start a new job and settle down in a new country. It’s almost like you are meant to stay behind and enjoy the assistance offered by the superiors. I still struggle with this myself, while policymakers and NGOs might consider me a success story.

For these reasons, I believe that refugees should seek advice from friends, service providers, language institutes or any other relevant sources that could help them settle down in a new country, as many civil society actors are making great efforts to support newcomers. Exclusive programmes or integration courses designed just for refugees lead to segregation instead of inclusion and can neglect newcomers’ different backgrounds, including the fact that those fleeing wars may need additional support to overcome trauma and health issues. Refugees easily find themselves obliged to follow certain paths or make certain choices, imposed by governments, and this leads to the creation of a new second-class society. We live in a time where ‘integration’ has become a burden on ‘refugees’ instead of being a solution.

In order to live in inclusive societies, governments have to embrace diversity and integrate it into the human rights discourse. This can happen through education and fighting discrimination. We need education systems that teach diversity and emphasise equal opportunities for all, and for this reason, policymakers should think strategically and modify the current education systems. At the moment, political agendas are polarising European societies and steps in the right direction can be very quickly overturned when there is a change in government.

Once diversity is seen as an essential part of the society, we will see future generations take diversity for granted. These new generations will not discriminate because of nationality, race, colour or any other reason. Future teachers, policymakers and public agencies will not practice discrimination because they have grown up in a country that embraces difference, and they will put together policies that affect everybody in the country, not only refugees. This might sound like a dream but for refugees, this is the dream: not being referred to as someone who needs specific care.

My advice to ‘refugees’ is to fight for changing the narrative and the way people think about ‘refugees’ and ‘integration’, because these two expressions have become misleading. ‘Integration’ in its current form will lead to segregation instead of inclusion. We have to fight stigmatisation, and with the current terminology, this is not possible because it highlights the fact that we belong to a

minority and that we are not part of the society we live in.

I have learned that a refugee should never feel incapable of pursuing his or her dreams. And this is the message I will keep fighting for.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Update education systems to emphasise diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities for all.



It's not a refugee crisis – it's a crisis of shrinking humanity and inequality

I am head of a charity called Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales which helps ethnic minorities, including refugees and asylum-seekers, to integrate, participate and be a valued part of Wales. I was thirteen months old when my parents were forced to flee Chile with me, escaping Augusto Pinochet's murderous regime. My dad was amongst the tortured and imprisoned, but he managed to escape.

We arrived in the United Kingdom, thanks to generous support from the World University Service and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and were welcomed no less generously by the people of Wales and Swansea. Growing up, I knew that we were refugees, but the word – in my young mind at least – did not have the negative connotations it sadly does today. In fact, I always felt lucky, privileged even, to have been welcomed and given a safe place to live. Yet listening to the tales of my parents and their Chilean friends, I did feel a burning sense of injustice and desire to make things alright.

ROCIO CIFUENTES

From: Chile

Living in: United Kingdom

Profession: Director of the Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team Wales, a charity which provides culturally sensitive and holistic support to ethnic minorities, including refugees and asylum-seekers

But we were lucky: we were given enough financial support so that my parents could complete the degrees they had started in Chile, and then go on to get good jobs and a nice enough house. I went on to attend the University of Cambridge myself and experienced that accelerator of social mobility. We ‘integrated’, I guess.

Importantly, the anti-refugee and anti-immigrant narrative had not yet taken hold of Europe. Instead, Europe, including Wales, was a self-proclaimed bastion of civilisation and moral high ground, offering protection of human rights and welcoming those fleeing from regimes disregarding these. On the side of economics, the idea of there not being enough jobs, houses, space or resources to cope with such an ‘influx’ of refugees had also not yet taken root.

And narratives matter. The way we explain and understand the world has an impact on how we feel about it and act within it. As a refugee child in Wales, I never felt like a victim; I felt fortunate and privileged. The people around me did not feel or at least act as if my family or I were a burden or a drain on their resources. Rather, they felt and acted as if the Chilean community in Swansea enriched their lives with their food, their parties, their music and their warmth.

Things could be the same today, but sadly, they are far from it. Instead, we are presented with images of refugees in endless streams queuing to get into ‘Fortress Europe’, or more tragically losing their lives in unsuitable boats

trying to reach Europe’s shores. More and more countries, emboldened by emergent populism, have declared their borders closed and their seas ‘no rescue’ zones. They have closed their hearts and their homes to these people while remaining open to (rich) tourists, (white) football fans or (wealthy) investors.

In my view, to change the situation for the better, we need to understand and address these root causes. People fleeing terror, brutality and poverty are merely symptoms of these problems. Our challenge is to reimagine our entire planet as one community, in which resources are more fairly distributed and the most vulnerable amongst us protected; where we all have the freedom to move around, just like the most privileged amongst us already do; and where we can be sure of our entitlements to and the protection of our human rights.

I am 41 years old today and head a charity which helps newcomers to become valued members of Welsh society. I still live in Swansea, as do my parents and my brother. I have a Welsh husband and two Welsh-Chilean children. It sounds like a story with a happy ending, and it certainly should be, but I am worried about what the next chapter will be.

I am worried when I hear refugees described as rats, allowed to drown, and migrants as animals, their children in cages. These people are being dehumanised while others are encouraged to hate and blame them for their unrealised dreams. Children in Wales are not being taught our colonialist past, our shared humanity, human rights, or even how

to vote. Over one third of children in Wales live in poverty, and with rising housing prices and shrinking pensions. For the first time, children born today face a poorer future than their parents. We need to invest more in education and awareness-building, if we want to counter this trend and make a positive difference.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Start early – teach children about their host countries' colonial pasts, historical migration trends and their civic responsibilities.



PART 3: INCLUSION

Living in fear because of love is not right

Born in Maputo, Mozambique, an only child in a conservative family, I left my country in 2013 because of my sexual orientation. Growing up in a place where the LGBT population is discriminated against is difficult: homophobia is a form of violence that changes how people see the world. It makes people – me included – hide their true identities for a long time.

Ever since I was a teenager, I knew I was not "normal" and that I liked women. However, I had no idea of what homosexuality was, because no one ever talked about such issues. I have always been a reserved person, as a result of the prejudice I faced when I got to know myself and affirm my sexual orientation. People complained about the way I dressed and walked and that scared me, so I decided to isolate myself. Life was hard when I was young, because I was aware of the consequences I could suffer if I were to present myself as a lesbian. I was rejected from college and jobs several times and endured humiliation from my own family.

LARA LOPEZ

From: Mozambique

Living in: Brazil

Profession: Intern at *I am a Refugee*, a social project connecting refugees to jobs in the private sector

That is why I decided to leave for Brazil: I wanted to guarantee my rights as who I am, without having to live in fear or with the idea that I am doing something wrong simply because of who I love. I know I am not alone on this journey.

I thought I would find rejection in Brazil as well, so for the first two years I didn't create bonds with anyone. Yet being in a new country helped me because I was able to express all the pain I had suffered. While there are hate crimes against the LGBT population here too, I feel safer because there are laws against this. I can demand my rights and say what I think. In Mozambique, I was always the one who was blamed because people believed my sexual orientation is not in keeping with family laws and morality.

When I arrived in Brazil, finding a job turned out to be a challenge, because I did not have the required documents and I needed to revalidate my diploma. After getting the necessary documents – which took some time - I started job hunting. Doing it alone was tough, so I sought help from Caritas, an organisation that assists refugees in Brazil.

I started as a maid, which proved to be a big challenge as I had no previous experience in this type of work. Nevertheless, I took the job because I had bills to pay. I also worked in administration, searched for other job opportunities and realised that in order to achieve my goal – to open my own company – I would have to study more. So I went to college and today I am graduating

in Management Information Technology while interning in the field of people management in a São Paulo company called *I am a Refugee*, a social project that aims to end prejudice and that links refugees to jobs in the private sector. I am in charge of bringing in refugees and registering them in our database – highly gratifying work because when I arrived, I wished someone could have done the same for me.

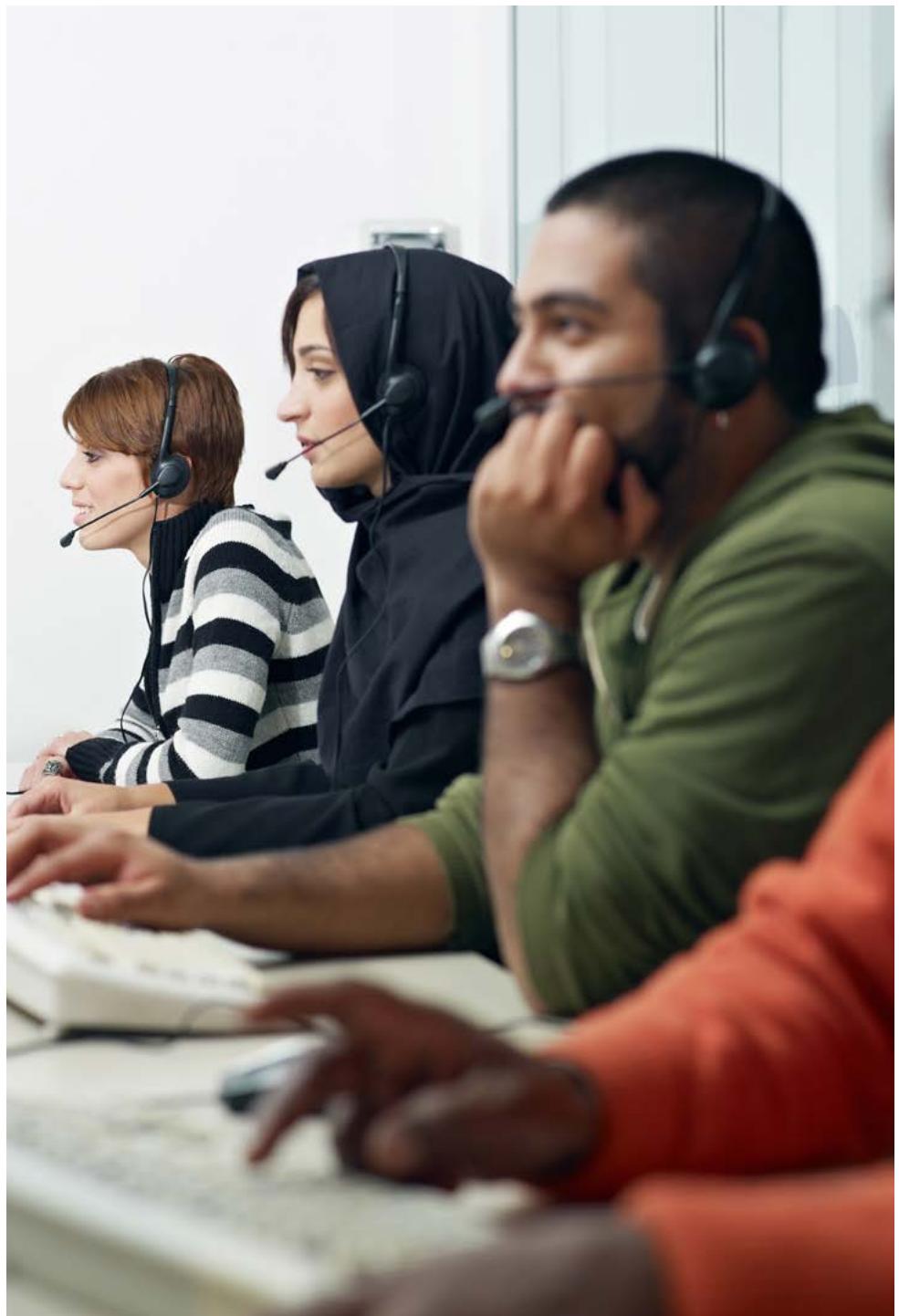
When I think about the integration process in Brazil, I believe there is a lot that can be done to improve things. For instance, the government could better prepare those who assist refugees so that they can really provide practical and administrative help. One problem is that there are companies that do not recognise the protocol – the Brazilian document given to asylum-seekers – as a valid document, even though it is. Revalidating diplomas could also be less expensive and less time-consuming. Access to university education should be more comprehensive and include asylum-seekers as well as those who have refugee status because the process of recognition of diplomas can take more than three years.

Being a refugee is difficult everywhere but it is a journey which is also filled with inspiration, courage and resilience. Ever since I moved to Brazil, I have learned to look at life from a new perspective: no one can make me feel ashamed of who I am or my personal choices. Everyone can live equally, as long as we know how to respect each other. Today, I can tell people about my experiences and express

my pain because I could not be who I am in my own country. Maybe one day I will also achieve my biggest dream of raising a family of my own.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Improve information on official and informal refugee assistance programmes and networks, and make sure that those tasked with helping refugees are up to speed on national and local bureaucratic procedures.



Europe's gender-blind asylum system must adapt to challenges facing refugee women

I left Algeria with my two toddlers, pregnant with my third child, in 2003 to join my journalist husband who had claimed asylum in the United Kingdom following an assassination attempt. As a professional woman myself – a scientist – I had already witnessed the departure of hundreds of colleagues who had fled after the Algerian army cancelled the country's first post-colonial election in 1992. What followed was a decade of violence, torture, mass murder and disappearances. The exodus of so many professionals was one of the many distressing events in Algeria at the time.

Once I arrived in the UK, I met two Algerian women who had also been 'dispersed' to South Wales under the asylum system. Unlike me, they both held PhDs from UK universities and had gone back to Algeria after finishing their studies, being later forced to return to the UK. Despite their prior experience, they were both struggling to adjust and rebuild their professional lives due to difficulties in the asylum process they were caught up in. I was luckier because I was recognised as a dependent of a political refugee.

LATEFA NARRIMAN GUEMAR

From: Algeria

Living in: United Kingdom

Profession: Academic at the University of East London Department of Social Sciences, Media & Cultural Studies

My husband and I finally gained refugee status in July 2004 – and I was finally able to think about how to rebuild my professional life. At first, I considered returning to my original field of non-destructive testing, but an old academic friend working at a UK university warned me that it would be impossible. My anger at the asylum process that I had experienced first-hand and had watched so many others struggle with, coupled with a feeling of compassion for other refugee women, particularly those who are subjected to the detention and removal process in the UK, motivated me to volunteer at the Swansea Bay Asylum-seekers Support Group and set up a refugee women's support group in the Swansea area.

Using my knowledge in technology and computer science, I worked for the Adult Education Department at Swansea University teaching migrant women. To add theory to my activism and personal experience, I decided to take a master's degree with a focus on gender and forced migration, and following this, with financial support from the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics, I gained a PhD, including an investigation into the networks formed by professional Algerian women who fled the 'Black Decade'.

The findings from my postgraduate research showed that once women have negotiated the gender-blind asylum system in Europe, many of them face yet further obstacles to rebuilding their lives and careers - although 78.5% of the participants in my study have now entered the labour market in their host countries. For many of them, it was necessary

to re-establish their academic or high-profile careers to regain their lost sense of identity. The survey revealed that 65% of them had to re-qualify in order to enter the labour markets, while some wanted to perfect their knowledge, change careers or join professional networks. Those who now live in the US, Canada and the UK explained that their Algerian diplomas were not recognised, and as a result, many had to start their higher education from zero or re-qualify in another field.

As a result of the experiences in my own journey, and as a refugee academic who is actively involved in refugee and migrant issues, I understand the importance of access to further and higher education. I'm a leader of the Research for Action and Influence project at a London-based charity that consists of designing and delivering a course aimed at enabling refugees and migrants to gain the skills and confidence they need to research issues affecting their communities. This involves teaching research, presentation and advocacy skills. I also work as a visiting lecturer on the Open Learning Initiative course for newly arrived asylum-seekers that aims to introduce them to higher education in the UK. Both of these courses offer participants the opportunity to discover the skills and knowledge they need to negotiate the pathways to lifelong learning and adequate employment in their adopted countries.

According to established research, the mentally traumatising journey into asylum requires resilience and resourcefulness. And indeed, women participants in my own

research demonstrated these personality traits. It would have been easier for them, however, if their gender and cultural background had been taken into consideration by the relevant authorities.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Take a gendered approach to migration and integration and pay attention to the needs of those who are particularly vulnerable.



Creating conditions for economic activity brings long-term benefits

I refer to it as the black day in my life. The morning started just like any other for me in Afghanistan, filled with things to do from my busy schedule as a CEO. It was midday when things changed: I was shot by the Taliban and was immediately evacuated abroad the afternoon of that same day. It happened so quickly and yet it changed my life forever.

When I was attacked, I was the Founder and CEO of a large microfinance network in Afghanistan that helped thousands of Afghans create self-employment opportunities by starting their own small businesses. The network also helped farmers grow crops like saffron which allowed them to move away from the alternative of growing opium. Most importantly, we helped Afghan women – who make up 50% of Afghanistan's population – start and run their own businesses, such as weaving rugs, an activity they could engage in from the comfort of their homes.

MAHIR MOMAND

From: Afghanistan

Living in: Australia

Profession: CEO of Thrive Refugee Enterprise, a company providing micro-finance and business support to refugees and asylum seekers in Australia

By giving people tools to create employment opportunities, we were throwing a spanner in the works of the Taliban, as they had less options for recruitment, and with farmers growing saffron, their sources of revenue were cut. By helping Afghan women to gain economic ground, we were also attacking Taliban principles. For this, not only was my life endangered but 17 of my colleagues were killed.

When I arrived in Australia, I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which took a toll on my life. The close care of my new Australian friends helped me to recover and integrate, albeit slowly. They supported me emotionally, guided me as I battled with my PTSD and were there for me even with the small things, like finding accommodation and attending cooking classes, as I had never cooked in my entire life.

My story is that of a lucky refugee: of one who finds a job at the very start of their arrival and as a result connects with people. However, the absolute majority of refugees in Australia, Europe and North America face social and economic isolation upon arrival in their host countries. Many refugees don't have family and friends with them, they may not know the language of their new home and, just like me, they may be going through episodes of trauma. In addition to the language barriers, the individualism of western cultures also means that there is little interaction between locals and refugees.

From the economic perspective, despite being highly experienced professionals such

as doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs and pilots, refugees often face economic isolation as employers prefer local employees with experience in the host country. A vicious circle indeed as how can a person gain experience if no one employs them in the first place? It is a catch-22 situation. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, only 31.7% of refugees in Australia are employed, and many of those who are not employed must rely on welfare benefits to survive.

Troubled by this idea of isolation, I was fortunate to find an opportunity to partner with some of Australia's well-known business people and large corporations, pooling together our resources and establishing a unique microfinance organisation called Thrive Refugee Enterprise. Its unique organisational model has been developed thanks to some of Australia's biggest corporations, which are also socially conscious and put in a fair share of their support. This is a somewhat new approach to helping refugees.

Thrive helps people with refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds to integrate into Australian society and economy. By starting their own small businesses, they integrate more easily into the social fabric of their host countries because they get to interact with their customers, suppliers and other people. They learn the new language, norms and culture of their new country. As a result, they become "economically active" and financially self-reliant which makes them less dependent on benefits.

I believe creating conditions for this type of economic activity is the best way to integrate newcomers and refugees. Through economic activity and inclusion in labour markets refugees become physically and mentally active, socially integrated and economically supportive of their host countries. There are various unique and proven ways to make this happen, whether it's through corporations, governments, citizens or a combination of these. Refugees can also help to fulfil societal needs in countries with aging populations and low fertility rates. This is the case in Germany and Australia, for example.

Integrating refugees would not only help meet the potential labour shortage but would also ensure that in the future, there will be enough working people per retiree. We shouldn't forget that refugees are not only the labour force of today but also that of tomorrow.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Provide counselling and assistance to refugees who may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological ailments.



A faith-inspired approach to welcoming and protecting refugees

I'm currently CEO of Islamic Relief Worldwide, the world's largest independent Muslim humanitarian charity, established in the UK in 1984. My own experience as a child refugee informs my work. When I was 13, my family fled our home in Eritrea, because of the war resulting from the independence movement that started in 1963. My father went first and was successful in travelling to Ethiopia and then to Saudi Arabia. Later on, I travelled with my mother, sisters and brothers to Sudan, and I remember how terrifying the experience of leaving Eritrea was, not knowing if the rebels at the border were going to allow us to leave or where we would end up.

In Sudan I had to rapidly learn a new language as the education system was in Arabic, and my poor grasp of the language affected my ability to learn and was a significant barrier to overcome. After a while in Sudan, we were able to join my father in Saudi Arabia, and as my Arabic skills improved, life became easier.

NASER HAGHAMED

From: Eritrea

Living in: United Kingdom

Profession: CEO of Islamic Relief Worldwide, the world's largest independent Muslim humanitarian charity

By the age of 20, I had also lived in Libya and Egypt, and my family had relocated to the United Kingdom. I feel fortunate that, unlike many refugees today, we were able to stay safe and together as a family throughout the process of moving countries multiple times.

One of the most difficult things we faced was the cultural differences and the lack of information on where refugees could obtain assistance. The information we received was second-hand and not always accurate. In the UK, my first support were my relatives and people from the Eritrean community; then the Central Mosque in London where I was able to make friends and receive advice and guidance. It was also an opportunity to offer my prayers and improve my knowledge of Islam.

I started my career as an IT trainee in the UK, advancing to head of the technical department before I was drawn to work for Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) after coming across their campaign to support refugees in Sudan. I was inspired by my own experience of being a refugee to help those who were going through a similar challenge in their lives. In 1993, when I started at IRW in the IT department, the organisation only had around 15 employees, but it was growing rapidly and IRW now has over 3,000 employees globally.

In those early days there were many opportunities to take on different roles in IRW and develop new skills. Over the intervening 20 years, I have worked in a variety of roles and helped to successfully launch the commercial arm of IRW, which manages IRW's retail

charity shops and clothes recycling business. I also played a key role in establishing the organisation's Humanitarian Academy of Development, which provides training in aid and development. My experience in the organisation, combined with gaining an MBA, gave me the confidence to apply for the CEO role when it became available in 2016.

One of the main issues IRW addresses is the huge number of refugees and internally displaced people in countries such as Jordan, Kenya, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. In 2017 we invested £56m to support six million refugees and internally displaced people across 26 countries.

My background as a child refugee and subsequent decades working in the humanitarian sector have given me a unique perspective on the problems faced by refugees today, most of whom are from Muslim countries like myself. The scale of the refugee problem is daunting and much greater than when I was a refugee, with over 65 million people currently displaced by conflict and poverty. While some countries – in both the Middle East and Europe – have made great efforts on an individual basis, overall there is simply not enough being done to address this terrible situation.

National governments that have the means to do so need to urgently take a more integrated approach to welcoming and protecting refugees, and faith-based organisations such as IRW have a key role to play in this. Islam has a long-standing tradition and

history of protecting migrants and refugees, and my own experience as well as IRW's programmes have shown that mosques and local faith communities are able to provide a faith-sensitive approach to the resettlement of refugees, helping them to resettle and become productive members of their new countries more quickly.

IRW is leading a response from faith-based organisations to the development of the United Nations Global Compact on Refugees, which we believe will provide a sound framework for national governments to re-examine their policies on refugees and migrants. Independent research commissioned by IRW in 2017 found that at least half of all people surveyed across four countries – the UK, Germany, Lebanon and the US – viewed refugees as innocent victims. Despite this, a majority were reluctant for their own countries to take on a more active role in resettling them, with the exception of younger people who had a more positive outlook.

Governments and others in the global humanitarian community must not allow this reigning anti-refugee public sentiment to affect their moral obligation to improve their response to tackling the humanitarian crisis we are faced with. Let's find a way to ensure that refugees receive the support they need to live safe, happy and productive lives, and to have the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the countries in which they resettle.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Take a more integrated approach to welcoming and protecting refugees, including through cooperation with faith-based organisations.



PART 4: NARRATIVE

When locals open their doors to newcomers, everyone wins

Today I run a growing catering organisation which brings together volunteers from Syria who provide food at events and in selected restaurants. I arrived in Belgium in August 2015 and obtained 'refugee' status in December that same year.

Leaving Syria was the most difficult thing in my life. Like so many other people, I didn't want to leave my country but was faced with two options: get killed there or risk my life passing through Europe. As the second option carried the potential of survival, I decided to take the risk.

It was a perilous and dangerous road to safety. But finally, I managed to arrive in Belgium, exhausted and tired after weeks of walking and running. Belgium became the country where I started my new life. Was it easy? Not really. I had many challenges at the beginning, including complex administrative issues. But it works out in the end – if you have support like I always had.

OBADA OTABASHI

From: Syria

Living in: Belgium

Profession: Founder of We Exist, an organisation aiming to facilitate labour market access while spreading awareness of Syrian culture and traditions

Once the paperwork required for an asylum application is complete and once the 'refugee' status is obtained, the real administrative challenges begin. Initially, I was enthusiastically looking for a job but after a couple of months, it turned out that it was something of a mission impossible. Reasons for not getting a job were always alike, and often it was clear that the reason was my origin. The same applies to looking for a place to live: if you don't have a payslip, it is hard to get a flat. Some owners would tell me that I was in a privileged situation compared to Europeans. I never understood why. Being rejected from a job or a flat just because of my origin was quite frustrating, as I already had work experience and had been volunteering on a freelance basis since my arrival in Belgium because I wanted to help others that shared my experience and the difficulties of arrival.

This feeling of rejection inspired me to create jobs for myself and other Syrians who were experiencing similar difficulties, and so *We Exist* was born. Consisting of a team of talented Syrian volunteers, we started putting our ideas into action in September 2016. Since then, many things have changed. We started organising dinners, brunches and then expanded to catering and cooking courses on Syrian food. Our network is growing and we are currently looking for a space in order to have daily activities and to be able to recruit our volunteers. Since the beginning, we have been fortunate to meet very dear people who regularly use our services and to be supported by organisations, such as the Quaker House and restaurant Le Damoiselle, which has

become almost like a home to us. Restaurants Entre Nous and Carina have also hosted us in their premises. Our story is a good example of giving people a chance.

Through regular activities and expansion of our network we all have also improved our language skills – learning by doing, in the true sense of the term.

We are happy to have had an opportunity to show our skills and demonstrate our knowledge. We offer our services and we are happy when people enjoy our food and atmosphere. We still face discrimination due to our status, as that of a 'refugee' brings a lot of stigma, and we can see this on a daily basis.

To my disappointment, I have attended many conferences on 'refugees', with discussions and debates on their needs but the voice of the people concerned is absent. After all, we are the only people who know what we really need.

We Exist is built on this need for mutual respect towards every individual, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, race, sexual or gender identity. Through our work, we connect people and we break prejudice, one at a time.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Listen and learn – include newcomers in policy debates about their own futures.



Fixing the economy will bring opportunities to both locals and migrants

Two years have passed since I arrived in Italy from Nigeria and I can say that I have finally found the peaceful place I was looking for. I live in Lecco, in the north of Italy, and volunteer in a canteen for poor people managed by *Caritas* – the organisation that has helped me since my arrival – as well as in the parish where I work with children. I'm also committed occasionally to do some sporadic jobs as a house cleaner or seller of the street magazine 'Scarp de' tenis', which is also a *Caritas* project.

I left Nigeria three years ago, looking for a peaceful place where I would be respected and could fulfil my dream of becoming a lawyer. I never thought of becoming a refugee. I used to live with my parents and my three brothers in Nigeria. I studied office technology management and right after finishing my studies, I found a job in a company in my city. After that, my life totally changed: I had problems with my boss and so left my job, my family's house burnt down and we had to move to another village.

PRECIOUS M

From: Nigeria

Living in: Italy

Profession: Participant in the *Cucinare per ricominciare* project, an initiative offering linguistic and professional training to aid refugees and asylum-seekers in finding jobs in Milan

The situation became worse when my father died and my mother lost everything, as happens to most unprotected widows in Nigeria. I didn't have a choice: I had to leave, to find a way to build my own future and to help my mother and my family. I arrived in Libya first, but it was not the safe place I was looking for. After much suffering and spending more than a month in prison, I crossed the Mediterranean and landed on the Italian island of Lampedusa.

The way I see it, I am here in my new city to contribute, not to 'stand still'. I have been actively looking for opportunities and have found them, thanks to a project created by the NGO AVSI Foundation, in partnership with the *Panino Giusto* chain of restaurants in Milan and the *Farsi Prossimo* cooperative. The project is called 'Cucinare per ricominciare' – "Cooking to Restart" – and it offers linguistic and professional training to help refugees and asylum-seekers to get a job in Milan. I have learnt how to cook Italian food and how to work in this field in order to get ready for an internship in a *Panino Giusto* restaurant. If everything goes according to plan, I will be hired and this will be the first step towards making my dreams come true.

Since my arrival in Italy, I have studied and learnt Italian, because I knew that it was the most important thing to do in a foreign country. Yet it's not enough: to live in Italy, one has to learn its rules and respect them. One has to have the desire to become familiar with other things too and embrace the culture as a whole,

including Italy's culinary scene, traditions and daily life. If not, there is no point in staying.

The role of those welcoming us is also crucial. When I arrived, I was hosted in a reception centre in a small mountain community in the north of Italy with 18 other youngsters. The 120 inhabitants of that small village were scared, they saw us as a threat and we had to face prejudice, such as the idea that all Nigerian girls come to Italy because they are forced into prostitution. When surfing the web or watching TV, I understand why those people thought that way. It's widespread in Italy to talk about migrants in a very aggressive way, especially in politics, and my personal opinion is that this behaviour is not facilitating integration.

I think politicians should understand, accept and spread awareness of the idea that the whole world is constantly on the move. People have migrated over hundreds of years and they will keep on migrating for years to come, and this includes people from all backgrounds and races. It's normal. It's also important to understand that those who decide to migrate risk their lives in the search of a better life, just as Italians and Europeans have done in the past.

Politicians, both in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, should first of all take care of the issues related to the economy and employment. Migrants aren't here to take away Italian jobs or opportunities from the locals. On the contrary, welcoming refugees has prompted new job opportunities for some Italians and Europeans.

It's the lack of work which is the real problem, for both migrants and locals.

For me, the experience with AVSI and Panino Giusto has been the first step towards reaching my goals. I like the idea of being a cook, a waitress: it's a job that allows you to serve people, which is the same reason that motivates me to become a lawyer. If my dream comes true, one day I can go back to Nigeria to help those who are in need.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Narratives matter – craft a more positive, realistic and fact-based narrative around migrants and refugees which does not stigmatise them as the ‘other’.



Talking of ‘values’ without explaining won’t take us far

Living in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon gives you two choices: the first is to surrender to unemployment – already imposed by law; to isolation by joining armed groups; to criminal activity; or to extremism. The second choice is self-dedication to succeed, and I can tell you without hesitation that the second choice is an exception for the majority.

I arrived in Germany from a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon for compelling reasons related to personal and family security. During the first 15-18 months, the challenges posed by the bureaucratic procedures were very intense, and, to me, that is one of the main reasons why many arrivals develop negative – and even dangerous – attitudes towards their host countries. The sense of humiliation and complexity has very serious psychological and personal consequences, especially for those who have had very high expectations of their foreseen salvation in Europe.

YOUSEF WEHBE

From: Palestine

Living in: Germany

Profession: Head of Justice and Rule of Law Unit at the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)

As a Palestinian, I didn't benefit from government-supported language courses, nor was I allowed to work until my asylum application was positively received. Meanwhile, I mostly had to rely on my own search for local civil society organisations and NGOs providing services for asylum-seekers in the fields of language, education and work. Kiron University was my first hope as it offered an uncomplicated and ambitious educational opportunity. Thanks to my previous professional experience in the Middle East, I found my first mini-job as a research assistant and benefitted also from a highly beneficial mentoring programme. It was these non-governmental actors – organisations and individuals – that helped me to keep my positive determination to find my way in a new life.

However, I always asked myself: what is 'integration' and when will I be considered to have integrated? Since I never got an answer – just like the majority of newcomers – I decided to come up with my own concept: 'inclusion' means the newcomers' positive actions for personal and societal benefit, including elements such as an interactive exchange process between the newcomer and the society's culture and not succumbing to stereotypes.

This is true for most refugees who are equally curious about these values we are being asked to adhere to. Understandably, newcomers have different concepts and practice of many values. For example, many newcomers from Arab countries define democracy in the context of elections while that's only the core

of the concept. This partial 'understanding' of democracy is based on what they have known in their home countries.

Newcomers – if left on their own to strive for inclusion – should not be expected to succeed collectively. They have different capacities and determination, especially considering traumas they are potentially suffering from. Not everyone is ready to take the initiative and fight for a new life; there are many who will simply retreat when faced with confusing bureaucracy and strict rules. Newcomers naturally need to adapt to the existing rule of law, but they need a hand from the responsible authorities, beyond a purely procedural relationship.

The so-called "refugees crisis" demonstrated the amazing role played by civil society actors in Europe. But governments should also do their share to make necessary investments in the process of integration and inclusion. Many of the refugees and civil society organisations I have met complain about the wasted resources and efforts because government programmes are bureaucratic and no different from the official procedures that people usually strive to avoid. When developing such programmes, authorities need to consider the background of the target group, including their qualifications and psychological needs; the real needs of the newcomers; the host community's needs and interests; as well as the allocation of qualified and knowledgeable personnel to lead these programmes.

Values cannot be dictated to newcomers by governments, with the additional warning

that non-conformity is punishable by law. Newcomers and host communities need to overcome their fears of each other by talking openly to each other not only about what brings them together – but also that which separates them.

Friends of Europe's recommendation

Don't shy away from a respectful, open and frank dialogue on values and traditions as well as other questions which concern locals and newcomers.

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