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The SeHeMe

CASE STUDIES BOOKLET

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INTRODUCTION

The third activity being developed under WP2 of the SEHEME project is the SEHEME case studies booklet.

The objective of this third activity was to collect migrant narratives, turn them into stories, and demonstrate their positive impact to deliver a sense of resonance towards the host society. This would act to break down any social stigmatization and awkwardness.

The lead partner, Lusófona University – COFAC, developed a research plan proposal that provides the theoretical framework (based on three research pillars, namely Diversity-driven Research, Narrative Research, and Action Research) for the different stages of the work - with detailed explanations and indication of different documents to be produced and used by the partners.

The first step was to create a network of partner institutions (each SEHEME partner indicated 5 institutions) who engage with migrants and refugees in each of the consortium countries. These institutions helped to disseminate a call for participants so that the consortium partners were able to identify and select the participants who would be interviewed and tell their stories. Therefore, Lusófona University – COFAC spearheaded a drive to create a participant institutions template and a call for individual participants templates to be used by all the consortium partners.

The 3rd ACTIVITY



After identifying and selecting the participants with the help of the institutions' network, interviews took place to collect the success stories of the participants (young refugees and migrants). To this end, Lusófona University – COFAC prepared an Informed Consent Form in which participants were informed of the project and prepared to participate. Two other documents were also prepared, namely the Structure and the Guidelines for the Interviews. These served as manuals with details of the prescribed structure of the interviews and tips on good practices.

The next stage was to write the stories that are presented in this booklet - which will also be available in the different languages of the consortium partners.

This booklet contains 14 case studies that describe the various motivations to migrate, the challenges encountered in the host countries, and how these were overcome. Originally, the booklet was supposed to contain 10 case studies but because the stories were so compelling and worth telling, we decided to include four more. The objective was to try to present different points of view, different nationalities, different home countries, and different motivations to immigrate. The case studies have not been classified by country, but that detail is easily detected within the stories. The sequence in which they are presented is purely random and full names were not used for reasons of confidentiality. Also, the length of the case studies is not the same for all and this is mainly because some of the migrants and refugees who were interviewed struggled to talk about their lives. They did not want to share too many details and the interviewers were sensitive to not pushing them to do so. To give a brief overview of the case studies, we start with someone who immigrated from India to Ireland to study law at university; they describe all the cultural characteristics of their home country. The second is about someone who comes from Swaziland, escaping the war, a nurse seeking asylum in Ireland.

The story that follows is about a Brazilian who received a job offer to work in Portugal and even though he had a very stable life in Brazil, a good job, and had never thought about immigrating, decided to try his luck in Europe - being mostly driven by his desire to leave a life without the level of violence that prevails in Brazil. He talks about how free and happy he feels for being able to go anywhere at any time without fearing a fatal attack. Klevis, Stefka, and Kinan all have very different backgrounds and allow us a window on their journeys in a new country. They also have different perspectives on motivations to immigrate. Klevis, an Albanian-born 18-year-old male, immigrated to Greece when he was only two years old, but because he spoke a different language, he always felt discriminated against, and his life was very difficult. As for Stefka, a young woman from Bulgaria, she started working at an early age in her home country and immigrated to Greece. She worked very hard, learned Greek, became a nurse, and married a Greek, but still, she says she feels discriminated against. Kinan is about a Lebanese medical student who comes from a well-off family. He still does not have the means to support his studies in Lebanon. He speaks several languages and despite that fact, it is very difficult to find a job. He engaged in volunteer work as a medical consultant helping refugees and migrants who arrived in Greece by sea. A young Italian woman, working in international cooperation and development, offers an entirely different perspective. This a European who went to Tunisia to help migrants from other countries integrating into a third country. The story that follows that one is about a young man coming from Gaza Strip on a scholarship to study abroad. He wanted to become a vet, but unfortunately due to financial reasons, he didn't make it. But he married a Tunisian girl, started a food street business and became extremely successful. The final story is about a woman and her journey towards a big successful life in another country.

These stories are excellent examples of diversity in terms of motivation to immigrate, differing professional, social and economic backgrounds, various problems faced in the host countries like learning a new language and dealing with all the bureaucracy involved in the legalisation process. Also, the cultural differences are mentioned as factors that hinder the inclusion process and make immigrants feel discriminated against. But what most of these stories also taught us is that somehow people find the strength to overcome all these difficulties and end up integrating and being successful in foreign countries.

As for the educational materials that were originally to be included in this booklet, the partners decided to include them in the Foreign Language for Media Literacy e-course.

We do hope that the SEHEME case studies booklet will fulfil its purpose of giving visibility to migrants and refugees and helping host societies change the way they look at newcomers by showing that they can be successful people that contribute to building a better society.



Agrima

Keywords: university student, empathy, migrant, homesickness, cultural values

Abstract

Agrima, an Indian student studying law in Ireland, reflects on her journey from India to pursue tertiary education. Growing up in Punjab with a close-knit family, she emphasises the influence of filial piety and cultural values on her upbringing. Agrima explores the responsibility ingrained in Indian cultures to care for parents in old age, shaping her into an empathetic individual. Motivated by the pursuit of a better future, she migrated to Ireland. Initially facing challenges in forming connections but eventually finding her way and forming close friendships with other foreigners and appreciating the work-life balance in Ireland. While grappling with homesickness, Agrima finds solace in the familiar flavours of Indian cuisine abroad. Finally, she encourages others to travel, especially to European countries, to broaden their perspectives on life and within.

STORY

Coming from India four years ago, Agrima came to Ireland to pursue her tertiary education and is currently studying law in university. Back in India, she had already got her master's degree in economics and the idea of studying abroad was always in the back of her mind. And Ireland is renowned for its tertiary education, so Agrima took the chance and chose to further her education in Ireland.

Going back to their childhood and early life, Agrima grew up with two elder brothers and two loving parents, along with her grandparents. Although it is not one's job to question why their grandparents lived with them, she explained that the strong familial ties and the notion of filial piety in India had influenced her, and her family's lives. Growing up in a fairly big family, she said that she was "the most pampered one" as she was also the youngest in the family and added that she had a pleasant childhood in Punjab, India.

It is crucial to note that India's rich cultural heritage and the responsibilities and love towards one's parents play a significant part in one's adult life. As mentioned above, the notion of filial piety and respect for elders in Indian cultures, Chinese cultures, and other Asian countries are taken seriously. It means that one must provide for their parents in old age and after death, it is our duty to repay our parents when we are well into our adult life and have the means to give back or repay debts to our parents. For those who choose to cut ties with their parents in these communities, they will be treated as outcasts and ostracised by their community.

Although it is a huge responsibility placed on one's shoulders from early on, these qualities instilled in Agrima have given her the skills to connect deeply with others. In addition to that, it has shaped her into a more empathetic individual.

Coming back to her reasons for migrating to Ireland, like most other immigrants, they are in search of a better future which entails better career opportunities, a better life for them as well as their family.

At first, she found it difficult finding and connecting with people in the new country because of the social circles that she was not part of. As time passed, she started to form connections with the people around her. Just like most things, it takes time and patience to make friends and adapt to one's new living environment.

Agrima also found that the work-life balance in Ireland is much better than her home country. Hence, further asserting her decision to live in Ireland. Moreover, as English is spoken in Ireland as well as in India, Agrima did not face many obstacles integrating into the society, language-wise. When asked about whether she misses her family, she said that she, like many other immigrants, deal with homesickness quite often. She has said that she misses the big community and the support system from her family and friends back in India. To add to that, what makes her think of home is the food there. The rich flavours, the spices and a huge diversity of food there. It is quite heartwarming for someone who has been living abroad for the past four years to find food in a foreign country that reminds them of a taste of home.

Finally, Agrima urged others who have the means and opportunities to travel as much as they can, especially to European countries to have a glimpse of what life is like for them and also what life could be like for them if they ever found themselves wanting to live a life in one of the European states.



Cindy

Keywords: asylum-seeker, Direct Provision, isolation, insomnia, visa restrictions

Abstract

Cindy is an asylum-seeker from Swaziland, having arrived in Ireland in November 2022, fleeing political instability in her country. She is currently living in Direct Provision, a system providing accommodation and financial assistance to asylum-seekers. While there, she faced challenges in accessing services and felt isolated. After a year in Ireland, employment still remains elusive due to her visa restrictions.

STORY

While acknowledging improvements in the asylum system in Ireland, Cindy emphasizes a significant gap between available services and awareness among asylees. With limited contact with the outside communities, it makes it difficult for asylum-seekers to navigate available resources. Despite the support from organisations like the Irish Refugee Council, Cindy grapples with mental health issues, and is now seeking professional help. She suffers from insomnia and finds completing daily tasks challenging, but she remains positive and engages in activities to distract herself from her circumstances. Cindy hopes to further pursue higher education in Ireland, but she is grappling with high school fees while awaiting her refugee status. She hopes to get a scholarship in the near future to upskill herself.

Coming from Swaziland, Cindy arrived in Ireland in November 2022 and has since been living as an asylum-seeker under the Direct Provision system. She grew up in a big family with eleven siblings, her being the eldest in the family. She had a fairly normal childhood and went to school like all other kids. She undertook her undergraduate degree from 2002 to 2005, and since then has been working as a nurse with the Swaziland Government in Lobamba Clinic.

Due to her country's political instability which ultimately affected her work and personal safety, she was forced to flee her country and seek asylum in Ireland. Because she left her country in such a hurry, without much planning, on her arrival in Ireland, she said that everything happened quickly, like everything was flashing before her eyes. When she arrived in Ireland, the first thing she thought was that her wellbeing and safety would not be compromised in that country: Safe from violence and safe from war back home in Swaziland.

In Ireland, she found it difficult to know where to access certain services and who to turn to ask for help and assistance. Although she faced many obstacles, the language here was not a problem since she spoke English in her home country as well. Cindy is still living in Direct Provision in Ireland. Direct Provision is a system that offers accommodation and some financial assistance to asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Ireland. Cindy was put into Direct Provision immediately after entering the country.

Once she had settled down in her new 'home', she said that she felt "secluded" from the people who were not living under the Direct Provision system. And due to the isolation and the lack of guidance from the immigration and resettling authorities, she said that she "does not know what is available for her even if the government has made it available".

And further added that many people in her position feel the same way as well.

She has been in Ireland for a year now and seeking employment here is still a challenge as many employers require their employees have a work visa and will not employ those who hold asylum-seeker status for various reasons - such as the uncertainty of their employees' visa status.

When asked what she would like for the government and those in power to change or improve in the asylum system, Cindy felt that many improvements have been made to make asylees lives easier. However, she also said that “there is a gap between those who need the services and the services provided”, adding that “it is hard to know what is available to us” let alone access it. And because all the asylum-seekers live together in Direct Provision and have very limited contact with the outside communities, she found it very difficult to know what services are available to her; where she can start, where she can study and apply for scholarships, how and where to get registered, and who to contact and so on.

There are organisations in Ireland that help refugees and asylum-seekers settle into their new home such as the Irish Refugee Council - which Cindy has found to be somewhat helpful. However, when asked about the state of her mental health, she stated that she has really been struggling with it. She said that she has started to see a psychiatrist who has put her on medication. Furthermore, she has been suffering from insomnia and has difficulties completing daily tasks. Nevertheless, she is still waking up in the morning and staying positive and trying to do chores and work to keep her mind from thinking too much about her issues and her circumstances etc.

While waiting for her refugee status, Cindy is trying to enroll in academic classes and other courses to upskill, but tuition fees remain an issue. She hopes she will be able to apply for a scholarship once she has been given refugee status in Ireland.



Elsayed

Keywords: homesickness, adaptation, migration decisions, family, hope

Abstract

Elsayed, a 34-year-old Egyptian captain, has worked in Cyprus for 8 years, steering a private yacht in Ayia Napa. He faces language barriers and communicates mainly in English with tourists. His family's seafaring background motivates him to aspire to higher ranks. Despite liking Cyprus, Elsayed struggles with deciding between staying in Egypt or seeking new experiences elsewhere. He reflects on the challenges of immigration and adapting to new cultures, torn between familiarity and exploration.

STORY

Elsayed, commonly known as Sayed, is a 34-year-old man, and the youngest of five siblings in his family. He has three sisters and one brother. He was born, and raised in Egypt, in a city near Alexandria, Dumyat, and he has built a successful career as a professional captain. Life in Egypt was not easy as Sayed said, however, he liked his life there. People are poor but they are good-hearted, kind and always willing to help others.

Elsayed has been working and living in Cyprus for almost 8 years now, since May 2017 in Ayia Napa, one of the most popular tourist destinations in Cyprus. His occupation involves serving as the captain of a private yacht - a demanding role that keeps him busy seven days a week. He starts early in the morning and finishes late at night. Specifically, Sayed works in Cyprus for 8 months continuously and then returns to Egypt for 3-4 months to rest and reunite with his family and friends. He even sometimes works in Egypt, with his brother's ship on the Nile. But, once the new season in Cyprus begins, he returns to his duties as a captain.

His journey into a career on the sea began at a very young age. After completing his schooling, Sayed started working for a shipping company in Egypt. His decision to pursue a maritime career was not random. He was influenced by his family's deep-rooted connection to the sea; his father and the rest of his family were also seamen, so it was an easier path for him to follow.



Over time, he aspired to become more than a skipper and wanted to be a professional captain which is why he attended the Arab Academy for Transport & Maritime in Egypt. Before coming to Cyprus, Sayed worked on cargo ships, again not an easy job, spending extended periods at sea, travelling from port to port, loading and unloading cargo. This experience allowed him to explore various parts of the world and meet new cultures and people, an experience for which he remains grateful.

Coming for work in Cyprus was an easy decision for him, since an Egyptian friend introduced him to the company he works now. However, life in Cyprus has been challenging due to his demanding work hours. But Sayed doesn't complain, he is a very simple man and always keeps busy. He has adapted to this lifestyle and developed a liking for it.

Being a captain comes with numerous responsibilities, leaving him with limited free time for leisure activities or hobbies. However, when time allows it, and he manages to find some free time, Sayed enjoys relaxing with friends and loves spending time on his own and working out at the gym. Over time, he has built a few friendships in Cyprus (mainly with colleagues) and appreciates the kindness of local people. He works alongside Cypriots, many Egyptians, and other foreigners in Aya Napa harbour, making him feel closer to his home country, Egypt. However, Sayed understands that Aya Napa is the most touristy destination in Cyprus, and that is why people tend to be more open because they are used to seeing tourists every day.



Sayed hasn't had many opportunities to visit other places in Cyprus or interact with other people outside his work circle, mainly because he doesn't have the time for it. Also, in Ayia Napa, people focus on their business for intensive 8-month stretches. Then, when the season is over, the city is like a ghost town during wintertime.

Although Sayed understands the basics of Greek, speaking fluently remains a challenge for him. Living in a tourist area and interacting with tourists on a daily basis has made English a more accessible way of communication for him. He also has no time to learn the language. The Greek he knows he learned during his time on the yacht.

Anyone who knows Sayed knows him for his strong work ethic, kind-hearted nature, and ambitious spirit. His ultimate life goal is to continue his studies and attain the highest rank of captain. While he appreciates his life here in Cyprus, he believes that maybe his future lies elsewhere. He also likes his life in Egypt, but life there is very different. So, he hasn't yet determined his next destination or when, but he's determined to move forward in life and achieve more.



Gini

Keywords: challenges, adaptation, discrimination, studies, struggles

Abstract

Gini, 26, came to Cyprus during the pandemic, initially facing many challenges. He later lived with 6 Indians in Nicosia. While working in various companies, he encountered discrimination due to his nationality, and language barriers. He feels excluded and unsafe and is now considering moving to Canada for a more inclusive environment. Gini values diversity and hopes for acceptance, aiming to save money to support his family. He dreams of a better future abroad but struggles to integrate into his new home.

STORY

Gini is a 26-year-old man, coming from Punjab, India. He came to Cyprus 3.5 years ago, during Covid. Enrolling himself in a university in Cyprus gave him a visa to access the country. For the first year, Gini was alone. It was difficult for him since everything was closed. He didn't have any job or any friends. However, time passed by, and he met people, made friends, and found a job.

Gini now lives with another 6 people, from India, in a flat in Nicosia. Rents are very expensive, that is why he decided to live with others to manage and pay the rent, to save money and to send some money back home to his family. Also, most of them are used to it, because as Gini explained most of his roommates, lived like this in India.



Living in commune houses is something common in India. But this is not the case for Gini. Living with so many people is new to him. Back home he lives only with his parents and brother, having his own personal room. His parents are both teachers, and his brother is married and living in Canada. His brother also left India to pursue a better life abroad.

Gini spoke with great interest about his country and mentioned that India is a very beautiful country. They have 29 states, and they speak 48 different languages. Hindu is the official language, and each state has a different language. However, in cases where someone doesn't speak Hindu, they communicate in English. Gini described his home state as a beautiful and calm place, a destination worth visiting. However, he explained that India can be a dangerous country because people are uneducated, which is a big issue for his country. However, he told us that his home state is very safe, that people are very good-hearted, and that he would be more than happy to take us there and show it to us one day. Generally, he misses India, but many factors cause him to want to leave. As he explained, there are no opportunities for young people, there are no jobs and no future. People want to study and be more in their life. In India, they cannot do that. Being the most populated country in the world compounds this problem. So as Gini said, his life goal is to find a better life and study at the University.



Therefore, three and a half years ago Gini hopped on the airplane and 24 hours later he landed in Cyprus. He now studies at the university, in the Department of Hospitality and Management. At the same time, he works. He works many hours in many different companies. He works for theatrical set companies. Gini is very happy with his job and with the people he works with. Also, he mentioned that his salary is good. However, this has not always been the case. At first, he had a hard time finding a job, and when he found one the salary was very low. Being a foreigner and unable to speak Greek has led to this. However, he didn't give up until he found something he liked. Moreover, he had to remove his turban and cut his hair to be able to find a job, just as most of his Indian friends had to do to get hired. This saddened him. He is forced to abandon his beliefs to fit into society, but even after removing his turban things are not much better.

As he explained, people don't respect him or his friends. He says that people are rude to him, and don't talk to him as nicely as other people. When he goes to a store, the way they treat him is not the same as other customers because he is Indian. Also, he comments on the way the police treat them. They are rude and ask them where they get their money, despite providing their legal documents and their social insurance number. Also, he expressed his fear for his life and the lives of his friends. Every one of his friends is afraid.



Recently, a friend of his was beaten up, just for being a foreign and a delivery boy. When asked about what the police did about that, he said: “They did nothing. They just took a statement and let us go, without asking more questions about the person who had beaten up our friend. That’s why we are afraid. All of us. We know there is no one to protect us, no one we can turn to if anything bad happens to seek justice.”

Gini understands that not all Cypriot people are like this. He met a lot of people, and the people who are around him at work are nice, but the cultural and language barrier does not allow them to be anything more than colleagues. When asked, about the cultural and language barrier, Gini said that for him is not an issue at all. Growing up in a multicultural society where people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds lived together and respected one another helped him realize that everyone is the same even if they have different skin colour or believe in a different God or eat different food. So, for him, is easy to adapt to a different environment, and he respects the differences, but to be able to prove it he must be given a chance. He wants to feel that he is accepted and that there is mutual respect, something which is missing at the moment. He likes Cyprus, and he would like to continue living here. Even though he finds difficulties, financially is better than in India.

He will stay in Cyprus for as long as he can, but if he feels that Cyprus has nothing else to offer him, he will try going to Canada, to his brother, where people respect him and people live like one.



Deison

Keywords: discrimination, sexual orientation, asylum seeker, integration, work, stability, future goals

Abstract

Deison is a 26-year-old man. His nationality is Venezuelan, his host country is Spain, and he is an asylum seeker. He has a secondary education diploma and currently works in the hospitality sector. He enjoys his independence, the lifestyle that he managed to create for himself in Europe, spending time with his friends, and going clubbing.

STORY

Deison's journey started 7 years ago, when he left his home country - Venezuela - because of its instability and lack of rights. Deison felt discriminated against because of his sexual orientation (homosexual) and he also felt that he could not enjoy the lifestyle he imagined for himself. Therefore, his main goal has always been to be emotionally and economically stable. As a result, he first moved to Colombia, where he stayed for 5 years. There, his situation improved but he felt dissatisfied, as he felt he was not achieving his initial goal. Also, Colombia was not as safe and tranquil as he thought. Consequently, 2 years ago he emigrated to Europe, Spain.

When he arrived in Spain, had a little cultural shock and realised that Spain and Venezuela are very different. One of his first impressions was that people were stricter than in Venezuela or Colombia. Despite this, he really liked the fact that in Spain, according to him, they are very organised. On his arrival, this organisation made him feel safer and it also gave him some hope that, because of this, he could better achieve his goal of being emotionally and economically stable.

However, to achieve his goal, Deison recognises that the path is still long and complicated. While finding the Spanish State - and Europe in general - better organised than Latin America, he still faces problems with bureaucracy.

Shockingly, after two years of living in Spain, he is still waiting for his residence permit, and he is still not sure if they are going to grant him asylum. As a consequence, he feels frustrated because he is working and paying taxes just like everyone else. This makes him feel that he is being treated differently. This is why many people in his positions decide to go working illegally (without a working permit). He is convinced that this affects the Spanish State negatively, as there is a growing number of young immigrants who do not contribute economically to the country - by not paying taxes. Therefore, as per usual, bureaucracy remains a serious problem in the European Union, as it not only slows down many civil administration processes but also affects seriously and negatively the lives of thousands of immigrants during their integration process.

During these difficult times, Deison has never received any help from local institutions or associations, as he has always dealt with his integrational obstacles alone. However, thanks to his openness with people, he has been able to make a lot of friends from the Latin American community who have supported him throughout the entire integrational process. Therefore, despite the many obstacles that he has encountered and will encounter after achieving full emotional and economic stability, he would advise other people to do as he has done - emigrate.



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Deison thinks that his story could be a good example of inspiration for other young immigrants who want to move to a higher quality of life, as he says: “if I was able to make it, everyone can!” He is convinced that everyone needs to build up their life experiences in order to have a good and happy life, although the process of achieving this might be tough and long. To get through the integration process,

Deison is aware that technological skills and abilities are very important nowadays. Technology is crucial for our everyday tasks and therefore essential to get important information about the integration process: offices, helplines, documents, booking appointments, etc. However, although technology plays an influential role in our lives, it is not well applied in forwarding specific and important information to immigrants for their integration process. Indeed, Deison classifies the information delivered to newly arrived immigrants as chaotic and insufficient. He says that all the important information he received was through informal channels - friends, WhatsApp groups and online blogs. This was useful because he managed to obtain the necessary information, but he also had to wade through misinformation. Moreover, he thinks that one of the most important abilities to get through the integration process is to have respect for the host country. He believes that many migrants are not open enough to adapt to the traditions, cultures, and rules of the host country and, as a result, attempt to have the same lifestyle as they had in their home countries.

Regarding his future goals, Deison says that for him the most important objective is to get his asylum application approved so that he can stop stressing about it and focus on his long-term plan. Eventually, he would like to buy a house, study something to improve his professional skills and, as mentioned before, be emotionally and economically stable.

Deison's final message for this interview is to the institutions. He truly believes that the application process for migrants (asylum, residence, working permit) should be more efficient. Due to its slowness, he is convinced that the State and the newly arrived immigrants are wasting a lot of money and time. These slow and bureaucratic processes cause illegal work, which means that the State is losing money, and the illegal workers have no rights and are not protected by any laws. According to Deison, in order to improve social and economic progress this problem should be treated by the institutions. In his final message, Deison also highlights again the importance of respect, he believes that "the world is perfect because of its imperfections".

In conclusion, Deison is happy with his immigration experience because it gave him the opportunity to be who really he is, to express himself freely, and to make connections with people that respect and accept him for what he is. Despite the obstacles he encountered during his integration process in Spain, his determination, flexibility, and openness helped him to get through the difficult moments that he experienced. As a result, he says that he would advise other immigrants to do the same as him, as it is worth a better quality of life.



Scarlett

Keywords: Opportunities, security, lack of information, loneliness.

Abstract

Scarlett is a Chilean immigrant who moved to Spain two years ago and currently resides in Madrid. Scarlett has a degree, a Masters in education and is currently working on her PhD at the Complutense University in Madrid. She is a teacher, although she works in the administrative sector. In her free time, she enjoys going to the cinema, traveling and dancing.

25

STORY

Scarlett decided to move to Europe two years ago. As her final destination she chose Spain because there are no linguistic differences between Spain and her home country - Chile. She wanted to grow academically and professionally, this is why she made the decision to emigrate to Madrid, Spain. She also chose Spain as her destination, as Chile and Spain have various political treaties and economical agreements that make it easier for the immigration and integration processes.

Her first impression when she moved to Europe was not too much of a surprise because she had already travelled a few times to Europe to study and on holidays. Fortunately, her impression of Europe has always been positive. This is because she feels much safer in Spain in comparison to Chile where robberies and street violence are a common thing. She is very happy about Madrid's public transport too, as she thinks it is much more accessible and organised than in her home country. She complains that Chile has become a very expensive country where many services such as public transportation have decreased their accessibility.

However, she also admits that her quality of life has decreased in Spain, as back in Chile, Scarlett had her own house in a nice neighbourhood and a car, and possessions that she does not have here in Spain. She found it very difficult to find a house in Madrid, as many landlords do not want to give their houses to immigrants. She also said that the renting prices in Madrid are very high, and people very often have to live in very poor conditions. She noticed that her quality of life worsened as she encountered many obstacles during her integration process in Spain.

Beka

**Keywords: love, family,
homesickness, loneliness,
integration**



Abstract

This is the story of a young Serbian woman, Beka, who immigrated to Portugal to join her husband who had already lived in the country for around ten years and was fully integrated. This is a love story and also a story of successful integration and its various phases.

STORY

Beka is a 30-year-old woman who was born and raised in Serbia. She never expected to leave her country and become an immigrant, but she came to Portugal to join her husband, who is also Serbian and had been living in Portugal for about ten years.

Beka doesn't like to talk about her childhood because of the war that plagued her country. She has some not-so-beautiful memories of those difficult times, especially since her father was a police officer who participated in the war. As a result, she prefers to forget about those times and focus on happier memories instead. Despite the difficulties, she had a happy childhood in a village with her parents and younger sister.

When she was 14, she had to leave home and live alone in a nearby city to attend secondary school. Although it was hard to leave the comfort of her home and family, Beka recalls that it was one of the most beautiful and happiest periods of her life. She had to solve problems on her own, became more independent, made many friends, and was very happy. She also remembers the joy of returning home every weekend to spend time with her family. Those were very happy times, which still make her smile today when she remembers them. When she finished secondary school, once again, everything changed.

This time, Beka went to live in an even bigger city so she could study at university. She once again had to face difficulties, discover a new place, find and live in a new accommodation, keep in touch with her friends and also meet new people, make new friends. The time spent at university seems to have been easier, lighter, than the four years at secondary school. Maybe because she was older, somehow, she had already got used to being away from her family.

With determination and a confident attitude, Beka never lost focus on her studies, as she wanted to get a good job and build a comfortable life for herself. And so, she reached the end of her university studies, having obtained an Integrated Master's degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences. And how proud she was of what she had achieved with so much effort and sacrifice. And she knew how proud her parents were too and that made her even happier. Having finished her studies, the time had come to truly become an adult, get a job, start living the future. And so it happened.

Beka spent about four years living in the same city. She enjoyed her life there and worked at a pharmacy, which was her preferred area of work and the field she had studied .



Everything was going well, and there weren't any surprises. She was content with her life and didn't think about making any changes, at least not at that moment. Beka was happy with her freedom and felt secure in her country as her family and friends were always nearby. She often smiles when thinking about this time in her life. But she met her husband. She fell in love. And “there was no other option” (laughs) other than to immigrate to Portugal. Always with a smile on her lips, she remembers her husband's words: “Either you go with me to Portugal or our story has no future, it cannot continue, because I don't want to live in Serbia, I want to continue living in Portugal”.

Her future husband was already fully integrated into the country where he had chosen to live, he had his job, he had his house, he had his friends, in short, a whole life that he was not prepared to abandon, he was not even able to do such a thing.

When faced with these facts, Beka knew that her choice was obvious, she was in love, she was happy, she did not want to miss the opportunity to live that love, she wanted to share a happy life, and decided to get married and accompany her husband to that country, at the end of Europe, of which he knew little or nothing. Although the decision to accompany her husband was straightforward, it was not emotionally easy. Leaving her country, everything that was familiar to her and everything that she loved, her family with whom she had always had a very close relationship, was very difficult, very painful. Even today she really misses his family, her country, her friends, everything she left behind.

But she gained courage and came to Portugal. The beginning of her life in the host country was a mix of emotions and feelings. Her arrival occurred at an extremely difficult time, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, more precisely, February 2021. The country was at a standstill, lockdown was in force, everything was closed, from shops to schools and public services, nothing worked, people were locked in their homes, almost no one was seen on the streets.

One of the first things she mentions when she remembers what her integration process in Portugal is bureaucracy, the difficulty of solving problems in state services. She says it was extremely difficult to deal with the documentation, in fact, she is still waiting for some documents, such as her driving license, for example. She has been waiting for this document for two years now, with the aggravating factor that when she returns to her country, she cannot drive either, as she had to hand over her Serbian license to the Portuguese authorities so that they could issue a Portuguese license. All administrative processes were very complicated, with the added difficulty of not speaking Portuguese, on top of that, at a time when public services were practically malfunctioning. She also mentions the recognition of her university studies and respective diploma, which was also a very lengthy process.

She began the process in April 2022 and obtained equivalence about a year later; they recognised everything except the internship she did at the end of her master's degree, and this situation is still unresolved, which also prevents her from looking for a job in her field.

Beka had a difficult time when she arrived in Portugal. Her experience with public services in Portugal was not very positive regarding her legalisation process.



She believes that the reason for this was due to the influx of immigrants, including Brazilians, Ukrainians and people of other nationalities which made everything more complicated and time-consuming.

Beka also experienced isolation during the first few months in Portugal due to the pandemic. Her husband's friends did not want to socialize because of the fear of the virus. Everyone was confined to their homes, and people only went out to work if their job was essential. This was a challenge for Beka, who arrived in a completely unknown country where she didn't know the language, customs, or culture. She spent many hours every day alone when her husband went to work, which was difficult for her. She missed her family and Serbia terribly.

However, Beka didn't waste her free time. She decided to learn Portuguese, which was a pressing need as she was fully aware that she would only be able to get a job if she understood and spoke Portuguese. She spent most of her days trying to learn Portuguese by watching television, using the internet and its many resources.

Fortunately, the pandemic eased, and lockdown measures were eliminated little by little. In May 2021, Beka managed to find a job through a friend of her husband's. She considered it a success, after two months of staying in a new country whose language was completely unknown to her. She went for an interview at a restaurant and got the job.

Language was a significant issue for Beka, and she takes pride in mentioning that when she arrived in Portugal, she did not speak any Portuguese. She took advantage of the two months she spent locked up at home to learn the language. However, when she got the job at the restaurant, she only knew how to say two or three words in Portuguese.



Beka embraced the opportunity and worked at the restaurant's bar, preparing drinks. She did not have to speak much in Portuguese, but from time to time, she also served tables, which was an opportunity to learn more Portuguese.

Beka worked at the restaurant for almost two years. However, she did not make friends among her co-workers, as they were all much younger than her. friends. We can see how sad this made her feel. Reflecting a little further, perhaps the fact that she immigrated to a completely unknown country to accompany her husband made the process of getting to know other people a little more difficult, since, as expected, they were always with each other, but it was essentially the moment we were living in, in the middle of the pandemic, and which eliminated any social contact between people, that made it so difficult. She remembers how hard it was to meet people in Portugal, she even says that in the first year she did not even meet her husband's friends, people were so afraid of the virus that they did not socialise, there were no social gatherings whatsoever. She says that the early days were very, very difficult, the loneliness, the isolation, not having friends around, not being able to have the comfort of her parents and sister, she could not even leave the country for administrative reasons, until she obtained her residence permit. She could not leave Portugal for seven or eight months, she felt trapped, alone, with no prospects, but she never gave up, as she had the support of her husband who comforted her in the most difficult times.

Reflecting on her impressions of the Portuguese, Beka says that she never felt discriminated against. She talks about her husband, saying that she has many Portuguese friends who accept him as Portuguese and that she also feels integrated among them.

She talks about her new job as a science manager at a large university in Lisbon where she has been working for around six months. Because she never stopped studying to improve her Portuguese, she managed to change jobs. She left the restaurant, started to have an easier work schedule, and is now satisfied with her situation. In her workplace, she says, she never felt discriminated against for being a foreigner, nobody ever looked at her strangely for having a different accent. She also realises that the university atmosphere is special; it is a place where people of many nationalities coexist, where many languages are spoken, and where people do not even remember where people are from. This creates an excellent atmosphere because people feel truly integrated. However, Beka is aware that this is not the situation for all immigrants, far from it. Immigrants who come from European countries feel, as a rule, very welcome; they are treated very well by the Portuguese, they integrate very well and very quickly. But she has heard comments about the discrimination felt by immigrants from origins other than Europe. She even mentions an episode in which someone commented that her name, Beka with a “k”, was curious, “but since it’s Beka from Serbia, that’s fine, but if it were Beka from Brazil, hmm, it wouldn’t be quite the same”, perhaps it would be different, she smiles a little embarrassed.

For Beka, the process of integration has been a bit painful, but she says that “it has been positive”. There are no major reasons for complaints - the bureaucracy and public services are the worst of all. She talks, once again, about her difficulties with the Portuguese language.

At first, she had a lot of challenges, she says she still has them, despite having improved a lot, but she was always helped, people were always very understanding and friendly towards her, they always helped her, they praised her when they realized that she had only been in the hospital for a short time:



“You have only been here for six months and you can already speak Portuguese so well”, she remembers being told, and he also says: “It’s great to hear that, people feel welcome. It’s good for us”.

Beka feels integrated into Portuguese society. Her job, due to the cosmopolitan environment at the university, has also helped a lot with this integration. People know Beka, they like Beka, no one cares if Beka is spelled with a K, if Beka is Serbian, Spanish, Portuguese or Brazilian. “And that’s good. It contributes to a person’s self-confidence,” she says.

Thanks to having immigrated to join her husband, who has lived in the country for many years, she never felt the need to look for an association or organisation that supports immigrants. She knows they exist but cannot identify any.

When we ask her about the evolution of her feelings regarding immigrating, Beka says “I think I’m in the middle. I’m making a path, evolving”. When she arrived, due to extreme difficulties, she was always talking about the same thing: returning to Serbia. She often told her husband that they could think about the possibility of returning, she was only thinking about returning, to her origins, to her family. But, since the beginning, her husband has always told her that he feels much better in Portugal than in Serbia. He does not want to leave because he has a stable life here. And now after two and half years since she arrived, Rebeka says that she already feels more comfortable in Portugal. She is even already considering the possibility of staying in Portugal.

She does not know if for life, of course, but at least for the nearer future. She can picture herself living here for many years. However, the desire to return to her country, to her parents, is always present. The language is sometimes still a challenge: she recognises and understands the words, but it is difficult to understand the meaning, but she will not give up.

She has dreams and goals to achieve, and she will achieve them, she is sure of that. And if it is in Portugal, with her love, it will be in Portugal.

Marco

Keywords: security, dreams, success, stability, freedom

Abstract

This is the story of a young Brazilian who immigrated to Portugal after receiving a job offer. The main reason he immigrated was not so much financial motivation but mostly the need to feel free and safe. He talks about how different life is in Portugal and how he misses his friends and family but at the same time he does not regret being an immigrant; he feels integrated, free, and happy.



STORY

Marco is a young Brazilian who moved to Portugal because he received a job offer that seemed very interesting to him. He had never thought about immigrating, he did not think about leaving his country, but he took advantage of the opportunity and came to Europe to discover a new country and a new culture with all the implications that it entails. Marco is 27 years old and comes from Brazil. He had a happy, normal childhood and adolescence. He lived in Brazil his entire life until one day he decided to abandon the beauty of the wonderful city of São Paulo and move to an entirely new country.



He received a job offer to work in software development and decided to embrace the opportunity. He came to Portugal. Behind, he left his country, his family, his friends, his culture and everything that was familiar to him.

He explains that he was very lucky in his professional life, but it was certainly not just luck; he was also competent and dedicated. He committed himself to complete his studies and started working in 2015, in the area of new technologies, always in large companies, in Brazil. He says that his life was quite comfortable because he had a family that always accompanied him, a good job, a nice home, he was healthy and had a group of friends who he met regularly and who he could count on in times of need. However, he began to feel that something was not right, something was missing. He couldn't not even explain it himself. It was a sense of restlessness. He just knew that his life was no longer enough and he had begun to feel a bit unhappy. He wanted something more, something different. He also mentions an ever-present reason to consider leaving his country: the insecurity of life in a city the size of São Paulo and the extremely high level of violence. Not being able to walk casually on the street for fear of being robbed, or even worse, being shot, or even killed; not being able to leave home or work without thinking about whether he would arrive at his destination safe and well, also being constantly worried about the safety of his family and friends. All these thoughts were a huge source of concern and anxiety, feelings that were preventing him from enjoying the good times. All this was making him feel overwhelmed, frustrated, worried, sad and moody most days. He was tired, very tired. He wanted to feel free and safe and, definitely, São Paulo was not the ideal place to have the life he dreamed of. Up until then he had never thought seriously about leaving his country.



Like countless others, Marco maintained a LinkedIn profile, regularly perusing job listings on the platform in search of new professional opportunities. Aware of the potential for a promising position in his field, his solid academic background and previous experience in reputable companies bolstered his confidence. In 2022, his patience paid off when several enticing job offers from tech companies in Portugal landed in his inbox.

With options abound, Marco faced the enviable task of selecting the most appealing opportunity—one that not only offered a fulfilling professional challenge but also favorable conditions. This decision marked his gateway to Europe. Despite the emotional weight of leaving behind cherished ties in Brazil, including his parents, Marco felt compelled to pursue a new chapter. Tired of the unrest and seeking a fresh start, he yearned for enriching experiences and a renewed sense of purpose.

Portugal, with its allure of discovery and shared language with Brazil, emerged as the ideal destination. The historical connection between the two countries further reinforced his resolve. Against the backdrop of this emotional and cultural synergy, Marco's once-distant dream swiftly materialised into reality.

And thus began Marco's journey in Portugal, equipped with the rare assurance of a job, a valid employment contract, and a visa—a privilege often elusive to the majority of immigrants arriving in the country. This difference, as Marco emphasizes, profoundly impacts various aspects of life, extending beyond the realms of practicality and administration into the social sphere. By sidestepping the arduous task of simultaneously securing employment and navigating the legalization process, Marco found himself halfway toward integration from the outset—a crucial advantage.



As Marco reflects, this distinction delineates between a promising start and an uphill battle, sparing him from accepting precarious, low-paying jobs borne out of necessity. He empathizes with those grappling with the despair of being far from home amidst challenges and discrimination. While he personally hasn't experienced such hardships, he acknowledges the pervasive narratives among his compatriots.

Arriving in a foreign land, Marco found himself navigating uncharted territory. Despite his anticipation, his knowledge of Portugal was limited to sporadic anecdotes—some recounting the wonders of the country and its people, while others depicted tales of discrimination and xenophobia. The varied experiences of fellow immigrants underscored the complexities of assimilation and the stark realities of societal integration.

As he recounts his own struggles, Marco acknowledges the inherent loneliness and acknowledges the comparative ease of his journey. Yet, he doesn't gloss over the imperfections of his adopted homeland. Portugal, like any other country, has its challenges, exacerbated for immigrants. Foremost among them is the struggle to secure housing, with exorbitant prices often outpacing salaries, especially in urban centers like Lisbon.

Marco sheds light on the reluctance of Portuguese landlords to rent to immigrants, citing unfounded fears of property damage. Such prejudices underscore the discrimination faced by foreigners, making assimilation all the more daunting. However, Marco identifies the bureaucratic labyrinth of the Portuguese authorities, particularly the Foreigners and Borders Service, as the most formidable barrier to integration.

The lack of support, clear guidance, and prolonged waiting times compound the ordeal of immigrant life.

Despite these obstacles, Marco's resolve remains unshaken. He acknowledges the high cost of living and the frustrations of bureaucratic inefficiencies but remains steadfast in his commitment to his new life. His gratitude stems not only from personal freedoms but also from the sense of security previously unknown to him.

In recounting his journey, Marco underscores the invaluable role of immigrant support associations, providing guidance and camaraderie in navigating life in a foreign land. While his own journey has been relatively smooth, he remains cognizant of the struggles faced by many, finding solace in the newfound freedom and happiness that Portugal affords.

In Marco's eyes, the sacrifices are outweighed by the unparalleled sense of security and freedom—an affirmation of his decision to embark on this transformative journey. The other big reason is the people in Portugal. So far, he has no reason to complain regarding situations of discrimination; he has always felt well received; he feels like he belongs here; he does not feel like a stranger among the Portuguese people, according to his words.

Despite feeling content and well-integrated, reminiscing about the initial days never fails to bring laughter to Marco's lips. Competent in Portuguese, a crucial asset that played a pivotal role in his decision-making process; Marco reflects on the significance of language proficiency. In Brazil, the public education system often neglects foreign language instruction, leaving the majority of Brazilians monolingual in Portuguese. The absence of opportunities to learn languages like English renders Portugal an obvious choice for many Brazilian immigrants. The shared language facilitates smoother transitions, eliminating one hurdle in the immigrant experience. With Portuguese proficiency, job opportunities become more accessible giving an advantage over non-Portuguese-speaking immigrants.



And Marco continues to remember, between laughs, how at first, when he arrived in Portugal, he did not understand many of the things people said to him. This was for him surprising, somewhat confusing, shocking even, and now, when he talks about it, he even feels some nostalgia for those early times, and for the people he met when he arrived. How new and surprising everything was. He remembers how he asked them to speak more slowly, to repeat it over and over again until he finally understood what they were saying to him. “How is it possible,” he used to think at the time, “that we speak the same language, and I cannot understand what they tell me?” But over time, with calm and perseverance, and with the help of friendly people he met, he adapted; he overcame this barrier and, nowadays, he understands the Portuguese language very well, he says with some irony.

Marcos repeated several times throughout the interview that his story is probably not the typical story of a Brazilian immigrant who comes to Portugal. He knows that his experience is a little different because he came with a well-defined plan and the security of an employment contract with the security of support from the company where he came to work and, in fact, where he continues to work.

Having a job, an employment contract that guarantees medical care, a visa that legalises his stay in the country, all of this makes a difference. He knows how the situation does not correspond to the reality of the majority of immigrants who are in Portugal.

And what about the future, Marco? What are your plans for the future? These are questions that Marco often asks himself; not because he does not know the answer, but because he is a structured person, according to him, who likes to think about his life. He likes to make plans. He has dreams, expectations. Above all he likes to live. He is passionate about life, but a life with quality, without fear, a life full of freedom and happiness.

He says he does not know what the future holds for him, no one does, but he knows what he wants and does not want; what he likes and does not like; what makes him happy and what makes him sad. And returning to Brazil to live is not part of his plans. It is not that he does not love his country, quite the opposite, he has his beloved parents in the country where he was born, and he has his family and his friends. But here in Portugal, Marco enjoys his life. He feels that he contributes something to society every day. He feels that he has his place here, that he belongs here. Above all, he has the freedom he always dreamed of when he used to live in Brazil. This freedom is being able to get up early in the morning and run through the city streets, or in a park, without being afraid of being shot; it is the freedom to walk on the beach without fear of being robbed; it is the freedom to be on any terrace at the end of the day, enjoying a cold drink, rested, relaxed, just enjoying the moment. As for the future, it comes every day, and for the time being, Marco's future is in Portugal, where he feels happy.



Klevis

Keywords: hope, opportunities, happiness, family

Abstract

Klevis is a male immigrant from Albania who is eighteen years old. After a lengthy conversation, Klevis confided in me that his primary concern was the lack of opportunities that he and other children his age had. He said that this was his primary concern. Their limited proficiency in the language prevented them from achieving success in elementary school. In spite of the fact that time passed quickly, his intelligence was never on par with that of his contemporaries.

STORY

Consequently, he was compelled to choose a pragmatic vocation rather than an academic one in order to fulfill his needs. bit of body text. Klevis is an 18-year-old Albanian-born male. For financial and employment reasons, his father emigrated to Greece when he was two years old. After one year, his sister and he followed along with his mother. The first few years in Greece were challenging due to the fact that he and his sister were both quite young. As a result, their mother had no choice but to stay at home and care for them, rather than seeking employment and supplementing their income. At the time, his father was the only one employed. Following the completion of primary school he and his sister, his mother progressively acquired knowledge of Greek by attending evening classes in Karditsa and working as a housekeeper for multiple households.



Early in his academic career, his bilingual upbringing presented greater challenges than those of his peers. His parents were non-academic, and they were speaking mainly the Albanian language at home as they were not fluent in Greek. When he required after-school support, they were not able to help him with his homework.

His teacher informed his parents that despite his considerable progress, he might perpetually struggle with his learning disabilities. The instructor advised them to continue their studies, adding that while they would provide assistance, they would not be able to resolve his issues.

His early academic years were more challenging than those of his peers due to the fact that he was raised in a bilingual household. Having been brought up in a household with two distinct languages with parents who were unable to assist him academically, he struggled to keep pace with his peers in different classes and was required to attend school-provided after-school support classes. This marked his initial encounter with discriminatory treatment from his peers, as he was the only student in his class required to attend school-provided supportive instruction. Every other child had a private tutor at home.

However, he overcame most of his obstacles until his parents were informed by his teacher that he was experiencing learning difficulties that he might never fully overcome. The teacher advised them that all he could do was continue studying, and while they would implement techniques to improve academic performance, he would not be able to completely overcome his learning difficulties.

When Klevis entered junior high school, he was only presented with a greater number of challenges. He was required to take classes in ancient Greek, memorise history, and compose complex papers in formal Greek. All these activities were difficult for him.

In order to help his family financially and be able to pay for evening lessons, his father suggested he found an evening job, helping a car mechanic in a car repair shop, since one of his most loved hobbies was learning how cars and motorcycles machines work. From an early age he knew through his father and through other friends how to work with cars, so this opportunity was great for him.

Klevis, upon finishing his junior year of high school, decided to enroll in a vocational high school with the intention of pursuing a degree in automobile engineering. This can be attributed to the fact that his occupation yielded benefits beyond his initial expectations. Upon completion of his vocational high school programme, he would be eligible to undertake a remunerated internship at an establishment that specialises in the field of automotive engineering. He would have the opportunity to acquire both the theoretical and practical knowledge necessary to become a professional in this field while attending a VET school. Ultimately, he succeeded, and he is presently employed at the auto repair shop where he finished his practicum. Likewise, he has just concluded his practice session.

Following an extensive dialogue with Klevis, he candidly disclosed to me that the most formidable obstacle he encountered was not the prejudice of other children, but rather the dearth of opportunities for himself and children like him. Upon entering primary school, they did not yet possess proficiency in the language, and during his time in school, he was unable to remain at the academic pace of his peers. Consequently, although the years passed quickly, he was never able to match the intellectual prowess of his peers. Because of this, his sole recourse was to pursue a vocational and pragmatic vocation as opposed to pursuing academic pursuits.



Stefka

Keywords: migration, racism, language barriers

Abstract

“It was a hard decision, but I had to do it’. Stefka was born in a village near Romania in northern Bulgaria. Following her father’s abandonment and her mother’s severe health issues, she and her siblings were raised by their grandparents from a young age. She faced racism and hatred because she was an immigrant with fewer rights. Despite marrying a Greek, she faces discrimination and racism. A year ago, she requested a public service document proving her Greek heritage. The authorities initially withheld the document and began identity verification. She aspires to get a second degree to improve her job prospects.



STORY

Stefka was born in a small town near the Romanian border in northern Bulgaria. Her father abandoned her, her mother, and her siblings when they were very young; her mother had severe health issues throughout her childhood, so she was mainly raised by her grandparents. She was required to begin working at the age of twelve, performing typically demanding duties that no one else was interested in. Around the age of sixteen, when she was still quite young, she decided to migrate. She made the decision to travel to Greece due to its convenient bus accessibility and the additional option of departing on foot in the event of an emergency, as she further elaborated. Also, Greece was the closest country to which she could legally travel to, given how simple it was for her to obtain the necessary documents.

She and other Bulgarians resided in Thessaloniki for a few months following their arrival in Greece, during which time she sought employment. As spring approached, they were offered agricultural employment in Trikala, performing a variety of field and vineyard duties. Despite her limited proficiency in Greek, they decided to relocate to Trikala. They stayed there for over three consecutive years. They acquired proficiency in the Greek language through interaction with local inhabitants and their manager.

Following that she made the decision to obtain a Greek language certificate through ANKA, a local organisation that actively supports the integration of immigrants and refugees and works with this population.

She obtained a certificate in the Greek language before enrolling in a vocational high school with the intention of pursuing a career in nursing. She continues to be employed as a nurse at present.

At first, it was difficult to make friends in Greece; however, that changed as soon as she mastered the language. The primary and most significant obstacle she encountered was her lack of language proficiency.

She did encounter racism and hatred, primarily due to the fact that she was an immigrant with fewer rights. Despite being married to a Greek, she continues to encounter discrimination and racism in a variety of contexts. A year ago, she requested a document at a public service that would attest to her Greek heritage. Initially, the authorities declined to provide the document and instead initiated protocols to verify the legitimacy of her identity. Moving forward, she aspires to obtain a second degree to expand her prospects for employment.



Kinan

Keywords: hope, career advancement, opportunities, repatriation

Abstract

A medical student from Lebanon, Kinan, arrived in Greece for studies on a scholarship and has been living and working in the country for over 9 years. He is a well-educated individual who aspires to complete his studies and return to his home country and establish a career there.

STORY

Kinan is a 29-year-old Lebanese male, currently attending Medical School. Given that his father is a practicing physician in Lebanon, from an early age, Kinan was determined to pursue the same path as his father. However, due to the high cost of higher education in Lebanon, his family were unable to afford the tuition. Therefore, driven by his aspiration to pursue a medical career and experience other cultures and civilizations, he applied for a scholarship to undertake studies in Europe, eventually migrating to Greece at the age of 20. Kinan, had a beautiful childhood in his coastal hometown Byblos. He grew up in a pleasant environment, surrounded by his parents and two younger sisters.

Unfortunately, in 2006, when Kinan was 16 years old, he experienced the Battle of Bint Jbeil that lasted for a month. It was an event that marked his life and shaped him as a person, even contributing to his decision to migrate and pursue higher education in Europe.

His first impression of Europe was quite pleasant. Upon arrival he was greeted by family members who assisted him in overcoming the initial anxiety of being away from home. Kinan was distressed and uncertain for a few weeks due to the fact that he was in a foreign country with people and a mother tongue that were alien to him. The initial fear of being away from home quickly subsided, as he began attending Greek language courses with fellow students concurrently with his studies, which allowed him to interact with others. However, Kinan never experienced that language barrier, as he is an extremely sociable individual who enjoys interacting with others, and he quickly formed friendships in the local community.

Following the acquisition of the Greek Language certificate, Kinan opted to seek employment in addition to his studies to better support himself. Despite being a well-educated individual who spoke Arabic, French, English and Greek, he struggled to find employment in Greece. He believes that this was primarily due to the country's financial situation, rather than his different nationality. Nonetheless, he felt that in some circumstances, companies would prefer to hire a local.

Kinan has volunteered for the Hellenic Red Cross as a medical consultant and interpreter, delivering humanitarian aid to refugees and migrants arriving by sea. In an effort to help those in need, he has also offered voluntary work at refugee camps. This also gave him the opportunity to gain practical experience in the field of his studies. His practical knowledge and skills in the service sector have enabled him to secure employment; he is currently finishing his undergraduate studies and working as a freelance interpreter.



When asked about any obstacles or challenges he might have encountered during his integration in the new society, he claimed that he never came across any, apart from homesickness. In times of need, he received help from his circle of Greek friends, who were always very kind and willing to assist him in any way possible.

Looking back on his life in Greece, Kinan stated that it has not been strange for him, as he comes originally from a Mediterranean country where the cuisine and culture are comparable. In general, he has been greeted with friendliness by the people of Europe, and his experience can be described as very positive. Although he did not face any significant challenges, his aspiration for the future includes completing his undergraduate studies and acquiring his residency in Otolaryngology. Finally, he hopes that after graduating from Medical University and acquiring some clinical experience, he will be able to return to his home country and work there, so as to be closer to his family.



AURORA

Keywords: tolerance, different cultures, social cohesion, international cooperation

Abstract

"I initially chose to come to Tunisia for work. It was undeniably challenging; I grappled with language barriers, and being a woman in this new world posed a significant challenge. However, as I persevered, I learned from my Tunisian colleagues, overcame countless challenges, and, in the end, discovered that it was the best and most empowering experience of my life."

STORY

In 2019 and at the age of 28, Aurora a young Italian woman set out on a journey to Tunisia, a country significantly different from her own. What is her mission? Working and making a name for oneself in the field of international cooperation and development. She was determined to make a constructive contribution to her host country, armed with a bachelor's degree in diplomatic science and a master's degree in human rights and multilevel governance.

Aurora, an avid reader and passionate yoga enthusiast, journeyed to Tunisia, a country with unfamiliar languages and cultures. Her digital skills ranged from low to medium-low, highlighting the challenges she faced in a society where access to information for migrants was limited, and the local community generally lacked awareness of the needs of migrants.

She emphasised the necessity of giving migrants a platform to express themselves in their own words and present an accurate picture of themselves. Her primary integration techniques included becoming more sociable, open-minded, and willing to appreciate other mentalities. But the path wasn't without hurdles. Communication with the local community was initially arduous due to language barriers. Aurora, like many other migrants, grappled with being a woman in a culture different from her own. This led to instances of sexual harassment and bullying, as she navigated the unfamiliar terrain of dress codes and social norms.

Aurora faced equally demanding challenges. Upon arriving in Tunisia, she lacked any prior professional experience and had to adjust to her Tunisian colleagues, their working approaches, and the intricate legal framework of the country.

Reflecting on her experience, Aurora resoundingly stated, "My experience was amazing from every point of view; for my personal and professional growth, it was the most important experience of my life." Her words carried a message of empowerment and personal development, a testament to her journey of resilience and learning. Her involvement in various projects empowered social organisations, NGOs, and local authorities. Through her dedication, Aurora spread awareness and common values, contributing to the betterment of her host society. She even expressed her wish for her brother to embark on a similar path.

However, she recognised that not everyone would find the same journey suitable. Tunisia's chaotic transportation and less-than-ideal living conditions might not appeal to all, particularly those who aren't as young or energetic.



When asked about her hopes for Tunisia, Aurora emphasised the need for social cohesion. She believed that strengthening communication between Tunisian communities and migrant and refugee communities was crucial to understanding their struggles and fostering tolerance. She referenced the events of July 2023 in Sfax, which exposed moments of racism and intolerance. To combat these issues, she highlighted the significance of migrants having their own platform, a channel to express their perspectives, which would mitigate the risk of media manipulation and increase awareness of the challenges they face.



Zaid

Keywords: school success, financial hardship, lost dreams, new dreams



Abstract

"I initially arrived with a scholarship, but soon realised it wasn't enough. My family had to send me money to support my stay. The language barriers at the university took me by surprise—everything was in French, a language I knew nothing about. In pursuit of a job to assist my family, I shifted my focus to a field with fewer studying hours. In the face of challenges, thoughts of illegal migration to Europe crossed my mind. But one day, in the metro, I saw someone selling food in the streets from a window. An idea struck me, a way to harness my culinary skills and bring a piece of home to Tunisia."

STORY

Zaid, a 26-year-old young man from Palestine, was a high school graduate who earned a scholarship to study abroad due to his outstanding performance in the baccalaureate exam, ranking first among his generation. Upon arriving in Tunisia, he faced financial difficulties as the scholarship provided to him was insufficient to cover his living expenses.

His travel to Tunisia presented several challenges. Coming from Gaza, which lacked an airport, Zaid had to pass through Egypt via the Rafah border crossing. This route was often obstructed due to political reasons, causing him to lose a year in language learning. When he finally arrived in Tunisia, he pursued a two-month crash course to learn the language.

Zaid's initial aspiration was to become a veterinarian, a field not available in Gaza. Yet, he discovered that in Tunisia, admission to veterinary school required passing through preparatory school, including challenging subjects in French, a language he didn't practice.

As financial support from his family began to burden him, Zaid decided to switch to a field with shorter hours and sought employment to sustain himself.

After three years, he graduated in biology and passed the national veterinary test. Though he was accepted, he felt it was too late, considering the financial support his family had provided for years. Restarting his educational journey was impractical as his mother urged him to return to Gaza and seek employment, a choice he refused due to war and structural restrictions in Gaza. Faced with limited opportunities, he took on various jobs to support his small family as he married a Tunisian woman using their scholarship money to fund their wedding. Despite his ambitions, Zaid faced exploitation by various employers who withheld his wages, leading him to feel helpless.

In his quest for a better life, Zaid contemplated illegal migration to Europe. While discussing this idea with his wife during a metro ride, they noticed a man selling food on the street. Zaid thought about the traditional Palestinian dish "kunafa". Encouraged by his wife, and with her support, he launched his small culinary street business.

However, this path was far from easy, as Zaid encountered numerous obstacles, including discrimination from local shops and harassment from street troublemakers who forced him to leave.

Navigating the bureaucratic hurdles to obtain the necessary legal documents and a residence card proved to be a daunting challenge in Tunisia, Zaid was desperate, particularly when facing economic recessions and racial bias.



Today, from being a jobless young man, Zaid has transformed into an employer who provides jobs for seven individuals. His dreams extend beyond owning his own shop and conquering bureaucratic challenges. Zaid envisions international success, where he can leave Tunisia, running his business in multiple countries while leaving a lasting impact on the world.

Despite achieving success and recognition, he found that the media often focused solely on his accomplishments, neglecting the numerous challenges he had overcome.

Participating in the case study of the SeHeMe project provides Zaid with the opportunity to share his complete journey. He believes that today, migrants can finally have a voice and representation in the media, enabling them to communicate and support one another in overcoming the challenges, rules, and laws of their host country. He emphasised the significance of having an online "HomeAway" magazine that would offer the host country a genuine insight into the lives and struggles of migrants. This, in turn, has the potential to facilitate the process of integration and foster solidarity among generations.





Ifemelu

Keywords: adventure, hard work, determination,

Abstract

"Every experience has its ups and downs. Following a family friend's footsteps, I came to Tunisia in search of adventure. I took up whatever job I could find to save money, from babysitting to room service. Through hard work and determination, I saved enough to undertake a training program where I was awarded a certificate. Today, I run my own business in Tunisia, providing jobs and support to others. I also volunteer at social events, helping my community integrate better and sharing the wisdom I've gained."

STORY

In 2013, Ifemelu embarked on an adventure inspired by the remarkable success of her mother's friend in Tunisia. This friend had built a comfortable life in the country, even becoming a homeowner, which ignited a spark in Ifemelu to follow this path of promise and opportunity.

Since her arrival in Tunisia, Ifemelu dived headfirst into the experience, taking on an array of jobs that came her way. From room service to babysitting and restaurant work, she embraced every opportunity, taking her new life with determination and enthusiasm. Ifemelu's journey is a testament to the power of resilience and a bold spirit.

With her hard-earned savings, she pursued a professional culinary and pastry arts course to equip herself with the skills needed to establish her own business.



The journey was challenging, and navigating through bureaucratic processes, legal documentation, and government authorisation took two years of unwavering persistence, Ifemelu told us the secret of her integration into the host society saying "Wherever you go, you'll encounter both the good and the bad. It's all part of the adventure! But the key is to respect the laws of the host country, embrace their culture, and cherish your own."

Yet, her journey extended beyond personal growth. It was about forging connections between migrants and local communities, highlighting the importance of communication and shared experiences. Ifemelu became deeply involved in various organisations and civil society, demonstrating her dedication to social work.

In 2017, her entrepreneurial dreams officially took flight as she began accepting orders at home. To connect with customers and promote her business, a Tunisian friend set up a social media account for her in 2016, an invaluable tool in her entrepreneurial journey.

But Ifemelu's story is more than just her business success; it's an inspiration. In addition to creating a successful business, she has committed herself to helping other immigrants, proving that determination and hard work can lead to remarkable achievements. Numerous media outlets have taken notice of her extraordinary success, including IOM, Italian media, and France 24, making her journey a blueprint for other migrants aspiring to achieve their dreams.

Her ambitions reach far and wide, transcending borders. Ifemelu envisions establishing a thriving culinary venture on an international scale, spreading her culinary expertise across the globe. She is excited to be included in the SeHeMe "Home and Away" magazine. She wants to inspire people with her incredible journey and share her experiences and abilities with the world.