

# MOVING FORWARD

UNHCR MALTA MAGAZINE | 2018

## Inside: Sharing Cultures

MEET THE REFUGEES WHO ARE CONTRIBUTING TO MALTA



**SPARK15**

The first youth led NGO

**ULLAH'S STORY**

In pictures:  
**RESCUE AT SEA**

With a special feature:  
**REFUGEES IN GOZO**



# EDITORIAL:

## Beyond the tragedy there is another story

UNHCR is very proud to launch this magazine as a testament to both an enduring and changing Malta.

Some years ago we conducted an in-house study of media content on how refugees are featured in the local press. Not surprisingly, we found that many stories focused on rescue operations, with some attention on the reception conditions, but very little on what happened to refugees while living in Malta.

Following these findings, we made an effort to bring to the public attention the stories of refugees who are living and working in Malta. We have produced a number of campaigns, including TV adverts on people who found protection in Malta, a short movie on a

group of Somali youth playing football at the Luxol ground and a radio campaign featuring an Ethiopian wife and husband who opened a restaurant in Msida among many other stories we feature online. In a way, this magazine is the culmination of this effort.

Inside this magazine, you will read some outstanding stories of refugees creating opportunities in Malta for themselves and for the wider community by opening businesses, such as an Ethiopian restaurant co-owned by an Ethiopian couple and a Maltese man. Their story was featured on a radio program to showcase their journey and experience, countering some of the more negative narratives. They are entrepreneurs, employing people and contributing to Malta's economic growth.

There is also the unique story of Farah - a transgender Somali refugee who in 2016 published her autobiography entitled *Never Again* recounting her journey from Somalia to Malta as she experienced harrowing ordeals and passed through the many smuggling networks in Sudan and Libya.

Then there is the inspiring story of Spark15 - a youth refugee organization who had their launch in January 2017 at the President's San Anton Palace. It is encouraging to see refugees living in Malta forming organizations in order to advocate for their rights. In fact, we decided to dedicate the front cover of this magazine to Spark15.

There are other groups forming registered organizations, such as the Sudanese, Somali and Eritrean communities, which UNHCR is working closely with and supporting.

The magazine also features the rescue at sea operations that still take place in the Mediterranean Sea and the heroic role of the NGOs and persons who are today saving the lives of people who are fleeing war and persecution.

With this magazine - a collection of stories from the past two years - UNHCR hopes to shed a positive light on a side of the refugee story that is often neglected and obscured by tragedy. We also hope that through this magazine readers will note that Malta is changing and will continue to evolve further in the coming years. It is of course up to all of us to see in which direction it goes.

The time to move forward together is now!



### MOVING FORWARD

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The UNHCR Malta office opened in 2005 and falls under the regional office of Southern Europe (Rome). UNHCR works closely with the Maltese government, social partners and a number of local organizations and NGOs to find durable solutions for refugees and beneficiaries of protection in Malta and to advocate towards improved access to protection and conditions of asylum in Malta.

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# MOVING FORWARD, TOGETHER

WE ARE VERY PROUD TO LAUNCH THIS MAGAZINE DESCRIBING THE RESILIENCE OF PEOPLE FLEEING WAR AND PERSECUTION AND RE-BUILDING A NEW LIFE IN MALTA.

This magazine is not just about refugees living and working in Malta. It is also about Malta as a crossroad of cultures and peoples for millennia.



A cursory look at the past decade reveals that a lot has changed.

Malta's recent refugee history has been characterized by irregular boat arrivals from Libya, where more than 20,000 arrived since 2004. Boat arrivals dropped to practically nil since 2014, following the Italian and European operations that take rescued migrants to Italy for disembarkation. This does not mean that asylum applications have stopped. It only means that the mode of arrival has now shifted towards regular arrivals.

Indeed, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner processes between 1,600 - 2000 asylum applications a year, granting the majority with international protection. Most of the asylum applications today are from Libya, Syria, Somalia and Eritrea – all countries where there are conflicts and war forcing civilians to flee.

Also, just because boat arrivals have dropped, it does not mean that Malta is not contributing in saving the many lives that cross the dangerous sea between Libya and Italy. In fact Malta continues to be involved in rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea. Malta should be proud of the Armed Forces of Malta for saving lives that would otherwise be lost.

Malta has also received support. Some would say that Malta should have received more, but it is an undeniable fact that Malta received solidarity from the European Union and the United States both in terms of funding as well as resettling refugees from Malta. In total, close to 4,000 people fleeing persecution and war have now been resettled and relocated to the United States and other EU member states.

Malta was the first and only EU Member State to receive such an assistance. Today resettlement from Malta to the US has stopped. But we are happy to see Malta playing its part by accepting around 200 asylum seekers and refugees from Italy, Greece and Turkey. One should also note that Malta is the only EU Member State to have fulfilled its quota in the relocation scheme. This is something that Malta should be proud of.

A further milestone is the significant reduction in the use of detention for asylum seekers. For too long Malta kept in place a system that was not in line with international and European human rights standards. The new system has not yet been tested with boat arrivals and UNHCR continues to engage with the local authorities to monitor this transition and recommend improvements. But this was an important step for Malta, and one which moves away from a situation of 'emergency' to one of sustainable management of the asylum system.

We are also pleased to note that the word 'integration' is no longer taboo. We are noticing that at a ministerial and government level, more officials are ready to recognize and work for a more inclusive society. More organizations, some of them in the private sector, are engaging with us to better understand the situation of refugees, contribute and bridge the gaps that still exist with the refugee community.

The new integration framework for migrants is a landmark moment for this country as it recognizes the need to have a holistic approach to the issue of social inclusion.

Yet, there are challenges to be addressed.

Despite the many success stories that we highlight, there are many refugees who are struggling because they lack access to sustainable inclusion prospects, such as difficulties to access stable and predictable work, situations of homelessness driven by increasing rent prices, legal and policy impediments for family reunification.

It is sadly a fact that racism and xenophobia are real and pose a threat to social inclusion and could, if not addressed, be a cause of social exclusion and communal strife. Europe, as well as the Western world, are facing a mounting challenge to their core values of solidarity, fueled by populist politics and toxic public narratives that create a climate of fear. It is here that leadership is required to engage with those communities who for one reason or another are facing challenges.

### **It is here that we would like to put forward three points:**

**Firstly**, social inclusion. Investing in this area means investing in the social fibre of Maltese society. More support should be allocated to localities that may be facing challenges in this respect. The reasons could be varied and they need to be understood and addressed accordingly. This approach needs to be a holistic one. There is no point in having an integration policy that is not followed up by the different ministries. Each relevant ministry should identify a focal point to work on integration and coordinate with other ministries. The ministries of home affairs, equality, education, health, social policy and the Office of the Prime Minister are those that need to be among the most active for this new integration policy to have an impact.

**Secondly**, Malta has made significant strides forward – from establishing the Refugee Act in 2000 to making changes to its reception policy, and having recently launched an integration framework, in December 2017. However, there are gaps that need to be addressed, such as better material reception conditions, a reform of the second instance asylum body, and broadening the family reunification process to include individuals granted subsidiary protection.

**Thirdly**, it is not just the Government or the local authorities that have certain responsibility towards social inclusion. Public perception and rhetoric matter too. Politicians from all hues should speak responsibly and seek to reinforce what holds us together rather than that which divides us. The media should use its powerful voice and position, as well as the terminology used, the reasons provided in the rise of refugee influx, and the solutions suggested, in a way that conveys accurate information, so that citizens can make sense of the world and their place within it. Sensational rhetoric makes headlines but it does very little to understand people who had to forcibly leave their homes.

Finally, each and every single one of us can do our part in making our communities a better place to live. So next time you meet a refugee at work, or at the shops, take that extra step to say hello and get to know the person. We have done a lot together. We can still do more.

**Kahin Ismail**  
UNHCR Representative to Malta





# SHARING CULTURES

By Sarah Mallia  
Public Information Assistant

AUTHENTIC, FRIENDLY, AND FLAVOURFUL ARE SOME OF THE WORDS THAT COME TO MIND AFTER A VISIT TO 'ONE LOVE AFRICAN BAR AND RESTAURANT'. RUN BY AN ETHIOPIAN COUPLE - MUNA TEFERA AND SAMSON TARIKU AND THEIR MALTESE PARTNER, WALTER MALLO, THIS VIBRANT REGGAE-THEMED RESTAURANT AT THE CENTRE OF MSIDA OFFERS A TRULY UNIQUE INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCE.

Muna and Samson come from Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. The couple met in Sudan in 2008, when they made the dangerous and life-changing decision to cross the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean Sea in search of a better future.

Since arriving in Malta, Muna and Samson, who are parents to two young boys, have worked hard to secure a comfortable life for their family. Before opening the restaurant, both of them had different jobs.

In 2015 they opened 'One Love African Bar and Restaurant' alongside their Maltese friend Walter from Cospicua, who also believes that food has the ability to bridge cultural divides and bring people together.

“ We want to show the local population our food, so that people can understand our culture and traditions.”

Muna

In 2015, Ethiopian couple Muna Terefa and Samson Tariku opened 'One Love African Bar and Restaurant' in Msida, along with their Maltese friend Walter Mallo from Cospicua. © UNHCR/ Peter Mercieca

The restaurant specialises in Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisine which characteristically consists of rich spicy vegetable and meat stews served on top of injera, a large sourdough flat bread.

“*Maltese people love our food! Before we opened we would invite our Maltese friends and cook for them. After a while we decided to open a restaurant.*”

Samson

An instantly noticeable feature of this restaurant is that it serves a very diverse clientele. “Most of our customers are Maltese but we also have a following among migrant communities, particularly Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somalis,” explains Muna. The staff working at the restaurant also come from diverse countries. “We currently have 5 people working here from 4 different countries including Malta, Ethiopia, Finland, and Romania,” says Samson.

When asked about common challenges faced by migrant and refugee communities, Muna responded by saying, “If you are a refugee in Malta you have the right to work – meaning that you are working legally and paying tax, like myself. I have always worked with a permit, paid tax and social security.” Samson adds that “Many refugees and migrants are opening shops, hairdressing salons and other small businesses. Many are also filling up jobs that are not being taken by the local community, for example in hospitals, hotels and restaurants.”

“*We need to realise that it is actually a good thing to have people with different nationalities coming and living in a country. We have to accept our differences, and notice our similarities. That is why we named our restaurant after Bob Marley’s hit song “One Love”, because we want to promote collaboration, sharing, and respect, qualities that are far better than fear and hate.*”

Samson

A Central Bank report, ‘Understanding the Macroeconomic Impact of Migration in Malta’, published in December 2015, supports the couple’s argument and has shown that foreign workers

“*All we want is to live happily, to work hard and bring up our kids well. This restaurant has made that possible. For that we say thank you to Malta.*”



Muna Terefa (left), and her husband Samson Tariku (right), run 'One Love African Bar and Restaurant' a vibrant reggae themed restaurant which offers a truly unique intercultural experience. © UNHCR/ Peter Mercieca

contribute significantly to the Maltese economy, noting that “evidence seems to indicate that the rising demand for labour by Maltese industries is too strong to be serviced by the supply of Maltese workers.” It goes on to show that “dependence on migrant workers amounts to nearly 29% of the entire workforce in entertainment and recreation, 23% in professional services and administrative support and 21% in hotels & restaurants.”

In September 2016, UNHCR Malta launched its first radio campaign on Bay Radio, challenging common myths about refugees in Malta. The campaign, “Flimkien ghal Malta Inklussiva/Together for an Inclusive Malta,” featured One Love African Bar & Restaurant.

The campaign sought to challenge some of the common misconceptions held by the local population about refugees, ideas such as “they do not work”, “they are a burden on the economy”, and “they steal local jobs.”



ONE LOVE AFRICAN BAR AND RESTAURANT IS SITUATED IN RUE D'ARGENS IN MSIDA





# NEVER ARRIVE

## - an Interview with Farah

By Sarah Mallia  
Public Information Assistant

AT AGE 17, FARAH ABDULLAHI ABDI BOARDED A BOAT IN LIBYA AND EMBARKED ON A NOTORIOUSLY DANGEROUS JOURNEY. TODAY, 5 YEARS LATER, FARAH IS AN AUTHOR, BLOGGER AND HUMAN-RIGHTS AND LGBTI (LESBIAN, GAY, BI-SEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX) ACTIVIST BASED IN MALTA.

### FARAH IS NO STRANGER TO DISPLACEMENT.

“ My family first left Somalia to escape the civil war in the 1990's. That was the first reason for my displacement. The second reason for my displacement was leaving Kenya to come to Europe, because of my gender orientation, and my fear of persecution because of that.”

Farah

Farah Abdullahi Abdi at a reading of her book *Never Arrive* in 2016. 'Never Arrive' tells the story of Farah who was forced to flee Kenya because of persecution and stigma associated with sexual orientation.

© UNHCR/ Tumer Gencturk

She is a transgender refugee from Somalia, and her gender identity and society's relation to it was one of the main challenges she faced while growing up.

Farah's journey however, is not yet over: "My arrival in Malta was the end of that journey, and the beginning of a new one", she explains.

Farah published her autobiography, *Never Arrive*, in 2016. The book sheds light on one chapter of her physical and emotional journey: the crossing of the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. The publication of Farah's story forms part of the first phase of the project **Bodyless**, which aims to reconstruct and retell African (im)migration and refugee narratives through a book, Maltese poetry and a public exhibition. The project is led by the NGO KOPIN, and financed by the Malta Arts Fund, UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration.

The title of the book, a direct quote from her mother, is testament to Farah's strength, resilience, and determination. "Never Arrive is something my mum always told my brother and I – to never find a comfort zone, and to always challenge ourselves to be the best that we can," Farah tells UNHCR with nostalgia in her eyes.

Farah started writing covertly at the tender age of 7. It was the only outlet allowing her to vent about her identity, as even then she knew that she would never be accepted into the community that she was born into.

Since arriving in Malta, Farah has had the opportunity to work as a freelance writer, and has been invited to share her story at a number of human rights conferences all over Europe, testimony to the fact that refugees also bring optimism, ambition and a great potential to be discovered.

While Farah's transgender identity has been accepted in Malta, she continues to face racism and xenophobia.

“ I fled Kenya because of fear of persecution for my LGBTI identity; why should I tolerate a place that does not accept my Muslim and African identity?”





Farah Abdullahi Abdi reads sections of her book *Never Arrive* at Café Society in Valletta. Through *Never Arrive*, Farah, a young Somali transgender refugee, tells the story of her physical and emotional journey to date. ©UNHCR/ Tumer Gencturk

Along with other young advocates, Farah believes that a number of European countries have failed to nurture inclusive societies. “For multiculturalism to exist, countries must give rights to all, not create ghettos and clusters of communities who feel excluded from the bigger conversation,” she explains.

“Now, it is in the hands of young people to create change. Young people have always had a role when it comes to overcoming injustice, as they did during the civil rights movement in the United States, and the liberation of South Africa from apartheid. Even here in Malta, the youth organisation Spark15 are doing amazing work when it comes to advocating for the rights of young refugees living in Malta.”

Spark15 is a group of young refugees with big ambitions, like Farah, and has a clear objective to

encourage other young refugees to become active participants and agents of inclusive societies in their communities.

### SO, WHAT IS THE NEXT CHAPTER OF FARAH'S EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY?

Farah will be working on her second book, a sequel to *Never Arrive*. “It is a sequel because I am never arriving, fortunately and unfortunately,” she says.

“I want to live in a society that that will judge me on my character, and not because of my colour, my gender identity, or my refugee status. I want to be judged by what I bring to the table.”

Farah’s greatest hope is that this next chapter in her journey will give her exactly that.





# SPORT: a tool for social inclusion

By Sarah Mallia  
Public Information Assistant

Photos: © UNHCR/ Dragana Rankovic

FOOTBALL IS THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR GAME, TRANSCENDING BARRIERS AND UNITING PEOPLE FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS AND NATIONALITIES. ACROSS THE GLOBE, FOOTBALL IS SEEN AS A WAY OF LIFE FOR MANY. IT HAS NO BORDERS AND IS UNIVERSAL. IT PLAYS A CENTRAL ROLE IN BREAKING DOWN CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BARRIERS WITHIN COMMUNITIES, REGARDLESS OF AGE, GENDER OR ETHNICITY.

“Football is a big part of my life. I have been playing since I was young. Eventually I would like us to compete in tournaments outside of the open centres. In that way, we communicate with new people, and join the community.”

Ibrahim, a team player residing at the Marsa Open Centre

When contacted by the Malta Olympic Committee regarding a proposal for funds for youth, UNHCR roped in the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), the national reception agency, so that refugees in Marsa would benefit from this initiative. The proposal for a new football pitch at





the Marsa Open Centre, as well as the sponsoring of a football coach by the Malta Football Association, saw the success of this collaboration. A football tournament was then organised by the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) together with the Malta Olympic Committee to launch the football pitch at the Marsa Open Centre on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2016.

“ Occasions such the opening of a football pitch at the Marsa Open Centre and the participation of refugees in sports confirms that it is not only individuals who benefit in terms of physical and mental wellbeing, but also communities, who are united and inspired.”

Beat Schuler, interim UNHCR Representative to Malta in 2016

2016 was a special year for some refugees. At the Rio Olympics, the International Olympic Committee announced the selection of 10 refugees who competed in Rio de Janeiro in August, forming the first-ever Refugee Olympic Athletes team.

They included two swimmers from Syria, two judokas from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a marathoner from Ethiopia, and five middle-distance runners from South Sudan. At a time when 60 million people have been forced to flee their homes to escape conflict and persecution, the Refugee Olympic Athletes team represented the courage, resilience and untapped talent that lies within refugee communities worldwide.





# REFUGEE ATHLETE TEAM

competes in  
World Athletics  
Championships  
in London



© UNHCR/ Bob Martin

Kadar Omar Abdullahi UNHCR Refugee athlete originally from Ethiopia competes in the 5000m men's heats at the World Athletic Championships at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Stadium in London England.

© UNHCR/ Bob Martin, 08 August, 2017





Two of the five refugee athletes competing in London in 2017 were among the squad who made history in Rio as the first refugee team to compete in the Olympic Games.

**Anjelina Lohalith**, who was at Rio, ran in her 1,500m heat on the opening night of the London games. Her disappointment at not getting through to the next round aside, Anjelina says participation alone will push her to continue.

“ I shall not give up no matter what. I want to continue training more and I believe I will be like them [other athletes]. I compete on behalf of all the refugees around the world. So many people behind me, watching me competing, and I give them a lot of hope.”

Anjelina, after running in the event.

Some members of the Athlete Refugee Team have been training for three years, while others had just a few months of training. Displaced from their homes at an early age, they have the opportunity of a better future away from conflict zones and refugee camps.

Anjelina's teammate, **Ahmed Bashir Farah**, who has never competed on the world stage, ran in the 800-metre heats. Despite only joining the team in March, Ahmed managed to keep pace with the other athletes. He did not make it through to the next round, but he hopes it will be the first of many appearances for him in international competitions.

The five athletes live and train alongside other trainee refugee athletes in Kenya, in facilities and residence funded by the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation and supported by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

**Dominic Lobalu**, **Rose Lokonyen** (who ran in the 800m in Rio) and **Kadar Omar** made up the rest of Athlete Refugee Team.

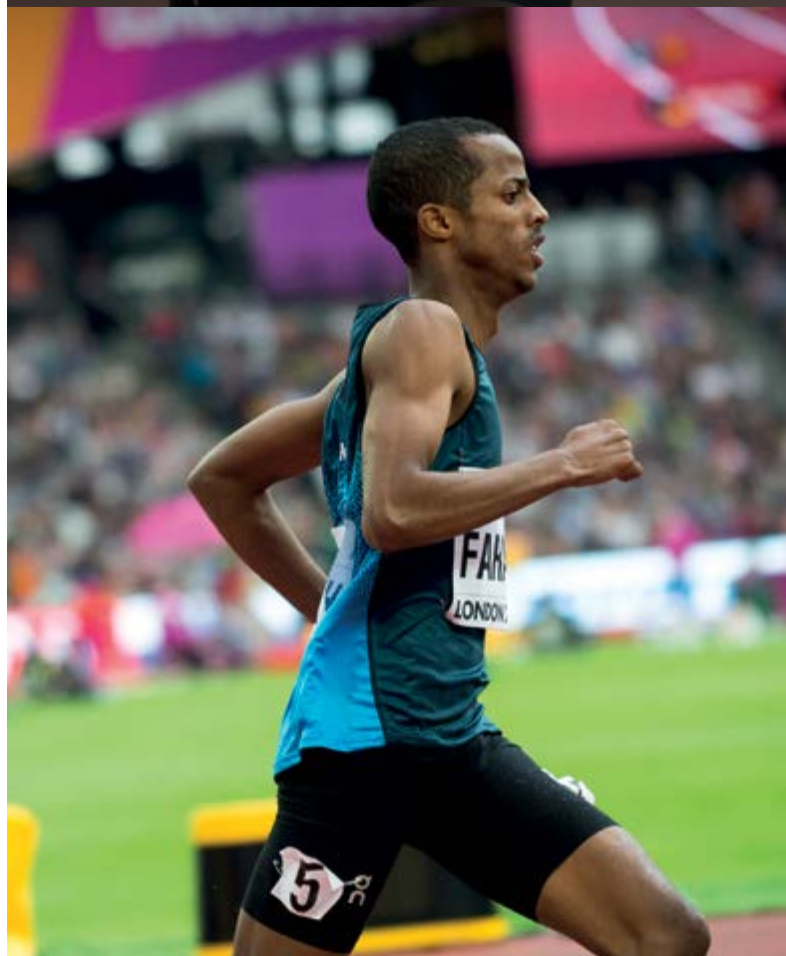
While they were focused on advancing through the competition, the athletes also knew that they were not just competing for themselves.

*Extracts from the article “Refugees compete at World Athletics Championship” by Warda Al-Jawahiry published on 08 August 2017 on [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org).*



Refugee athlete Anjelina Nadai Lohalith competes in the 1500m women's heats at the 2017 IAAF World Athletics Championships at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Stadium in London.

© UNHCR/ Bob Martin, 04 August, 2017



Athlete Refugee Team member Ahmed Bashir Farah competes in the 800m heat at the World Athletics Championship in London.

© UNHCR/ Claire Thomas, 05 August, 2017



# SPARK15: The first youth refugee led NGO

By Sarah Mallia  
Public Information Assistant

SPARK15 ARE A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE A CLEAR OBJECTIVE: TO ENCOURAGE BOTH YOUNG REFUGEES AND OTHER YOUTHS TO BECOME ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS AND AGENTS OF INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES IN MALTA, AND BEYOND.

Spark15 members are a mix of young people coming from a number of different countries including Eritrea, Palestine, Somalia and Libya, with ages ranging from 18 to 25. After forming friendships while attending MCAST (the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology), Spark15 officially formed as a group following a UNHCR consultation meeting in October 2015.

“ We found that we all face common challenges. Following the consultation, we stayed in contact and decided that together it would be possible to do something great. We named ourselves Spark15 because we are a small idea that can become big.”

Hourie Tafah, Spark15's former president, a 25 year old woman from Palestine.

The organisation was officially inaugurated on Friday 17 March 2017, at the President's Palace at San Anton Gardens, with an opening speech given by the President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca.

During the launch, Spark15 released a video which highlights daily challenges that young people, in particular refugee communities face in Malta – mainly access to work and education opportunities.

Hourie has a Bachelor of Arts degree in graphic design from Lebanon, and a diploma in Marketing from MCAST. She then received a scholarship and is currently studying at Rutgers University in the USA. She explains that “One of my major challenges has been finding work. I am not the only one who has this problem. For me, it's because I wear a hijab, for others it may be because of their skin colour. Even if they have a work permit, many are not accepted.”

Mohammed Hassan, better known by his friends as Moh, is a 23 year old business student who also believes that education and employment are key elements to enabling the integration of refugees in Malta. “With no access to education and work, there can be no integration. This will lead to the creation of ghettos,” says Moh.





Moh is confident that Spark15 have the key to encourage dialogue between refugees and local youth.

“ It cannot be done through traditional and formal ways, but by organising events, music sessions and sports activities which will attract members from different communities to be and work together.”

Moh

During the launch, Kahin Ismail, UNHCR Malta Representative said: “We applaud the resilience and dedication of Spark15 as a youth refugee organisation whose members find the time between studying and working for their work to promote and advocate for refugee integration in Malta and to be active members of this vibrant society.”

Replace with: UNHCR called for the implementation of an integration framework in Malta, which was since launched by the government in December 2017.

Launching of Spark15 during an event held at the President of Malta Palace in 2017. ©UNHCR/ Tumer Gencturk

“ At the legislative and policy level, we welcome the Government’s efforts to create an integration framework that acknowledges the growing reality of a diverse Malta and which we hope will establish concrete and actionable measures to facilitate refugees’ and migrants’ access to services, employment and full integration.”

Mr. Kahin Ismail

“At the community level, social inclusion is a dynamic two way process. It is important that we work together to engage with the wider community, to establish deeper ties, and to highlight how our similarities are greater than our differences.”

“ Spark15 is the first youth refugee organisation in Malta, and is a testament to the growing diversity of Malta.”



# INTERVIEW:

## Hourie Tafech, Spark15

Photos: © UNHCR/ Tumer Gencturk



### 🗣️ Tell me a little bit about yourself...

I am a Palestinian refugee, born in Lebanon. I was raised in a refugee camp. I came to Malta in 2014 after I finished my Bachelor of Arts degree in graphic design in Lebanon. I am now studying for an Advanced Diploma in Marketing at MCAST. I am also a volunteer with several NGOs, like the Migrant Women Association and Spark15.

### 🗣️ What are your hobbies and interests?

I have two main hobbies, which are not related to each other. My first is advocacy and public speaking. I got into this through my voluntary work in Malta. The other is everything related to design, particularly graphic and interior design.

### 🗣️ Who is your role model?

My artistic role model is Salvador Dali, the surrealist artist. As for my more political side... I don't have a special one – I have many like Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

### 🗣️ What do you aspire to, in terms of your education and work?

I graduated in 2012. Till now I have never had a job. But I really need one. Marketing will hopefully help me get the job I am looking for. I always look for a job as a package designer, because I love packaging design. I also want to be known as a public speaker and an activist.

I always wanted to be a TV presenter, but as a Palestinian there is no way I can work as a TV presenter.

In Lebanon, the problem is that I am a Palestinian refugee. Even if you are born there – even my parents are actually born there – we need a work permit. Employers avoid hiring Palestinians so they do not have to struggle with the work ministry to get a work permit. I got a job for three months once, at a time when I needed money. I worked at a printing press for 3 months and got paid 350 dollars. When you are not registered you accept anything. In reality, they wanted me to clean more than anything. I am not a cleaner, I am a graphic designer. So I left. When I came to Malta, I came as a student.

### 🗣️ Are you concerned about the rise of Islamophobia in Western Europe?

Yes. I have been affected by this directly because I wear a hijab. It happened to me a lot here in Malta. I hear many racist comments...people tell me to leave, to go away. And it is becoming worse because of the media. The media here is unfair because it does not show both sides. They focus on one side. The media is not helping us. I am worried about it. How can we raise our children in this? It is something we have to think about.

### 🗣️ How can Islamophobia be mitigated?

As I said, it is the media who can do this first. Then the moderate Muslims. They also have to do something to show the real face and image of Islam. Because



what we are seeing is the other image only. The only ones who are talking are the extremists. The moderates are sitting down and saying it is not Islam. Your community doesn't know what Islam is. We have to show the good image and to have a link and connection with the media. As they are showing the extremists, they should also show the other image. We are the other image. We are asking the media to show our image – the image that we are normal and that we are living and don't hate others.

### **📍 What is Spark15?**

If we have to go back to October 2015, it began at the UNHCR consultation meeting about youth refugees in Malta and the challenges we are facing. Then we saw and realised that we share the same concerns, and the same challenges. We found common challenges between all youth refugees. After the consultation meeting, we stayed in contact and we started thinking about doing something, because a lot of us are at MCAST. Many had faced racism issues like me. Together we thought that maybe we can do something. The only ones who can help us are ourselves. We named ourselves Spark15 as we are a small idea that went big.

### **📍 Why do you think youth are important in shaping society?**

I think they are very important because we are the mothers and the fathers of the next generation. If we work with youth now it is a guarantee that the next generation will be better than this one. This is why we are always trying to work with youth in Malta.

### **📍 What do you think are the benefits of an inclusive society?**

Diversity should be enjoyed, because it is interesting. With no diversity, things would be dull. Sharing cultures is an interesting thing. Some people are afraid of this, but if we are all the same, it will be very boring. We need to benefit from this difference. We are not here only for taking. We want to give. Every time you ask a refugee "What do you want?", the answer is "I want to work". They do not say, "I want you to give me money". We are not given a chance – I am a graphic designer and I need to work. Malta will benefit from my skills in designing and I will benefit from your work. But we don't even have the chance to give, nor to take. So I think that inclusive societies give that chance to everyone. We can benefit from diversity.

### **📍 Can you tell me a bit about Spark15's official launch video?**

The first thing we want to do with this video is to introduce ourselves to the Maltese community. Now we have social media, and everyone's online. I did some research about Malta and it placed first in the EU for youths that are online. We thought that the best way to communicate with them is online. So we made an entertaining video with us trying to communicate with youth, trying to show that we are normal persons. To tell them we are here with you, so try to communicate with us.



### **📍 What would you as an individual, and as a member of Spark15, most like to achieve in society? What change would you most like to see?**

If we have to go to our mission, it would be to maintain full integration. Now I know this is very difficult, and we will not get there now, but at least we are starting to take steps. What we are looking for is a society that accepts others, that respects differences. That is why we are trying to work on the perception of the Maltese society towards the refugees. After I went to the consultation meeting in Geneva (UNHCR's Global Consultations with NGOs held yearly), it was evident that this is not only a reality in Malta, it is a reality everywhere. Perceptions are not related to a place, they are related to someone's status. The status of being a refugee can change your life because people look at you differently. But in reality it is not about status, or documents – it is about the person.







# RESCUE BOAT SCOURS SEA FOR FLIMSY CRAFTS

By Fabrizio Ellul

Photos: © UNHCR/ Giuseppe Carotenuto





It was a calm morning on board the rescue vessel Phoenix off the coast of Libya. The sun had broken through and flying fish accompanied the boat as it patrolled in international waters of the Mediterranean Sea.

A two-metre swell meant few boats would risk the conditions and the crew believed there was little likelihood of a rescue operation.

Suddenly, a dinghy was spotted and the crew swung into action. Waves of that magnitude make it difficult to see boats that are low in the water, such as dinghies.

“ They were very, very lucky that they were spotted.”

Gonzalez, the captain

The dinghy carried 146 people, and within minutes they were being pulled aboard in groups of 25. Lifejackets were removed, and medical and identity checks made. Within two hours, all were safely on board the Phoenix, which is operated by the Malta-based Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS).

MOAS is the first privately funded search and rescue organization operating in the central Mediterranean.

“ This was easy. No one got hurt, no one died, no dead children. It was easy”.

MOAS crew member

Between 2014 and 2016 when MOAS was operating in the Mediterranean Sea its crew saved around 40,000 people; an important contribution by NGOs in saving lives.

The second phase of the Phoenix's operation involved providing solar blankets, water and biscuits to those brought aboard. Anyone feeling ill was taken to the small clinic and assisted by a Red Cross team composed of a doctor and two nurses.

Among them was Yasmine, a 26-year-old pregnant woman from Senegal, with her daughter, two-year-old Khaija.

My eyes met Khaija's and I tried to make her smile, without success. She gazed around in







incomprehension and confusion, as if she were looking inside a madhouse.

Yasmine had carried her daughter from Senegal to Libya. They travelled with Yasmine's husband in the hope of finding a better life in Europe. From Libya, they attempted the risky journey by boat twice without success.

Once, they were intercepted by other smugglers who robbed them of the few possessions they had and returned them to the beach. The second time, they paid smugglers who failed to turn up.

"I'm afraid to go through the desert again," Yasmine said. So they tried a third time.

They were placed in a large compound with about 1,000 other people. They only had enough money – 600 Libyan dinar – to pay for Yasmine and Khaija to make the crossing, so her husband stayed behind in Libya. He considered the possibility of returning to Senegal and trying a different route.

They were taken during the night to a beach at Sabratha, from where they set out at dawn in the

inflatable dinghy. Most of the 146 people on board were men, with some women and children.

One of the men who had inhaled fuel onboard the dinghy was throwing up, others were suffering from sea sickness, cold, or exhaustion. By eight in the evening, everything was calm. There were no serious medical emergencies. Khaija settled down, cradled by her mother. The next day, the Phoenix remained in the area on the lookout for a possible second dinghy. A deflated empty dinghy was noticed some hours later, but nothing else.

As the Phoenix was heading for the Sicilian port of Pozzallo, news was received of the grim discovery of seven bodies on a dinghy 100 miles off Malta. Two Ghanaian men were evacuated to Malta suffering from dehydration. One died and the other was in intensive care.

Between 2016 and 2017, more than 8,000 people died in the Mediterranean. Khaija and Yasmine were lucky to have been spotted by MOAS and taken to safety.

*Article published on [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org) on 31 January 2017*





© UNHCR/Giuseppe Carotenuto

# INSIDE THE BELLY OF THE PHOENIX

By Fabrizio Ellul

STAFF MEMBER JOINS MOAS CREW TO SAVE LIVES. VALLETTA, MALTA, DECEMBER 29 - INSIDE THE PHOENIX NOTHING IS EVER STILL. THE 40-METRE DRONE-EQUIPPED SHIP IS IN CONSTANT MOTION, DEPENDING ON THE SIZE AND STRENGTH OF THE WAVES THAT ROCK THE VESSEL. THE LOW, DEEP, MONOTONOUS HUMMING OF THE ENGINE FEELS LIKE YOU ARE INSIDE THE BELLY OF A BEAST.

Life on board the Phoenix is challenging. It requires courage and stamina to make it through the voyage without breaking down. Living space consists of small compartments. Brushing your teeth and taking a shower require holding handles to prevent falls. Water fluctuates from cold to hot in an instant. Standing on deck is risky – you can be swept away by a wave to an almost certain death. Piracy is a reality. Lack of sleep is the norm.

I had the privilege of spending one week onboard the Phoenix as a guest of the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), a private Malta-based organisation that engages in search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean. During that week, I witnessed 146 men, women and children being rescued from the

dangerous Mediterranean crossing that they had made in search of a better life.

From this moving experience, I came away with a deep admiration for the professionalism of the MOAS team members and the pride they take in saving lives. In their rescue efforts they have witnessed suffering and death first hand – including the sight of those children who did not survive the journey. For this they will always have my deepest and most sincere respect.

The Phoenix is a mechanical beast whose job it is to rescue the many victims of conflict, persecution, and poverty, whose only available route very often involves unscrupulous smugglers who place them at great risk, on a dangerous journey in unsafe boats.

Moved by the Lampedusa tragedy in 2013 in which 366 people died at sea, Chris and Regina Catrambone founded MOAS in 2014, with their own personal funds. They purchased a rundown ship in Virginia which needed six months of repairs to be transformed into a seaworthy craft. The Phoenix rose, because that is what a Phoenix is meant to do – rise from the ashes.

The Phoenix was the first private rescue vessel to operate in the Mediterranean in 2014. The MOAS story is well documented on its website ([www.moas.eu](http://www.moas.eu)) which also acts as a platform to raise



funds (MOAS operations cost around 1 million Euro each month). “We are on the frontline,” notes Franco Potenza, the Director of Operations with 35 years of experience in the Italian Navy.

Indeed, experience is crucial for such operations. Some of the crew onboard the Phoenix have worked for decades with the Maltese, Italian, and US military forces. Others have vast experience in private industry, working on oil rigs and trawlers. From the captain to the steward, everyone’s role is crucial for the success of the operations.

“*When we started, everyone thought it was impossible. I thought that it couldn’t be done.*”

Marco Cauchi, Director of the MOAS  
Search and Rescue Operations

Mimmo, as he is affectionately known by the crew, is a Maltese national who makes the first contact with the refugees and migrants during rescue operations. He has been directly involved in the rescue of over 25,000 people since 2014. His job is to drive the rescue RIB (rigid inflatable boat) and approach the distressed boat, providing life jackets and then taking them onboard, usually in waves of 25.

“*Some people might be fortunate to have the chance to save one life in their lifetime; I do it all the time.*”

Says Mimmo proudly

One evening I noticed Mimmo listening to a recording of one of his three children. He explained that the most touching and difficult moments in this job are those seeing children in such distress. “What is the difference between my children and these children?” he asks. “You try to give them that extra bit of love.”

As the Phoenix landed in Pozzallo near the southern tip of Sicily to disembark those it had rescued – including a mother and a child – I reflected on the extreme poles of humanity – the cruelty but also the abundance of love. And it was on the Phoenix that I saw these two faces of humanity fiercely collide together during a two hour rescue operation.

It is only fitting that the Phoenix’s second life is dedicated to saving the lives of thousands in need at sea.



© UNHCR/ Maria Grazia Pellegrino

## MEDITERRANEAN SEA

### Over **8,000** died in 2016-2017

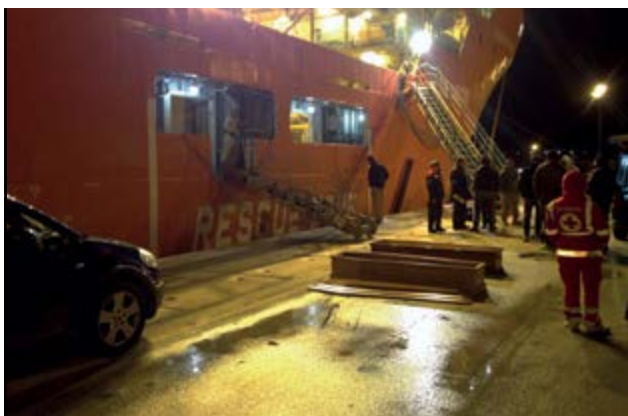
OVER 8,000 REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS DIED OR WENT MISSING BETWEEN 2016 AND 2017 IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO CROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA. OVER 3,000 PEOPLE DIED IN 2017.

This situation highlights the urgent need for states to increase pathways for legal admission of refugees, such as resettlement, private sponsorship, family reunification, student scholarship schemes and humanitarian visas, among others, so they do not have to resort to dangerous journeys and the use of smugglers.

The causes for the alarming increase in death are multiple but appear to be related to the declining quality of the vessels used by people smugglers, the vagaries of the weather and the tactics used by smugglers to avoid detection by the authorities. These include sending large numbers of embarkations simultaneously, which makes the work of rescuers more difficult.

# 2017 **LIFE AND DEATH** across the Mediterranean Sea

## January



Coffins are laid out in the port of Trapani, Sicily, where the Norwegian rescue boat, the Siem, landed with 34 refugees onboard from a search and rescue mission, as well as four bodies and four survivors from a capsized boat which may have killed 180 victims.

Photo: © UNHCR/ Marco Rotunno, 16 January, 2017



UNHCR staff wait to welcome the arrivals in the port of Trapani, Sicily, where the Norwegian rescue boat, the Siem, landed with 34 refugees onboard from a search and rescue mission.

Survivors and victims were brought to the island of Lampedusa and to Messina and Trapani, as UNHCR staff helped undertake arrangements for funerals for the victims.

Photo: © UNHCR/ Marco Rotunno, 16 January, 2017

## March



**Greece. Separated from his mother, Afghan boy retreats into silence**

Eight-year-old asylum-seeker Farzad plays by himself in the playground at Kara Tepe camp, Lesbos. The young boy has not spoken any words since the trauma of being separated from his mother in 2015.

Farzad is one of a growing number of refugee children whose mental health has been affected by the trauma of flight. He withdrew into a world of silence after being cut off from his family as they fled across a mountain border between Iran and Turkey in the snow.

He was quickly found by Iranian police and reunited with his father and his eldest brother, but his mother and middle brother, who fled in the other direction, are now thousands of miles away in Germany. Farzad hasn't spoken since the incident. Loss of speech is just one symptom of post-traumatic stress. Other refugee children have taken to self-harming or suffer from nightmares and depression.

Children travelling alone are particularly vulnerable. Farzad now lives at Kara Tepe camp with his father and brother and attends a specialist school, but plays only by himself. His father Jalil\* hopes UNHCR's partner NGO Metadrasi – Action For Migration And Development will succeed in reuniting the family.

\*Name changed for protection purpose  
Photo: © UNHCR/ Roland Schonbauer, 17 March, 2017



## April



### Greece. Syrian family staying in prefabricated container

A Syrian family standing outside their prefabricated container installed by UNHCR at Kara Tepe, Lesvos.

Over 5,000 refugees and migrants have found shelter in 1,000 prefabricated houses installed by UNHCR across Greece. The container units are funded by the European Commission.

UNHCR has installed over 1,000 prefabricated containers across Greece with funding from the European Commission. The 1000th container was installed in Kara Tepe on Lesvos island.

Photo: © UNHCR/ Pavlos Avagianos, 25 April, 2017

## May



### Italy. Survivors of a dangerous crossing

Some of the 538 people rescued by an Italian Navy ship while attempting to cross the Mediterranean on dinghies are met by UNHCR workers as they go through the identification and health check process at the port in Catania.

Photo: © UNHCR/ Medea Savary, 08 May, 2017



### Greece. From the Greek islands to a renovated facility on the mainland

Syrian refugee Akid and his daughter Silina prepare to leave their UNHCR-funded apartments on the island of Chios to be relocated to a new facility on the Greek mainland.

In the lakeside town of Ioannina in north-west Greece, a former children's home in spacious surroundings has been renovated to provide accommodation for 500 refugees. The new facility was given the go ahead by the Greek government in May 2016 and, thanks to European Commission funding, UNHCR was able to relocate the first refugees from the Greek islands of Lesvos, Chios and Samos exactly one year later. With basic services provided by UNHCR's local partner NGO Intersos, the families are settling in and enjoying the garden-like setting.

© UNHCR/ Christos Tolis, 04 May, 2017

## June



### Italy. Refugees Welcome in Sicily

Alpha, 18 years old, and Cettina, 85 years old, sit together at the dining table in Cettina's flat. Alpha moved in with Cettina a couple of months ago thanks to the organisation 'Refugees Welcome' Italy which put them in touch.

Photo: © UNHCR/ Medea Savary, 07 June, 2017

# THE RESCUE FLIGHT

By Fabrizio Ellul

Photos: © Moonbird operation

Humanitarian Search and Rescue NGOs are adding small aircraft carriers to their arsenal to save the lives of people who make the dangerous journey from Libya to Europe.

Operation Moonbird is a combined effort between Sea Watch and the Humanitarian Pilot Initiative (HPI) with the latter providing air support to the Sea Watch vessel and to other rescue vessels.

UNHCR official, Fabrizio Ellul, joined the HPI on one such mission in September 2017 to scout the vast empty sea between Malta and Libya for about six hours. During this particular operation, three rescue operations were observed being conducted by different NGOs in the sea.

In 2017, more than 160,000 people were rescued and brought to Europe, while over 3,000 have been reported as dead or missing.



📷 Rescue operation conducted in the Mediterranean Sea by NGO Save the Children.





Rescue operation conducted in the Mediterranean Sea by NGO Open Arms.



An overcrowded dinghy with refugees and migrants left from Libya. The rescue operation is underway. A merchant vessel is observed passing by.



# LET'S GET TECHNICAL: Refugee Status Determination in Malta

## Protection Unit

FINALLY, AFTER A PERILOUS JOURNEY AND MONTHS OF WAITING, 17 YEAR-OLD RAHMA HAS RECEIVED A LETTER FROM THE OFFICE OF THE REFUGEE COMMISSIONER IN MALTA GRANTING HER INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION. SHE IS OVERJOYED, AND RELIEVED BECAUSE NOW SHE CAN START TO LOOK FORWARD TO THE SEMBLANCE OF NORMALITY.

The letter grants her refugee status recognizing her as a refugee since she crossed her country's borders to flee from the elders in her village who wanted to forcefully marry her to a man older than her father and whom she never met.

### **BUT HOW DOES ONE BECOME A REFUGEE? WHO DECIDES AND HOW DOES IT WORK?**

The starting point is the 1951 *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, which Malta acceded to in 1971. It defines a refugee as a person who "owing

*to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."*

According to the Convention, a person is a refugee because s/he fulfills the criteria found in the definition. And this of course means that one becomes a refugee before the time when refugee status is formally determined. A person does not become a refugee because of formal recognition, but is recognized because s/he is a refugee. This is where the process of refugee status determination comes into play.

In many parts of the world, in areas where governments do not engage in refugee status determination procedures, either because they do not have the capacity or because there is no formal national asylum system, UNHCR conducts refugee status determination procedures and issues certificates and documents to refugees. This was the case in Malta up until the early 2000s.



## MALTA'S ASYLUM PROCEDURE

In 2000 the Maltese Parliament enacted the *Refugees Act* and the national authorities started setting up institutions and structures to assume responsibilities under the 1951 Convention.

The Office of the Refugee Commissioner, the first instance body, was established together with the Refugee Appeals Board, the second instance body. These two institutions have a very difficult and highly technical job to do. They are required to examine the facts presented by every individual applicant and determine whether they fit the definition in the law.

The process is very similar to the analysis which a court of law conducts when considering particular legal questions. They need to look at all the evidence and examine it on the basis of specific rules of evidence applicable in refugee law, conduct research by looking at country of origin information, and apply the law in the specific case. Decision makers in these institutions have a very important responsibility which must be executed diligently.

The consequences of getting it wrong can be very serious, potentially leading to the return of the individual to their country of origin where s/he would be at risk of persecution and serious harm. It is for this reason that refugee status determination procedures must be given utmost importance and supported by adequate professional structures and expertise.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF A FUNCTIONAL ASYLUM SYSTEM

Having a functioning asylum system requires three interdependent components in order to be effective.

#### Any given system should be able to:

1. Immediately and efficiently identify those persons who need protection and should therefore be recognized as refugees;
2. Have a system of checks and balances through an efficient and effective appeals procedure;
3. Have an effective returns system which ensures that those who are not recognized as being in need of international protection are returned to their countries. This is the whole point of having an asylum procedure – to identify those individuals who have a legal ground to stay in the country of asylum.

Any deficiency in any of these three elements affects the credibility of the entire system.

Over the years, Malta has granted protection to thousands of refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, a complementary form of protection under EU law intended to protect those who do not fulfil the criteria in the refugee definition but who nonetheless would face serious harm if returned to their country of origin.

This has been largely thanks to the Office of the Refugee Commissioner which has developed relatively efficient procedures and invested in the training of its staff, with the support of UNHCR and the European Asylum and Support Office (EASO), to identify those who are in need of protection from return to their country.

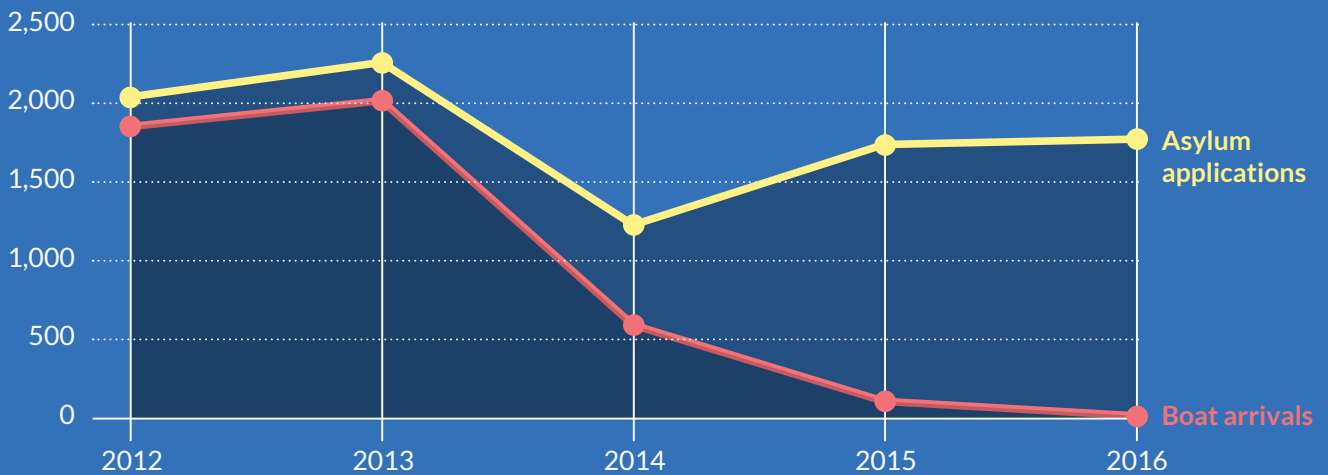
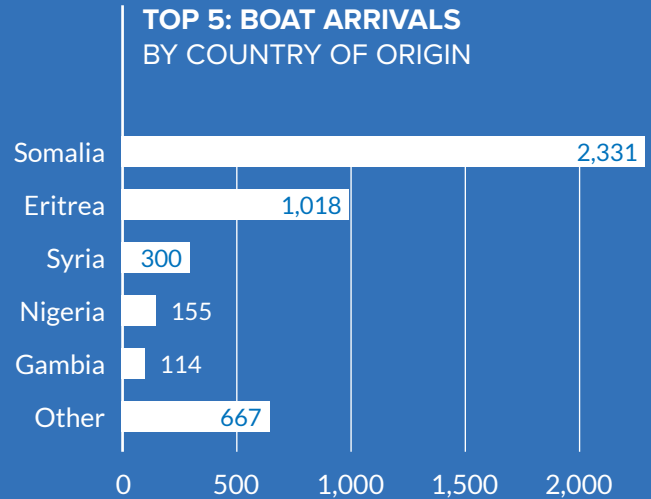
Nonetheless, there are some challenges with the current system including lack of full-time experts at the second instance body – the Refugee Appeals Board. The task of the Refugee Appeals Board is a very technical one, identical to the task of the Refugee Commissioner. Again, it also involves analysing and assessing relevant facts and determining whether they fit into the legal definition. Such tasks would be better handled with full-time expert staff or within a court structure which would also allow for the development of case law on the subject.

Any credible system needs to have adequate safeguards to ensure that those are in need of protection are not ultimately at risk of being returned to their country of origin.

In parallel, Malta also needs to ensure that there are humane and dignified avenues for rejected asylum seekers and those who are found to not be in need of international protection to return to their country.

Malta has made great strides forward. However, there are a number of gaps that still need to be addressed, including reforming the second instance body. Here at UNHCR, we look forward to continuing to provide support to the Maltese authorities by sharing our expertise and experience on these matters. Because ultimately having a strong asylum system is in the interest of refugees and of Malta

# MALTA TRENDS IN BRIEF 2012-2016



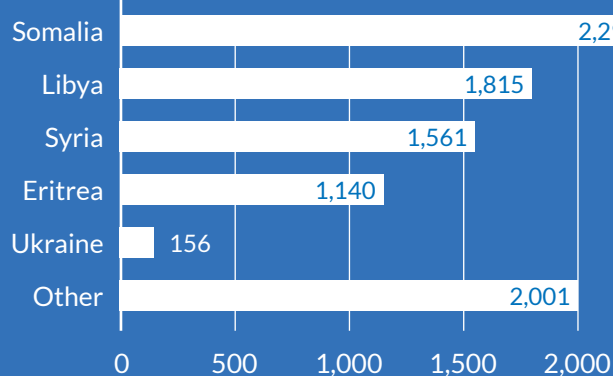
The vast majority of asylum seekers are today arriving through regular means, as all disembarkations are happening in Italy.

## RESETTLEMENT/RELOCATION TO MALTA

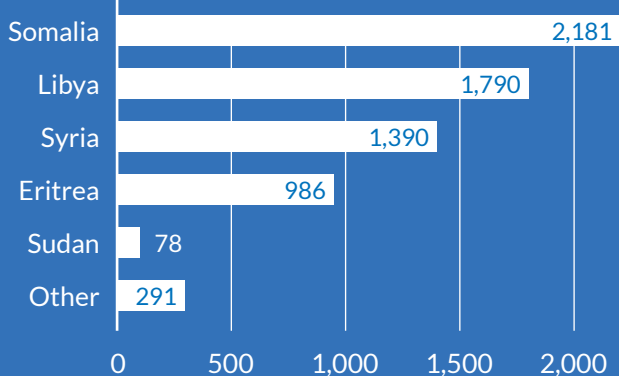
Year	Persons relocated to European states (EU/Non EU)	Persons resettled to the US	Persons resettled to other countries
2012	105	307	8
2013	20	392	0
2014	0	577	0
2015	0	568	0
2016	0	455	0
2017	0	171	0



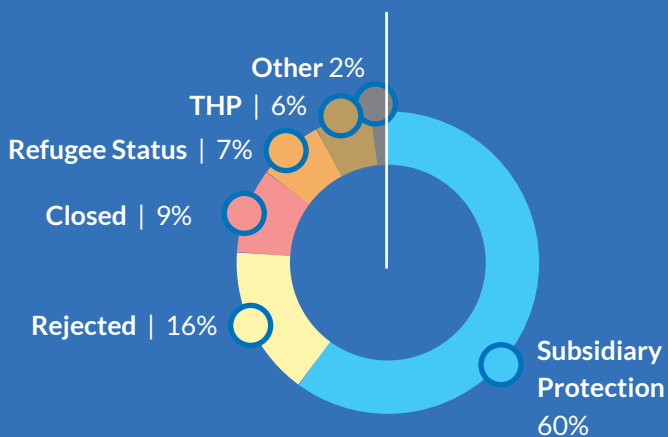
### TOP 5: ASYLUM APPLICATIONS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



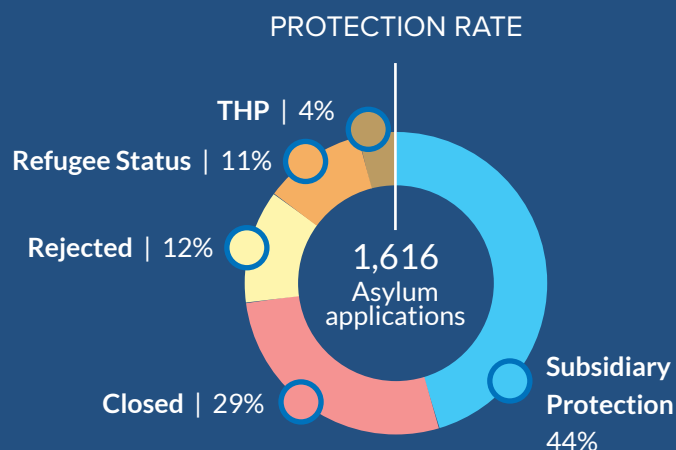
### TOP 5: ASYLUM SEEKERS GRANTED INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



### PROTECTION RATE (2012 - 2016)



### 2017 TRENDS



Source: Immigration Police, Office of the Refugee Commissioner, Ministry for Home Affairs. While every effort has been made to ensure that all statistical information is accurately presented, for official statistics please refer to the original sources.

**MAJORITY OF ASYLUM APPLICATIONS: SYRIA, LIBYA AND SOMALIA**

**RELOCATION TO MALTA: 168 persons (2016-2017)**

**RESETTLEMENT TO MALTA FROM OUTSIDE THE EU: 17 persons (2017)**

**RESCUED INDIVIDUALS: 21 (all medical evacuations)**



# A PLACE OF PEACE

By Sarah Mallia  
Public Information Assistant

Photos: © UNHCR/ Stephanie Scicluna

NESTLED AMONGST ARMY BARRACKS AND TOWERING METAL CONTAINERS, JOHN XXIII PEACE LABORATORY IS AN OASIS OFFERING SHELTER TO PEOPLE FLEEING CONFLICT, PERSECUTION AND POVERTY. UNHCR SPEAKS WITH FR DIONYSIUS MINTOFF, THE 94-YEAR-OLD PRIEST WHO HAS BEEN RUNNING THE CENTRE FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS.

This gardened sanctuary, situated in Hal Far, one of Malta's industrial estates, was originally part of a British airfield which suffered aggressive air raids during the blitz of the Second World War. "Hal Far was a hub and centre of war. It saw thousands of soldiers and sailors coming from the entire Commonwealth," explains Fr Mintoff. Today, the centre sits between Lyster Barracks, which has acted as a detention centre for irregular migrants seeking asylum, and two of Malta's largest reception centres, characterised by rows of pre-fabricated containers and, in the past, also tents.

UNHCR Speaks to Fr. Dionysius Mintoff, 94, who has been running John XXIII Peace lab, an oasis offering shelter to people fleeing conflict, persecution and poverty, for the last 15 years.

The Peace Lab was set up in 1971, following an appeal made by Pope John XXIII, who called for the world to reflect on peace. "As a Franciscan, and a Maltese who has personally seen the outcomes of war, I decided to open a space that advocates for peace education in Malta" he explains.

We transformed this space from a place of war to a place of peace.

A couple of decades later, on one very memorable night, Fr Mintoff recalls hearing loud screams coming from the army barracks situated across the road from the Peace Lab. When inquiring on what caused the commotion the next morning, the guards informed him that several individuals, from a number of African countries, had arrived in Malta on a boat in search of asylum.

There was a lot of panic that spread around Malta after this. The Maltese thought that these individuals would spread disease, take their jobs and most of all take over our [Roman Catholic] religion."





Since 2002 Peace Lab has offered shelter to refugees and migrants. Peace Lab offers a number of activities in an environment conducive to learning, inclusion and acceptance. “This is a place where people can learn and be free. A place where people of different religions can live together peacefully. A place where people can be happy,” says Fr Mintoff.



Inside Peace Lab, one may find a church, a mosque, and a prayer room for all religions. Fr Mintoff prays together with the largely Muslim residents inside the mosque. When asked why he feels the need to pray with those who have different religious background, Fr Mintoff responded with: “When you pray with others it means that you live with them, you know them and they know you. For remember: to God there is no one, or the other.”



UNHCR has commemorated Fr. Dionysius Mintoff and Peace Lab for their work in helping refugees and migrants. © UNHCR/ Anna Camilleri

## WHAT IS AN OPEN CENTRE?

An open centre is a key part of reception management, offering accommodation and facilitating access by service-users to mainstream services, such as free health and free education.

### AWAS

The function of the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) is the implementation of national legislation and policy concerning the welfare of refugees, persons enjoying international protection and asylum seekers.

In practice, AWAS manages reception facilities, provides information programmes in the area of employment, housing, health, welfare and education, and promotes government schemes related to resettlement voluntary returns.

### TYPOLOGIES

Three models:

- Open centres run directly by Government
- Open centres owned by Government but whose day-to-day running is subcontracted to a third-party
- Privately run open centres, receiving financial assistance from Government

At present 2,200 beds are available.

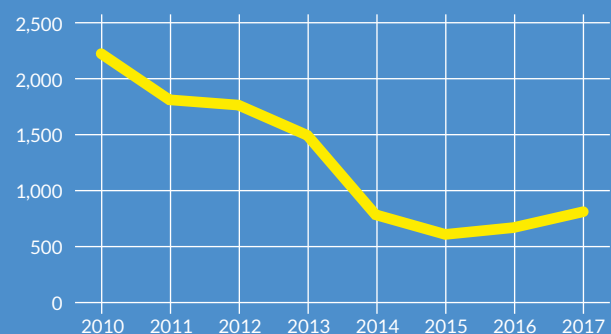
Centres also house, to the greatest extent possible, specific client groups, namely:

- Single males or single females
- Families
- Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMAS)

**Open Centres:** Hal Far Tent Village, Hal Far Open Centre, Hal Far Family Centres, Dar il Liedna, Peace Lab, Marsa Open Centre, Malta Emigrants Commission (MEC) Apartments and MEC Balzan.

**Top five nationalities as end of July, 2017:** Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Syria and Libya

### Population in the Open Centres



Source: Ministry for Home Affairs – [www.awas.gov.mt](http://www.awas.gov.mt)



# MALTA, THROUGH THE EYES OF A REFUGEE

By Sarah Mallia  
Public Information Assistant

Photo: Hal Far Tent Village in Malta. Taken by Ali.

STARTING OVER IN A NEW COUNTRY IS COMPLEX. MIRIAM, AND HER HUSBAND ALI (Names have been changed), BOTH IN THEIR 30's, UNDERSTAND THIS MORE THAN ANYONE. MIRIAM, AN ARCHITECT, AND ALI, A CIVIL ENGINEER AND HOBBYIST PHOTOGRAPHER, ARE REFUGEES FROM IRAN WHO ARRIVED IN MALTA IN LATE 2015.

“ We paid a smuggler 25,000 Euro to get here. This included the cost of the flights, hotel in Malta and a visa,” says Ali.

“ We did not know that the visa we were given was false. For that, we ended up in detention. We had 400 Euro left when we were released from detention. Back then we were very shocked, and scared,” continues Miriam.

Miriam and Ali were later granted refugee status and are now “back on the road to happiness,” as Ali explains.

Miriam is a beneficiary of a UNHCR program, implemented by partner organisation Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Malta, called Project Integrated. Through this project, she was offered support by way of a small financial grant to improve her English, in an effort to become more employable in Malta.

“ We are seeing an increasing number of skilled refugees coming to Malta, who ask for assistance to undertake educational programs to reach their employment goals. That is why we introduced this program, which is specifically aimed at refugees who want to integrate and settle here in Malta.”

“ A lot more can be done locally. Mentorship, educational programmes, preparation courses, and access to financial support, particularly for those who have a thirst for it. It's about giving them that stepping stone.”

Sarah Giusti, a social worker at the JRS.

After undertaking an intensive English course at an English Language School Academy, Miriam is now working as an architect in Malta.

“ I had been approaching the same firm looking for employment for months, but they kept telling me that my English was not good enough. After taking the course, that same firm offered me a job.”

Throughout the interview, Miriam and Ali expressed uncertainty about their future in Malta. While individuals with refugee protection are eligible to apply for citizenship after a number of years, this is always at the discretion of the Minister. Regardless of this, they admit that it is only now that they can see a light in the long dark tunnel that has been their journey so far. “We are concerned because we want to make our lives here, and we too want to contribute and improve this country.”





# REFUGEES TAKE PART IN MSIDA INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITY

A NUMBER OF REFUGEES CAME TOGETHER ON 1<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER TO ORGANISE AN INTERCULTURAL EVENT IN MSIDA WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE MSIDA LOCAL COUNCIL, APPOĠĠ AND THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY (UNHCR) OFFICE IN MALTA.

The event was held at the Msida Centre Square with the refugees, some of them representing the Somali, Eritrean, Palestinian and Syrian communities, organising a number of activities including music, dancing and games.

Palestinian, Syrian and Somali food was however one of the main successes of the event. This is one of the first events where refugee communities have been invited to take part in intercultural activities in the local community.

“ Social inclusion is a two-way path and such activities can enable further dialogue between the Maltese and refugee communities,” Mr. Kahin Ismail, UNHCR Representative to Malta, said. “We congratulate Appoġġ for taking the lead in organising the event and the Local Council of Msida for hosting such an activity.”

📷 Somali, Eritrean, Palestinian and Syrian communities, among others, took part in an event supported by the Msida Local Council, Appoġġ and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Office. The event brought together the refugee and Maltese communities. Photos: © UNHCR/ Tumer Gencturk







# IMAGINE

By Mireille Sant,  
Durable Solutions Officer

IMAGINE THAT TONIGHT YOU HAVE TO LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY. YOU MUST LEAVE ALONE, WITH NO LUGGAGE, NO EXTRA CLOTHES, NOT EVEN DOCUMENTS (THE ABUSIVE SMUGGLERS WILL GIVE YOU FAKE ONES). IT'S EITHER EMBARKING ON THIS UNWANTED PERILOUS JOURNEY OR YOU AND YOUR WHOLE FAMILY WILL BE IN LIFE-THREATENING DANGER.

Imagine this is really happening to you, even if so far you have lived happily and peacefully in your country of birth. Just do not try to reason out that “this can never happen to me”.

These things are not matters of reason or logic. It can.

When you manage to arrive in a safe country, you are recognised as a person fleeing from persecution and you are given status. You feel as if the pain, loss, confusion, lack of understanding of new systems, suffering, anxiety and worry that have occupied a continuous, gnawing place in your heart are slowly being lifted – a new chapter lies before you.

At this point, you attempt to believe in a happily-ever-after ending from now on.

Now it's time to breathe. It's time to have your spouse and children back, saved from the dangers of your country and allowed to reach you, time to resume your career from where you had left it and apply your university degree or other skills in this new country. You are also looking forward to contributing positively to this new, exotic community, learn its culture while sharing your own. Trying, just trying, to make it your new home, knowing that there is no place like home.

In Malta, most of the people fleeing some form of persecution or life-threatening situation because of violence are granted protection. The majority are granted Subsidiary Protection rather than Refugee Status. The laws of Malta are still quite restrictive when it comes to those rights and benefits that affect a person in effectively rebuilding one's life in Malta.

Persons with Subsidiary Protection who have been in Malta for more than a decade still cannot apply for Family Reunification, and never can. They are not eligible to apply for citizenship unless several more years pass, and this will still be at the discretion of the Minister. So they have to renew their documents periodically, they cannot access unemployment or pension benefits even though they pay their tax





contributions, they cannot celebrate their wedding anniversary with their spouse nor see their children grow, among many other deprivations.

What hurts the most, though, is that you are not welcome in this new country that you happened to find yourself in, through no fault of your own.

You are seen as less, even though you have absolutely nothing less. You will manage to find a few kind people who will offer you a hand and even some Government officers who will do their best to help you and facilitate your challenging stay in Malta. But what you really want, above all, is for the people of this country to accept you, to treat you equally, to love you.

We can all make a difference and chip in to give a true welcome to refugees, individuals who could have been you or me.

This needs a real change of heart. Leaders of the country can facilitate legitimate processes, politicians can see beyond the votes, the media can dig deeper, and the Government can coordinate and create an effective Integration Framework. And as for us? We can simply smile to the next refugee we happen to meet in the street.

## INTEGRATION PRIORITY TRACK

UNHCR has developed a framework to provide individual support for refugees who are focusing on their integration prospects. This is being implemented through **Project Integrated** with the Jesuit Refugee Service and the support of two other NGOs: Aditus Foundation and Integra Foundation.

The project consists of providing more tailor-made support for refugees to facilitate their integration, including access to tertiary education, skills & employability, and entrepreneurship. Support is provided through an individualised action plan for settlement in Malta.

The aim of **Project Integrated** is for refugees to be fully integrated in Maltese society, effectively enjoy their rights, and achieve true independence and self-sufficiency. This is achieved through service provision (counselling, information sharing and in-depth support), capacity building of mainstream service providers to facilitate easier access to such services, and monitoring integration gaps and advocating for the development of better integration services and programmes.



## UNHCR CALLS FOR NEW VISION IN EUROPE'S APPROACH TO REFUGEES

UNHCR IS CALLING FOR A FAR-REACHING REFORM OF EUROPE'S GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT WITH REFUGEES, INCLUDING THE EUROPEAN ASYLUM SYSTEM.

**Filippo Grandi**, who took over as UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 2016, said: "It is important that EU Member States show, through collective action, that Europe is capable of engaging effectively and in a principled manner with refugee movements, helping to stabilise refugee flows over

the long term through more strategic external engagement - while at the same time, continuing to welcome refugees in Europe."

UNHCR called on Europe to offer more strategic and targeted support to countries of origin, asylum and transit of refugees, to review its contingency preparations to respond to large refugee and migrant arrivals, and to put in place a more efficient and better managed asylum system.





Filippo Grandi was appointed as the new UN High Commissioner for Refugees on 1 January 2016, succeeding Antonio Guterres whose more than 10 years in office ended in December 2015. In October 2016, the UN Security Council recommended Mr Guterres as the next United Nations Secretary-General.

© UNHCR/ Achilleas Zavallis

Among its main proposals are targeted measures to address the reasons why refugees are fleeing and moving onwards, increased safe pathways for refugees to Europe, and a simplified asylum system that would identify, register and process arrivals swiftly and efficiently and would go a long way to restore public trust.

“ *This is now the moment for a new vision for Europe’s engagement with the global refugee crisis.*”

Filippo Grandi

He said this vision should draw “on its history of tolerance, openness and (be) based on protection principles, but also with a pragmatic and practical approach. History has demonstrated that Europe is stronger when it addresses its challenges together; and I firmly believe that this is still possible today.”

Building on elements of the existing Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and some of the reforms proposed by the European Commission, UNHCR’s proposals would result in a simplified asylum system that would provide access to territory, register and receive new arrivals properly, allocate responsibility for asylum-seekers amongst EU Member States and ensure that Member States are equipped to meet the task.

UNHCR’s proposed reforms would guarantee the right to asylum, enhance security screening, facilitate the efficient management of population movements, and could potentially reduce costs.

The proposals include a common European registration system, accelerated and simplified procedures for asylum determination, prioritisation of family reunion, a common approach to unaccompanied and separated children, a distribution mechanism for Member States under pressure of high number of arrivals and an efficient system for returning individuals who are not in need of protection to their countries of origin.

It also asked for greater investment by EU Member States in the integration of refugees, including housing, employment and language training.

Entitled “Better Protecting Refugees in the EU and Globally”, the paper also sets out a practical vision for how this could be achieved both within the EU and globally.



# REGISTRATION AS A TOOL TO UNDERSTAND AND ASSIST THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY

By Lauren Borg, Durable Solutions and Registration Assistant  
Annalisa Mantelli, Protection and Registration Assistant

UNHCR HAS BEEN REGISTERING PERSONS OF CONCERN SINCE ITS INCEPTION ALMOST 70 YEARS AGO. PROFILES OF INDIVIDUALS, THEIR BIOLOGICAL DATA, BACKGROUND, FAMILY RELATIONS AND SPECIAL NEEDS, AS WELL AS SKILLS, ARE RECORDED FOR THE PURPOSE OF ASSISTANCE.

Today, registration is carried out globally and it is utilised in many countries as a protection tool to protect refugees from forced returns (*refoulement*) and forcible recruitment.

In Malta, the protection of refugees is secured by the national authorities. Nonetheless, registration offers UNHCR the opportunity to record, verify and update the information of persons of concern.

However, the goal of this activity goes beyond the mere collection of information. Registration facilitates the identification of individuals in need of special assistance and enables UNCHR to support refugees in finding a suitable long-term, durable solution. Resettlement together with local integration and

voluntary repatriation are the three durable solutions promoted by UNHCR as part of its core mandate. Enabling refugees to become self-reliant pending the realisation of an appropriate long-term solution is an important first step towards achieving any of the three durable solutions.

UNHCR Malta has registered over 6,000 individuals who have fled persecution and war. More than 2,600 refugees and beneficiaries of international protection have been resettled to the USA while over 700 refugees were relocated to other European Member States under different relocation programmes largely due to the lack of local integration prospects in Malta.

Following the cessation of the resettlement program in April 2017, UNHCR further strengthened its efforts to support refugees in their inclusion in Malta. In light of this new situation, UNHCR stepped up its work with the refugee population and the Maltese community toward a more inclusive society.

In this new context, local integration became the prioritised durable solution in Malta and the focus of registration is now entirely on protection and integration issues.



The information gathered during the registration sessions enables UNHCR to support refugees by carrying out counselling sessions, home visits, community outreach and refugee consultation group meetings.

By providing UNHCR staff with the opportunity to meet refugees to better understand who they are, their needs, their problems and strengths, registration feeds into UNHCR's advocacy strategy. By engaging with the Government of Malta, local authorities and different stakeholders, UNHCR advocates for the creation of a better protection environment. This includes the establishment of a functional integration framework and finding an effective durable solution for all beneficiaries of international protection.

### MY LIFE IN MALTA, A SNAPSHOT OF REFUGEES' PERCEPTIONS

During the first registration session following the cessation of the resettlement program, an anonymous survey gauging refugees' views on life in Malta was piloted.

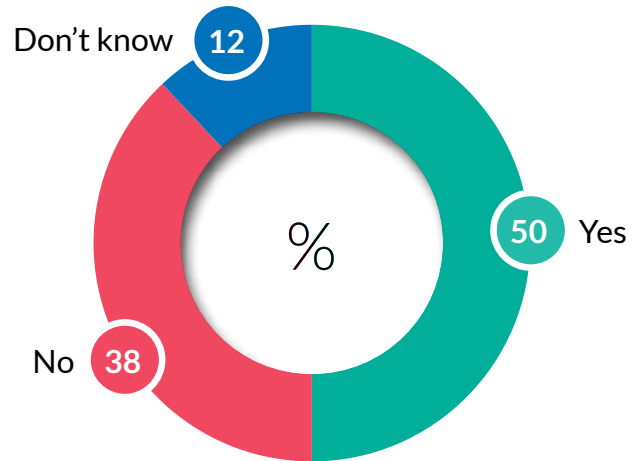
Registration day presents an opportunity for UNHCR to meet many persons of concern. The dual aim of the survey was to get their opinions on their integration efforts and difficulties and, secondly, to reiterate the message about UNHCR's protection and integration activities in Malta.

The questionnaire was completed by 56 out of approximately 100 beneficiaries of international protection who attended the session (mainly Eritrean, Somali and Libyan nationals) and these were the findings, which tallied perfectly with other large-scale surveys.

The first section dealt with the level of satisfaction on different aspects of refugees' lives in Malta with the majority of refugees being 'most satisfied' with their physical safety in Malta, followed by the healthcare system. Nonetheless, their greatest concern is housing, followed by access to education and employment.

The second part of the survey dealt with relationships and needs. It was interesting to find out that only 67% of the participants knew a 'few Maltese people'

### Do you feel accepted by the Maltese community that you interact with?



personally, and only half of the participants felt accepted by the Maltese community.

Asked about which programmes and services were most needed to help refugees adjust to life in Malta, the majority expressed the need for job skills and training as well as assistance with accommodation, closely followed by access to education. On the other hand, the majority of refugees felt that their healthcare and medical needs were met, which corresponded to the good level of satisfaction with the healthcare system in Malta.

Finally, the questionnaire was concluded with the following open question: "How do you think you can contribute to Maltese society?" Many of the participants mentioned work and the payment of taxation as their contribution to the development of the country and its society.

To conclude, the findings indicate that although refugees are adapting to their lives in Malta, they need support to fully integrate and to overcome those invisible barriers which limit their access to rights and ability to reach their full potential.

"If I get help, if I get education, if I get a job, I can pay taxes to help the country" – this demonstrates the extent to which integration is a two-way process, requiring willingness and efforts by refugees and the Maltese community.



# MEET ABDUL

Photos: © UNHCR/ Dragana Rankovic

LOCATED IN MSIDA, ON ONE OF THE TOWN CORNERS THERE IS A BUSTLING UNISEX HAIRDRESSING SALON, A COLOURFUL AND SOCIAL MEETING POINT FOR DISCUSSING THE LATEST HAIR TRENDS AND THE ODD TOWN GOSSIP. THE SALON BELONGS TO 36-YEAR-OLD ABDUL WHO STARTED AS A HAIRDRESSER IN HIS COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, ERITREA. WHAT HAD ORIGINALLY STARTED OFF AS A HOBBY, DEVELOPED INTO A PASSION AS THE AMBITIOUS TEENAGER BEGAN WORKING PART-TIME IN A LOCAL BARBERSHOP IN HIS HOMETOWN AFTER SCHOOL HOURS.



"I do not discriminate against anyone, no matter what his or her ethnicity is." The negative experience Abdul went through gave him the will and determination to follow what he believed in, which was business based on equality.

“ *The secret to success is to strive to keep a constant good service...location is also important, you have to be clever and place yourself strategically.*”

“ *When I see people happy with the service I provide for them, it makes me happy.*”

"Some refugees in Malta are reluctant to invest their time and money to opening a business because they may have plans to leave Malta, and do not want the commitment," Abdul commented, highlighting the importance of making the most of his time in Malta and encouraging others to do the same.

"I see so many refugees like me who stay in Malta waiting to leave but before they know it, they remain in Malta for years and would not have achieved the things they wanted to." His advice to others would be to explore the possibilities around them, and not to be afraid of taking the leap.

*Article was first published on [www.unhcr.org.mt](http://www.unhcr.org.mt) on 17 June 2015. Original text by Christina Vella Wallbank.*



Abdul, 36 year old Eritrean national, has opened his second business venture in Malta – a grocery shop in Hamrun. His first venture was a barber shop in Msida, a story which UNHCR covered in 2015. We are happy to say that the barber shop is still going strong.





## WELCOMED by the Sudanese community

Photos: © UNHCR/ Stephanie Scicluna

Adam Jalal, a 29-year-old student studying IT at MCAST, is one of the refugees who took part in the Vodafone Malta Full Marathon. This was his first time running. Apart from studying at MCAST, Adam also works at a bakery at night and holds the voluntary position of sports coordinator at the Sudanese Migrant Community in Malta.

Adam, who originates from Darfur in Sudan, explains why he decided to take part in this year's marathon: "We want to integrate with the Maltese. We want to make bridges and break the invisible borders that lie between us."

Adam formed part of a larger group of refugees living in Malta who decided to run in the marathon. Participants included other Sudanese refugees from the community, and a young refugee Dursa who is a member of Spark15, a refugee-led youth organisation aiming to promote integration in Malta.

In 2014, refugee Ibrahim Hussein Ahmed, from Sudan, representing the local club of St Patrick's, won the 21 Kilometre Half Marathon. It was the first time that a refugee had won one of the main marathons in Malta.

The Sudanese community is a vibrant and forward-looking community who have recently come together and opened an office in Hamrun. In 2017, they opened the doors of their premises for an information session to discuss their current situation in Malta.

The information session was delivered by UNHCR Malta, Jesuit Refugee Service Malta, aditus and Integra Foundation.







# THE BEFRIENDING PROJECT: Understanding each other

By **Fiona Cauchi**  
Protection Assistant

VARIOUS ENTITIES IN MALTA HAVE FOR SOME TIME UNDERTAKEN EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE INTEGRATION POTENTIAL OF REFUGEES, PARTICULARLY OF **WOMEN**, AND REDUCE THE LEVEL OF **SOCIAL ISOLATION** AND MARGINALISATION. SUCH ACTIVITIES HAVE INCLUDED ADVOCACY, COUNSELING, LEGAL ADVICE, **SERVICE PROVISION**, TRAINING, **WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**, AND DETENTION MONITORING, AS WELL AS ACTIONS TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS RELATING TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY, HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND A RANGE OF **INTEGRATION-RELATED ISSUES**.

For refugees, effective integration can often be a **Durable Solution** and therefore it is important that we constantly strive to encourage and facilitate integration. Members of the local population as well as refugees are **stakeholders** in this process. Here at UNHCR Malta we carried out a mentorship pilot project. This is my experience working on the project.

The aim of the Befriend project was to explore ways of **empowering** women by connecting them to permanent Maltese residents, to **improve their access** to mainstream services and enhance their **understanding** of Maltese culture, systems and relationships.



UNHCR Malta matched refugee women to a Maltese national or long-term resident partner and encouraged them to meet regularly and participate in a variety of different **social activities**. The women discussed potential social activities with each other and **decided which they would do**.

The Befriend pilot project aimed to address the following issues in the integration of refugee women:

- Cultural/racial/religious stereotypes
- Misinformation regarding refugee experiences
- Lack of participation of refugee women in integration activities
- Lack of access to mainstream services by refugee women
- Low levels of empowerment or self-esteem
- Low level ability to communicate with the local population

The pilot program started off by providing a number of **training** sessions to both groups of women (refugees and mentors), in separate groups. This was especially useful to the mentors as it gave them the tools to understand their partners, their backgrounds and their needs more fully.

The mentors expressed their opinion that this learning experience was a **vital** component of the project. The fact that they heard from a number of guest speakers on a range of topics made the training interesting and diverse.

The project's focus on **networking and socialisation** was also successful as highlighted in the report.

Through the social meetings, both the refugee women and their mentors learnt more about each other's **cultures, traditions and circumstances**. The refugee women in particular benefitted because of the **connections** they made and the **local knowledge** they were able to access through their partners.

The results of the Befriend pilot project highlighted the **need for a fully-fledged, larger scale, structured mentorship program for refugees in Malta**. The integration potential of the project is high and while there were some logistical and communication issues, the overall potential of such a program aimed at enhancing the integration of refugees in Malta is considerable.



Throughout the sessions, the most frequently encountered difficulties were **effective communication, time commitment and managing expectations** of both the mentors and the refugee women. The evaluation of the project has proven to be very fruitful as it has created a better starting point for **future mentorship projects**.

As a result of the pilot project, UNHCR Malta feels that mentorship is a **useful tool** in the Maltese context. Both the mentors and the refugee women gained better insight into the background, culture and situation of their partners.

The mentors gained a better understanding of the **challenges and needs** of refugee women in Malta while the refugee women increased their **networking abilities and further developed their level of local knowledge**.

Moreover, the project provided a **safe and controlled setting** in which to stimulate social inclusion between different cultures.



**FEATURE**

## **REFUGEES IN GOZO**

Gozo is Malta's smaller sister island, the second largest in the archipelago. Seen as a safe haven, far removed from the bustle of everyday life in Malta, the island is witnessing an increasing number of refugees, including women and children, settling there. Sarah Mallia, Public Information Assistant with UNHCR Malta, meets with refugees and locals in an attempt to understand what is compelling refugees to settle on the little island, with a population of under 40,000.

Photos: © UNHCR/ Julian Calabrese





## Hassan Yassin Ibrahim

### Film Buff and Refugee Living in Gozo

Hassan was 16 years old when he was forced to flee his country. "I left Somalia not because I wanted to, but because of tribal and security problems that I faced," he explains. One year later, Hassan arrived in Malta and was given protection.

However, shortly after he arrived on the island, he embarked on a second journey: "I quickly left Malta after I was released from detention and moved to Sweden, where I lived for two years. I went to Sweden because I felt very lost in Malta, and because people told me that life was better there," says Hassan. "Living in Sweden really opened my eyes. They taught us how to speak the local language, and how to cook and clean. They basically taught us how to live in their society."

Two years after moving to Sweden, Hassan was required to return to Malta. According to EU rules, asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection are transferred to the responsible Member State, such as the country of first entry or the country which has granted protection first.

Since arriving in Malta, Hassan has moved to Gozo where he has now been living for the past few months. "Refugees need support when they arrive or are transferred back to Malta. My friends who live here know very little about the Maltese people and culture," Hassan explains. "Sometimes friends of mine throw litter in the street and I collect it after them. I was taught this in Sweden. They don't know that it upsets people."

Later on during our interview, Hassan shares that he is an avid lover of movies and video games, just like many other young men his age. "My favourite movie is the 'The Hateful 8', I love Quentin Tarantino. My favourite series is 'Game of Thrones', and my favourite video game is 'Fifa'. Hassan dreams of going to University and becoming a nurse. He admits that since moving to Gozo, he has found the lack of access to information as his main challenge: "I think that refugees and migrants do bring benefits to communities...but only if they are offered the opportunity to do so."



# GOZO: The Way Forward

UNHCR CARRIED OUT OUTREACH ACTIVITIES AND MEETINGS WITH RELEVANT MAINSTREAM STAKEHOLDERS IN GOZO, WITH THE AIM OF BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE INTEGRATION PROSPECTS OF REFUGEES LIVING IN GOZO AND THE AVAILABLE SERVICES THERE. THE GOZO OUTREACH INITIATIVE STARTED OUT IN APRIL 2016 AND IS STILL UNDERWAY.

From these activities UNHCR identified that refugees and beneficiaries of international protection living in Gozo lack information and integration support. Consequently, refugees are struggling to access services which could help in their inclusion in Gozitan society. If unaddressed, in the long term this could have a negative impact not only on the refugee communities but also on the general population of Gozo.

Towards the end of July 2016, UNHCR, the President's Foundation for the Well-Being of Society (President's Foundation), and some Gozitan stakeholders agreed to embark on a 9-month strategy, commencing in September 2016 up to June 2017.

The strategy focused on two pillars – a mapping of the services carried out by two cultural mediators available in Gozo and an identification of refugees' needs, done through a number of Refugee Consultation sessions.

From the sessions it was revealed that the Somali community seem to be the group facing most social, educational, and employment problems, resulting in them becoming idle and/or unable to integrate in the local community.

The lack of a structured system providing adequate support services to refugees living in Gozo is strongly felt, and major gaps in the system remain unaddressed. There is a fragmented and unstructured





**Ahmed** Refugee in Gozo

Ahmed, a 23-year-old graphic designer, did not choose to end up in Gozo. “My journey started from Somalia in 1991 at the start of the civil war. Since then I have been running. I am still running. This is my reality. I am always looking for a better place, a place where I can have a good future.”

While Ahmed feels lucky to be alive, and to have found protection and peace in another country, he admits that many other refugees like him face a number of challenges in Malta and Gozo. “In Somalia we were faced with war. Here we are faced with other issues, such as racism and xenophobia,” explains Ahmed.

However, Ahmed admits that his biggest challenge in Malta is that he lives without a sense of certainty. “Even if we work and pay taxes in Malta, we will probably never receive a pension, or be granted citizenship. We cannot even dream about buying a house. There is no guarantee here. That is why many of us feel like we have not finished our journey.”

Ahmed believes that one way to overcome these challenges is to open dialogue between the Maltese and refugees. “It is time for locals and refugees to start communicating with one another. Even though we have been living side by side for years, people’s impressions are still formed by the media. There are lots of misconceptions,” Ahmed explains. “We need to organise meetings with the local communities and let them know who we are, and that we are here to help make their communities better.”

Like others, Ahmed highlighted that adult education is key to bridging the two communities. “How can people communicate if they do not speak the same language? How can people work if they do not learn the language? Refugees living in Gozo do not even have access to that,” says Ahmed.

support system being provided, mainly by Church institutions such as Caritas which offer material support such as providing milk, food and other material needs to refugees registered with them.

General lack of awareness and knowledge about refugees seems to give rise to misconceptions which in turn create barriers to social inclusion. The involvement of local councils, authorities and refugees working together would be able to bridge some of the current challenges faced by both refugees and communities.

The report was presented to Justyne Caruana, Minister for Gozo, in July 2017.

The project will now continue to advocate with the relevant stakeholders for the necessary support which is much needed by the refugees living in Gozo. It is foreseen that this will be done in a collaborative manner between UNHCR, the Ministry of Gozo, the President’s Foundation, and the relevant Gozitan stakeholders.

## HERE ARE SOME OF THE FINDINGS:

### EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION:

- Employment and education remain challenging to many refugees living in Gozo.
- A considerable number of refugees and migrants work casually and illegally in construction, agriculture, garbage collection, or as kitchen helpers. Until recently, refugees in Gozo received minimal support from Jobsplus. However in 2018, Jobsplus will be opening up its services to beneficiaries of refugee and subsidiary protection and temporary humanitarian protection. This way more people will benefit from assistance and gain better skills in areas such as CV writing, among others.
- **Accessing skill training** courses in Gozo remains challenging mainly because of financial constraints. Enrolling in MCAST part time courses is possible against a payment which many refugees cannot afford. Even though the full time courses are free, refugees would still need financial support to cope with their daily living expenses.
- **MCAST's Skill Kit** could provide much needed support for refugees in need of improving their basic language and other skills.
- **Refugees have a strong interest to learn English and Maltese language** – so far in Gozo there are no classes provided.

### HEALTH

- So far **no major concerns** have been observed, with adequate health support being provided to refugees living in Gozo. From UNHCR's observations, it appears that refugees have full access to health care.

### HOUSING

- Even though the rent rates in Gozo are considerably lower, there now seems to be an indication that **rent rates will also increase**.
- There was **no or little awareness** from the refugee population about the support provided by the Housing Authority.
- Many Gozitan landlords **refuse to provide a legal rental agreement** to refugees.

### COMMUNITY LIFE

- There are **lack of activities and dialogue between refugees and the local councils**, which would benefit better the social inclusion of refugees in the community and anticipate some of the challenges that might arise.
- In addition **social workers should be appointed to support refugees living in Gozo**.



**Hodon**  
Single Mother and Refugee Living in Gozo

Hodon moved to Gozo a few months ago. She is a single mother of a large family, and could no longer afford to pay rent in Malta.

“ I am happy in Gozo. The people here are good. We have not been facing major problems as we were before in Malta.”

Hodon

Other than Caritas Gozo, other refugee mothers like Hodon do not know who to approach when asking for assistance, particularly with regards to information on educational and employment opportunities. “We want to work. We really need to work. And we want to get educated,” she explains.





**Fr Michael Borg**  
Head of Caritas, Gozo

Caritas Gozo opens its doors and offers its services to families in need of basic necessities, such as food, nappies, and milk. “We offer our services to all those in need, regardless of where they come from,” explains Fr Michael Borg, Head of Caritas in Gozo, which is located at the Curia in Victoria.

Over the years, Gozo has seen an increasing number of families settling there, including refugee women and children, Fr Michael reveals. “Families are leaving Malta because it is becoming increasingly expensive to live there. Even if people work, they find it more and more difficult to pay rent and support their families.”

Fr Michael admits that there is a lack of services being offered to refugees living in Gozo: “While charity is beautiful, we also need services that empower people,” he explains. “If we do not empower them, exploitation and unemployment will continue to grow. This will lead to idleness, drinking and violence. These are all signs of poverty and frustration.”

## **GOZO OUTREACH INITIATIVE**

Over the last three years UNHCR has been following closely the refugee and migrant community living in Gozo. Apart from carrying out a mapping of refugee needs and services provided, UNHCR has identified and implemented a Refugee Focal Point (RFP) system. Six refugee focal points are currently being trained and supported so as to assist their community.

The RFP system in Gozo could potentially improve the gap between the refugee community and service providers.

*(Go to page 66: A refugee focal point programme in Gozo)*



**George Mario Attard**  
Installation Artist from Gozo

George creates installations which foster dialogue and interaction between local and migrant communities. His project, ‘Migrating to Europe’, explores how art can contribute to a humanitarian cause, at a time when the death toll of migrants perishing in the Mediterranean is at an all-time high.

What inspires George to tackle this topic through his work? “One day while on a remote beach in Gozo, I started observing a number of items that had been washed-up on the sea shore. At first, I thought it was litter, but then I started noticing personal objects. It then occurred to me these items could have easily been brought in by a current from a tragedy,” he explains.

The story of Alan Kurdi, a three year old Syrian boy of Kurdish ethnic background who drowned in September 2015, whose image made global headlines, further inspired George to explore this topic through his art. “I believe that artists have an important role in our society, and have a responsibility to explore and communicate important topics,” says George.

For this project, George uses a very distinct medium: second hand clothes. “I always approach a subject with a tabula rasa – I start my research from there. This is what guides me to my medium of choice. I chose second hand clothes because it creates a bridge between the local community and migrants. All the clothes that I collect for the project are then donated to people. In this way, I create a temporary happening and expression,” explains George.

George exhibits his work in public spaces, as he believes that this is where dialogue needs to be created. “Art does not necessarily have to take place in a conventional space. With my installations, you don’t need a formal invitation to witness and interact with it.”



# THE STORY OF A PJAZZA

By David Castillo  
Durable Solutions Associate

IN 2015 UNHCR CARRIED OUT AN OUTREACH PROGRAMME IN GOZO TO ENGAGE (OR MAKE CONTACT) WITH OVER 100 REFUGEES LIVING ON THE SISTER ISLAND. THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF A TWO-YEAR PROJECT THAT LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 'GOZO OUTREACH INITIATIVE', WHICH IDENTIFIED A NUMBER OF GAPS IN THE COMMUNITIES AND PUT FORWARD SEVERAL PROPOSALS.

The outreach was held in a hall kindly provided by the Ministry of Gozo. Their offices, a historical building which previously operated as the hospital of Gozo, are located in one of my favourite pjazzas in Gozo – Pjazza St. Francis in Victoria. It is a medium-sized square, dotted with typical Gozitan bars, a small Baroque church and a beautiful fountain right in the middle.

Pjazza St. Francis has a truly special positive energy to it, and has stuck with me since my childhood years.

UNHCR officials David Castillo, Durable Solutions Assistant (Centre) and Kahin Ismail, UNHCR Malta Representative (Right), meet refugees living in Gozo. Pjazza St Francis, Victoria, July 2017

© UNHCR/ Annalisa Mantelli

It is the perfect setting to simply sit at one of the bars, sip on a cold drink and watch the world go by.

Nothing much has changed. The pjazza still retains the same energy I always perceived. Actually, thinking about it, it did change; it evolved, it got better.

Arriving at the pjazza for my first outreach session, the energy was vibrant, almost electrifying. I watched with content eyes the balance of Gozitans and refugees sitting together at the bars. I silently remarked, "The pjazza has now attracted people from different countries, including refugees."

I suddenly felt a harmonious energy beseech me; it was a moment of clarity. Proudly I contemplated, "In





Gozo refugees seem to be well-integrated and the Gozitans have provided balance and space for their inclusion.” I mused with the thought, trusting that my love story with the pjazza got even better.

Then a moment of reflection followed – “could I be wrong?” After all, my biases could be playing tricks on my thoughts.

Back at work I wanted to test my perception. The question that we put forward was:

“ *Is it that simple for refugees to be well-integrated in Gozo?*”

We carried out a mapping of needs by working closely with refugees living in Gozo. We also attended meetings with a number of relevant offices who for some reason or other would have an idea or two of the refugee situation in Gozo. Information shared in these meetings came to me like a lion’s roar. I was crushed.

I started to understand more clearly the problems both refugees and the locals encountered. For the first time, I felt cheated by Pjazza St. Francis. I had to understand more; it couldn’t be that the energy I felt that day of the outreach had no truth.

More than a year later, working on the Gozo project gave me the opportunity to listen to both the refugees and the Gozitans. The insights I obtained, somewhat intense, helped me unfold a more realistic picture. I knew it! Pjazza St. Francis did not let me down. The problems both refugees and Gozitans face are all related to the lack of integration support available.

I questioned, “How about if refugees and Gozitans are provided the space to dialogue, to listen to each other and allow the world to reveal itself? After all, is it not the same energy that the pjazza reveals?”

Yes, integration is possible. It is not us and them, it is we together.





# BEYOND SAFETY & FREEDOM

Seeing the container ships coming in and out of the Birzebbuga port from Pretty Bay, where I spend most of my Sunday afternoons during summer, is really a pleasant view. The view is a particularly pleasant one for me, firstly because it is in itself breath-taking, and secondly because it brings back a lot of fond memories.

I am a refugee from Eritrea. To be exact from Massawa, a port city with busy cranes loading and unloading goods. Or at least it used to be a busy port until its sad decline. Now it is a distant shadow and skeleton of itself.

But I don't want to remember my city as it is now. I always want to picture my city as it used to be – vibrant and full of energy.

I fled my country to find a safe place where I could find the freedoms that were denied me. I was a conscript in the endless national service for seven years.

I was hoping for the new year to be better than the one before. Until one day I came to the realisation that things were only going to get worse. I took the hardest decision of my life – I left my family, friends and home. I left everything behind to the unknown and to be the unknown.

I love my country and my city very much.

I hope one day I will be able to go back to see my city, which we like to call the Pearl of the Red Sea, come back to its old life. To the buzz of people in the markets, the streets full of cafés and bars, the busy fish market, the container ships waiting their turn to be served by the port, the night life and discos.

Right now I am thankful for the safety and freedom I have found in Malta, and I will do my best to pay back the country that gave me a second chance at life.

But the memories of Massawa the city, Massawa the people, Massawa the streets and Massawa the life will forever be engraved in my mind.

It is strange how things can be the same and yet be so different. Both Birzebbuga and Massawa are port towns, yet they feel different, smell different. Even though one reminds me of the other, they don't feel the same. It is like you will always have an invisible connection to the place where you have spent your childhood.

I do not feel out of place in Birzebbuga because I see myself in the people around me. We are all human beings and we inhabit the same planet. It depends





on how we live in the community. How we treat each other. Whether we can see further than the colour of our skin or the little accent at the tip of the tongue, and really see people for who they are.

We can build a better inclusive society together. I want to be a productive and contributing member of this society. But to do that I need to be a member of society first. After so many years in Malta I am still struggling with social inclusion.

I do face racism in my daily life. At times I face racism when I take a bus, or when I go to renew or reissue my ID card or protection certificate. I am denied access or turned away from recreation places because of my skin colour. I am called names, and spoken of behind my back.

On the other hand I also meet good people who really care about me and want to lend me a helping hand.

I am grateful for the safety and freedom this country has offered. I believe this is a good foundation to build an inclusive society for many who, like myself, see Malta as their home now.

People have always migrated from place to place. The reasons are different but the movement is always the



Photo: Pretty Bay, Birzebbuga, 2017

same, and it never stops. To leave everything behind is a really difficult decision I hope nobody is forced to take.

Maltese society has given me the opportunity to have a safe and free life here. I hope we will find common ground for real integration, where I will be able to contribute and give back to society.

I hope one day I will be able to feel at home in Malta.

Then Birzebbuga will be my Massawa!

*Editor's note: Author is a refugee living and working in Malta. Name has been concealed for protection reasons.*

IN PICTURES

# SYRIA

“ Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, a continuing cause of suffering for millions which should be garnering a groundswell of support around the world.”

---

Filippo Grandi, UNHCR High Commissioner









Mohamad, 62, returns to his shop in the Al-Mashatiyeh neighborhood of east Aleppo to clean up the debris with his children Mohamad and Esraa. "I used to sell ice cream and candy. Business was good but the war destroyed everything," he says. © UNHCR/ Bassam Diab



On the streets of a war shattered city, a boy pushes a wheelchair through the debris in the Al-Mashatiyeh neighborhood, where relief supplies are being provided by UNHCR and other UN agencies to the displaced residents of east Aleppo. © UNHCR/ Bassam Diab

Millions of Syrians are escaping across borders, fleeing the bombs and bullets that have devastated their home.

Turkey hosts over 2.7 million registered Syrians. The majority of them live in urban areas, with around 260,000 accommodated in the 23 refugee camps in the provinces of Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis and Sanliurfa.

In Lebanon, life is a daily struggle for many Syrian refugees, who have little or no financial resources. Around 70 per cent live below the poverty line on less than USD 3.84 per person per day. There are no formal refugee camps and, as a result, more than a million registered Syrians live in over 1,700 communities and locations across the country,

often sharing small basic lodgings with other refugee families in overcrowded conditions.

In Jordan, over 600,000 men, women and children are currently trapped in exile. Approximately 80 per cent of them live in urban areas, while more than 100,000 have found sanctuary at the camps of Za'atari and Azraq. Many have arrived with limited means to cover even basic needs, and even those who could at first rely on savings or support from host families are now increasingly in need of help.

Iraq has also seen a growing number of Syrians arriving, hosting nearly 25,000, while in Egypt UNHCR provides protection and assistance to more than 100,000. But although life in exile can be difficult, for Syrians still at home it is even harder.

On the streets of a war shattered city, among the devastated buildings, residents receive crucial relief items provided by UNHCR and other UN agencies in the Al-Shaar neighborhood of east Aleppo.

© UNHCR/ Bassam Diab

Roads lined by destroyed buildings in east Aleppo, show the damage of years of conflict. Many people are attempting to return to their homes and one of the biggest challenges facing them is rebuilding their livelihoods.

© UNHCR/ Bassam Diab







Aleppo residents internally displaced by the violence and destruction in Al-Kallaseh neighbourhood have begun to return. UNHCR is helping them with their needs

© UNHCR/ Hameed Marouf



After the fighting has ended, the scale of destruction is revealed, as tonnes of bricks lie piled high, close to the ancient citadel of Aleppo.

© UNHCR/ Hameed Marouf

## WHAT IS UNHCR DOING TO HELP?

We provide life-saving humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees, helping the most vulnerable with cash for medicine and food, stoves and fuel for heating, insulation for tents, thermal blankets and winter clothing. In early 2016, with Syria's war heading into its sixth year and with no end to the fighting in sight, we joined forces with other United Nations humanitarian and development agencies to appeal for USD 7.73 billion in vital new funding to help 22.5 million people in Syria and across the region.

The first aspect of the appeal is the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), led by UNHCR, which calls for USD 4.55 billion to support 4.8 million refugees in neighbouring countries and four million in the communities hosting them. The second aspect is the 2016 Syria Humanitarian Response Plan which seeks nearly USD 3.2 billion to provide humanitarian support and protection to 13.5 million people inside Syria.

On 3 January 2017, Sajjad Malik, UNHCR's Country Representative in Syria, along with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) visited the Sakhour clinic in east Aleppo. UNHCR originally helped to set up the Sakhour clinic to provide health care to Iraqi refugees. Now, the clinic stands in ruins – but Sajjad Malik said it will be rebuilt with SARC.

© UNHCR/ Bassam Diab

UNHCR began assisting Iraqi refugees in Syria in 1991 – helping those who fled the Iraq war to seek safety. By the end of 2010, over 1,300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers – including one million Iraqis – were housed in Syria.

© UNHCR/ Bassam Diab





# INTERVIEW: Ullah's Journey

ULLAH MOHAMMED WAS ONE OF THE REFUGEES RELOCATED FROM GREECE TO MALTA IN 2016

## **Tell me about yourself, and your family**

My name is Ullah Mohammed, from a city called Hama in Syria. I am married with four girls, and one on the way. I am 35 years old. I used to work as an English teacher in Syria. I spent ten years working in an elementary, preparatory school and secondary school. My husband is an engineer. He worked with the government for 16 years.

## **When did you leave Syria?**

We tried to stay there, in Syria. It is very difficult to leave your country. We tried to go to other cities in Syria, but we couldn't. We even went to the border, we stayed there for a long time.

When we left without intention to return it was 20 February 2016. Before that, we had gone to Turkey, and then returned to Syria. We had hoped it would stop so we tried to go back to Syria. But then it became too difficult and complicated, so we decided to leave for good. We couldn't settle in any place there. In the end we had no hope – no hope for safety. That is why we took to decision to leave to Europe.

## **Was there one particular incident that made you decide to leave, permanently?**

I was inside the house preparing lunch in my husband's village. There was supposed to be a ceasefire. I thought, "Finally we can breathe!" I started preparing lunch, and suddenly – oh my god! – bombs started falling everywhere. I still cannot believe I am still alive from that day. I started crying, I collapsed. At that moment I imagined that my daughters would lose their hands. My husband is also disabled and we couldn't go on like that, so were forced to take a very difficult decision.



©UNHCR/ Tumer Gentruck

## **TURKEY**

Before the war started, we had a very comfortable and peaceful life. Imagine, we didn't even have a passport because for us, in Syria you had everything, the mountains and the sea. We were always busy with our jobs. We never thought that it could become like this. So, we had no passports. We entered Turkey illegally through Idlib, a very mountainous area. There are lots of people who make business there – human smugglers. We walked over the border, to avoid the Turkish military soldiers because some let you enter, others do not.

When we arrived in Turkey they gave us an identity card, but as visitors. How could I be a visitor in Turkey forever? It's hard to get a work permit there. I worked as a volunteer teacher in a camp for a while. We got tired there. It was a difficult decision, because we couldn't fly to Europe – we had to catch a boat.





Refugees and migrants disembark an inflatable boat on the shores of Lesbos island after crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey, 2015. © UNHCR/ Achilleas Zavallis

## GREECE

When I crossed I knew that we would not turn back. We travelled at night, in winter. There was a lot of rain. We crossed land full of moss. I was afraid for my husband, since he cannot walk well. There were so many children! If you were to see this trip, you would agree that it is the harshest trip that you can imagine. Actually, you cannot even imagine it – people crying, shouting. The smugglers telling us to hurry up, because they don't want the police to catch us. The smugglers take thousands of Euro to do this. They are making so much money.

At last, we arrived at the boat. Sorry, not a boat, a dinghy! I remember it was 1.13am when I saw this dinghy. When I saw the dinghy, I told myself, "Am I really that stupid to get on that with four children?" I told myself I was not a good mother to make them do this, to take that kind of decision for their life – they are innocent. So I told my husband that if something were to happen to me, he should save our youngest daughter, because she is the lightest from all of them. I hold him, "put her on your back, go forward and forget about us. Don't even look back."

The person who drove the dinghy did not have the experience. It was at this point that I told myself that if I were to be returned to Turkey, I would not try this

again. When you are in the water, all you can see is the sky, and black water. The driver changed a few times.

To be rescued we used technology. It is incredible, the power of technology. We had GPS, so when we entered Greek waters we informed them to come and rescue us. They came. We saw this big ship coming to us. I am sure that one wave from the ship could have drowned us all. It looked like the Titanic. But this wasn't a film, this was reality. We were real human beings on this boat. We were around 45, with the children. Again, I believe that it was our good luck that 12 big men and women did not have the courage to come with us before we left. This was our good luck.

After that, I remember not being able to feel or move my legs. They put us on the big ship and took us to Mytilene Island. We had not yet slept. They started to give us some food, bananas for the children. On the second day, we went to give them our finger prints and they gave us a paper saying that we are legally in Greece. Then we went from Mytilene Island to Zavala. When we went there we were put in a basketball court for one week. While there we met people who were very welcoming, very incredible. They treated us in a fantastic way. I started volunteering there, helping the staff there. I spent most of my time translating in English. When we left they even gave us a candle of hope.

## RELOCATION

Then we went to a camp that was run by the Greek Military for four days. But it felt like 40 years. We were in tents on the cold grass. The conditions were very harsh. After four days the people from EASO came and started to advertise the relocation programme. I helped them with translation.

The fourth day, in the morning, it started raining like crazy. The water started to enter the tents. I remember my husband turned to me and said, "The children will die if we stay like this, we need to find a solution". A friend of mine said that the people at EASO can take people out of here. So I said that I want to go there. There was a very long queue because of the rain. Because they knew me, because I was translating, they allowed me to skip the line and sign. Then they asked, "Are you ready?" and I answered, "Of course I am". They said, "Bring your things and let's go". I got my children and husband and we left everything.

From there we went to Thessaloniki. EASO put us in a very nice hotel there. We were there for 1 month, around 25-27 days. Then we started interviews for the relocation programme. We went to the interview and they looked at all our information. After this we went to Athens. This is when we were told that a country had accepted us. Most of the group we were with went to France, others to Finland.... and us Malta. They said 'Congratulations, the Maltese Government

has accepted you! Really, I started crying with shock. They gave me 8 choices to fill. I did not choose Malta! I ticked Germany, Austria, Belgium, and others, not Malta. Places where Syrian people had been to, that we knew about, of course. I only knew where Malta was from history, that the Turkish government would exile people to Malta. A friend laughed and said, "What have you done for them to send you to Malta?" I started crying. Why did they give us a choice if in reality we don't have one? I was very unhappy after that. This had an effect on my physically. I wasn't interacting with my children. My husband was looking after them. After a while he asked me to think about our children, to think about what they will do without me. He told me to be strong for the children.

We went to an IOM cultural orientation session, and I asked them to tell us about the place, to tell us about Maltese culture. I wanted to know things that were relevant to me and children. They told me that they cannot tell me, that they did not have answer. Most of all, this is important for UNHCR to know: they told us that Germany, Malta and anywhere else have the same door. That the standards and salary are the same in all the countries. He told us this. I will never forget this. They sent a very nice car to pick us for the airport from IOM, and doctors came to see if we were okay to fly. I felt like my body was going to explode at this point.





## IN MALTA

We arrived in Malta. They immediately took us from the airport to Hal Far, in a centre for families from the relocation programme. It is a building built during British rule. We were alone. All alone. Why did they put us all alone in a new country? We had nobody to talk to, apart from the staff. All I could see were containers, and the ugly way that place looked. We were totally isolated. We had never done anything bad in our life... why did this happen to us?! Luckily, another Syrian man who had been resettled to Malta told us not to be afraid, that they would take us to the city, where there would be people. At least this gave me some hope. Hal Far is not a good place. When you arrive in a new place you don't want to be isolated, you want to be around people from that place.

Then we were told we would be taken to the best open centre in Malta, Balzan. Don't get me wrong, the town is very nice, but the open centre is not. When I arrived I started crying, again, and my children started crying too. We all sat on the floor and starting crying. It is a horrible place. I didn't even want to enter. My husband said "We have children, they need to eat, need to sleep... we need to go inside!" He went and he cleaned the room. I sat outside and cried. We lived in good conditions in Syria; this was humiliating for us.

Life didn't stop there though. It continued. We starting cleaning, cooking and making the place better. Life moved on. People have treated us well in Malta, everyone did. The people here are kind. We don't like problems, we don't make problems, so people don't make problems with us.

### 🗣️ Who has supported you so far in Malta?

JRS have helped us a lot. The staff have been very supportive. Especially legally.

We have been given subsidiary protection. This is only temporary. Why have they only given us this? We cannot return to Syria. Why can't we have access to all our rights? My husband and I are civil people, and all we want is our children to grow up in a healthy and happy environment. But like this, we don't have our rights. We don't know what will happen. What is our future? We cannot be settled like this. I have 4 girls, 5 soon. I think about them and their future. What future do they have with subsidiary protection? Now we are appealing, because we have a right to refugee status.

UNHCR and JRS have given me something special, light after a lot of darkness. It has given me the chance to attend an English course at a professional English Academy. This is when I really saw that UNHCR is helping refugees in Malta.

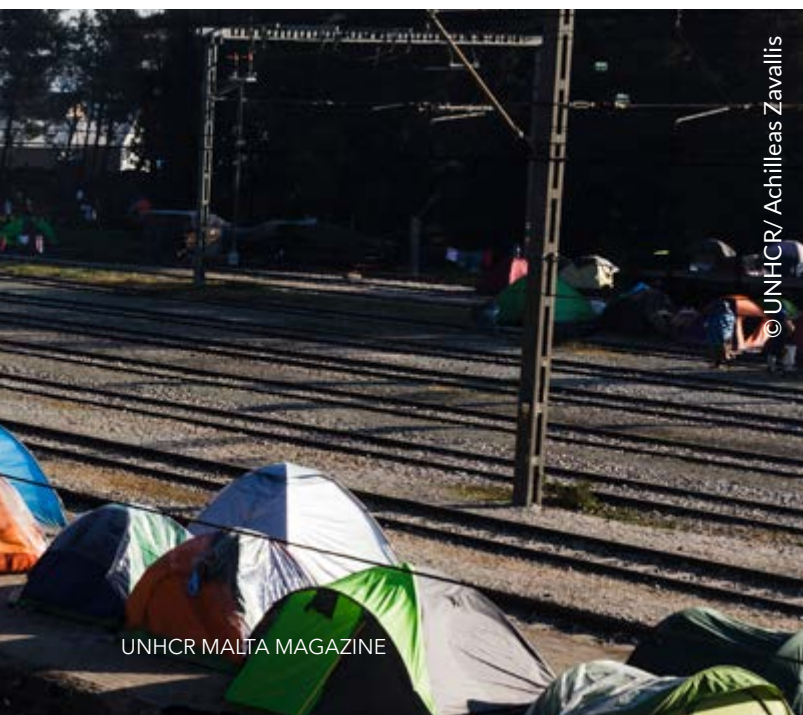
### 🗣️ What can be improved in the relocation programme?

They need to make sure that the standards are equal in all countries. If countries cannot receive refugees, and cannot provide certain standards, then why send refugees to these countries? Refugees should also go to cities, around people, so they can integrate and their children can go to schools with others.

### 🗣️ What are the hopes of you and your family?

More than anything I want peace in my country. I want people to live safe, and stop killing each other. But I know that this might not be possible for now.

After I finish my language course I would like to return to my favourite job: teaching. The first day my children went to school I started crying. Because I saw my children go to school. And I also want to be a teacher in a school. My husband would also like to find work, but it is difficult for him because he does not know the language yet. Now our situation has changed, and we feel happy in Malta. We are living in the community. After leaving the open centre, we felt like we were leaving one country, and entering into another. Our life has really improved now.



# GLOBAL TRENDS

## Forced Displacement in 2016

**10.3**

**MILLION NEWLY DISPLACED**

During the year, 10.3 million people were newly displaced by conflict or persecution. This included 6.9 million individuals displaced within the borders of their own countries and 3.4 million new refugees and new asylum-seekers.

**20**

**NEW DISPLACEMENTS  
EVERY MINUTE**

The number of new displacements was equivalent to 20 people being forced to flee their homes every minute of 2016, or 28,300 every day.

**10**

**MILLION PEOPLE**

UNHCR estimated that at least 10 million people were stateless or at risk of statelessness in 2016. However, data captured by governments and reported to UNHCR were limited to 3.2 million stateless individuals in 75 countries.

**51%**

**CHILDREN**

Children below 18 years of age constituted about half of the refugee population in 2016, as in recent years. Children make up an estimated 31 per cent of the total world population.





# 84%

## HOSTED BY DEVELOPING REGIONS

Developing regions hosted 84 per cent of the world's refugees under UNHCR's mandate, with about 14.5 million people. The least developed countries provided asylum to a growing proportion, with 28 per cent of the global total (4.9 million refugees).

# 552,200

## REFUGEES RETURNED

Refugee returns increased from recent years. During 2016, 552,200 refugees returned to their countries of origin, often in less than ideal conditions. The number is more than double the previous year and most returned to Afghanistan (384,000).

# 1 in 6

## PEOPLE A REFUGEE IN LEBANON

Lebanon continued to host the largest number of refugees relative to its national population, where 1 in 6 people was a refugee. Jordan (1 in 11) and Turkey (1 in 28) ranked second and third, respectively.

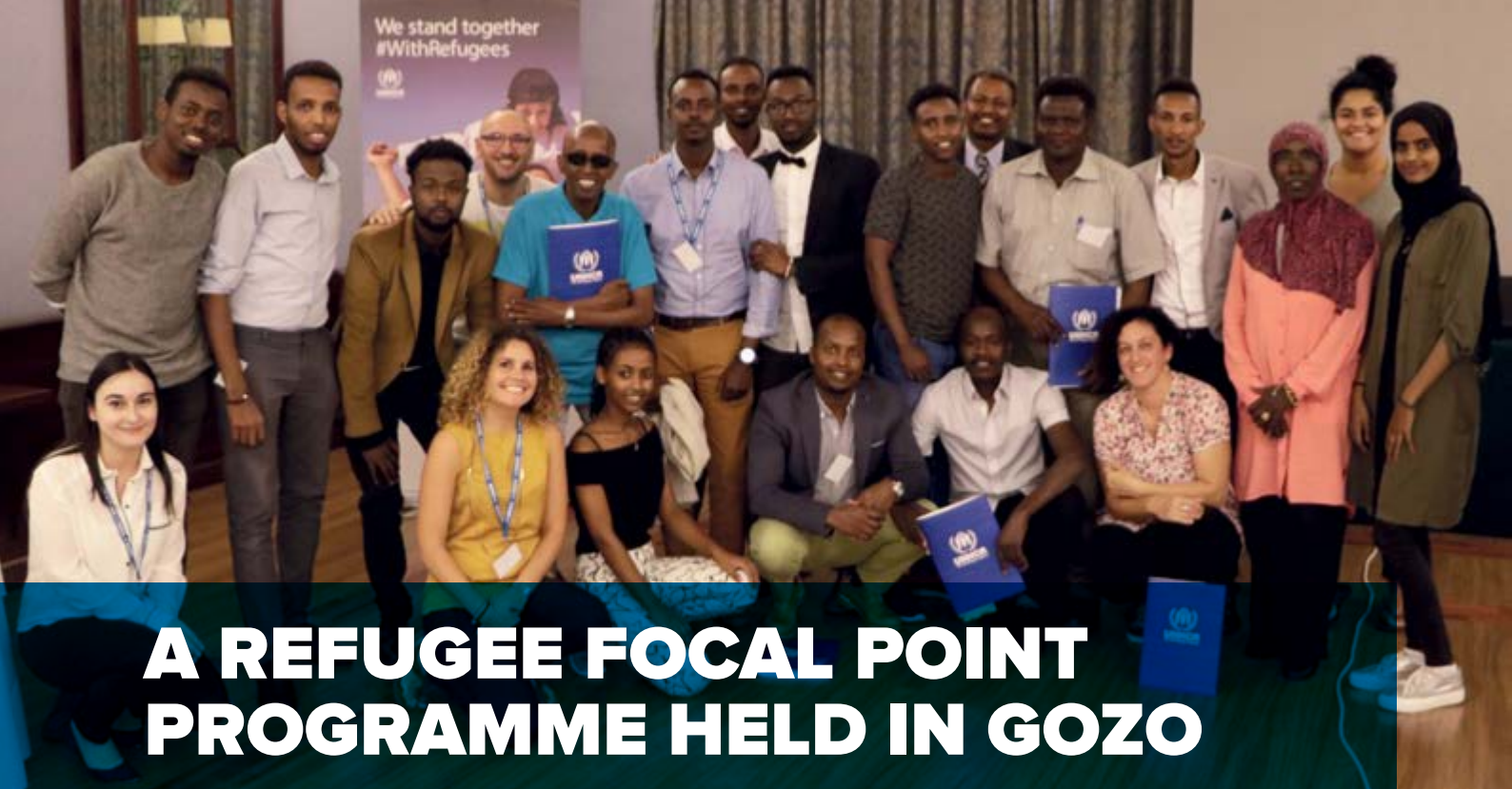
# 55%

## FROM THREE COUNTRIES

Altogether, more than half (55 per cent) of all refugees worldwide came from just three countries:

- Syrian Arab Republic (5.5 million)
- Afghanistan (2.5 million)
- South Sudan (1.4 million)

📷 Syrian orphans Mohammed Adlani (left), 8, and Mohammed Chami, 11, take a bus to school from the Islamic Charity Association Orphanage in Homs. Both children, and their siblings, lost parents to the conflict. © UNHCR/ Andrew McConnell



# A REFUGEE FOCAL POINT PROGRAMME HELD IN GOZO

A REFUGEE FOCAL POINT (RFP) PROGRAMME AIMED AT EMPOWERING REFUGEE COMMUNITIES WAS LAUNCHED BY THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY OFFICE IN MALTA, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE MINISTRY OF GOZO, ON THE 20TH OCTOBER IN GHAJNSIELEM, GOZO.

UNHCR collaborates with Refugee Focal Points in Gozo and refugee and migrant community leaders from Malta. They have committed to voluntarily providing integration-related information in order to assist their own refugee communities in accessing services. In this way, they can become catalytic agents for community advancement towards more social inclusion.

The Refugee Focal Points' active engagement will complement and continue to build strong partnerships with service providers.

The two-day workshop provided Refugee Focal Points with an array of information on local services, the Maltese legal and policy frameworks, Maltese culture and the similarities with other cultures. This is the first training session of a series of programmes being planned.

UNHCR and the Ministry of Gozo are committed to work together in advancing social inclusion as a two-

↑ Refugees, NGO and UNHCR staff members during the event. © UNHCR/ Annalisa Mantelli

way process through which strong social relationships are built by increasing understanding of diversity and by augmenting the capacities of refugees and migrants to become active members of our society and realise their full potential.

The workshop would not have been possible without the added support of the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, the Church in Gozo, MCAST, the Police, Caritas Gozo and the Social Security office in Gozo.

"We would like to express our gratitude for the support provided, in particular by the Hon. Dr Justyne Caruana, Minister for Gozo, and other stakeholders in promoting social inclusion both in Gozo and in Malta. For Malta, this is an important step that reflects well on the Government, the public service and civil society to engage further with the refugee community to foster a better society for all," Mr Kahin Ismail, UNHCR Representative to Malta said.

Hon Justyne Caruana, in her address during the seminar, stressed on the importance of communication to ensure positive interaction and social inclusion. Also she augured further collaboration with UNHCR especially with regards to services required in Gozo to address the needs of refugees.





## MICROSOFT PLEDGES TECHNOLOGY TO MALTA'S REFUGEE NGO COMMUNITY

A joint event was held by Microsoft Malta and UNHCR at the Microsoft Innovation Centre to discuss with refugee-led NGOs and Communities in Malta the topic of social inclusion and how technology like Microsoft's programs can assist refugee non-profit organisations achieve more.

“ Every year, Microsoft hosts a Tech4Good event in which we seek to address Maltese NGOs to see where they need assistance and to expose them to technology that can help them achieve efficiencies and better results. This year, we are proud to collaborate with the UNHCR to deliver an event that will help NGOs learn more about Office 365 and how this productivity solution can help them focus on their core activities, about GDPR and how to prepare for it from a Security and Privacy perspective, and to share best practice with other refugee non-profits and network together,” says Angela Micallef, Philanthropies Manager at Microsoft Malta.

Microsoft has been assisting and collaborating with NGOs in Malta for a number of years by helping them harness the power of innovation to meet the needs of their various communities. To date, Microsoft has donated over €2 million worth of software to over 40 NGOs in Malta.

Silvan Agius, Director, Human Rights and Integration Directorate, Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties – Human Rights and Integration Directorate, addressing the event. © Corporate Identities/ James Vella Clark

“ In Malta, Microsoft has had ample opportunity to discover how NGOs are such a vital part of the local community and we are truly appreciative of the great work they do across so many different spheres. This is why every year, Microsoft makes it a point to reach out to these NGOs through our annual Tech4Good events during which organisations meet together and find out how our technology can help them operate more efficiently,” added Angela Micallef.

“ We applaud Microsoft's initiative to engage and support refugee-led organisations by providing them with the skills and knowledge to grow further and to better serve their communities. We are proud of this collaboration and hope that others will follow suit in promoting social inclusion in Malta,” Mr. Kahin Ismail, UNHCR Representative to Malta, said.

“ Securing a durable solution by way of empowering refugees to join the fabric of their adopted society and make contributions is a principal goal of international protection and part of UNHCR's mandate,” Mr. Ismail added.

# WHEN ASIAN REFUGEES SETTLED IN TIGNE ... IN 1972

By Fabrizio Ellul

Back in 1972 a group of some 400 Ugandan Asian refugees settled briefly in Malta when then Ugandan leader Idi Amin expelled more than 80,000 Asians from the country.

Many of the Ugandan Asians had been living in the country for more than a century. However, when Idi Amin came to power, following a coup d'état, he expelled and persecuted ethnic minorities, including Asians.

Thus, many suddenly had to leave their home, work and business and become refugees. From this large group some 400 arrived in Malta in November of 1972 and stayed at Tigne Barracks for some months before they were resettled to other countries including Denmark, USA and Canada.

During this stay, the refugees were provided with support from the Government, Church, civil society and UNHCR. At one point a group of 36 refugees were taken on an educational tour to the National Museum and the Palace in Valletta by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

In a letter to the Times of Malta, Mr. H.A. Patel expresses his gratitude to the Maltese people by expressing his "heartiest thanks to the Government of Malta for providing us with accommodation for our temporary transit camp here in Malta when we were in adverse circumstances in Uganda."

“ During our stay of these seven months, we have got used to being greeted by the cheering faces of this small but beautiful and ever salubrious Island, which has become a footstep towards our new life,” he continues.

Their experience is however not lost.

Some researchers in Canada, one of the first countries to respond to the crisis (at the time Canada's Prime



Minister was Pierre Trudeau, father of current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who is continuing the tradition of resettlement), opened 'The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project' to record the experience of Asian refugees resettled to Canada in the 1970s.

Nizar Fakirani, one refugee who passed through Malta, recalls his experience: "We were taken care of, very nicely taken care of there. But of course it was still a camp and we stayed there for almost a year while we were being processed to immigrate to Canada. The good thing about being in Malta was that it was an English speaking country so we were able to adjust quite quickly, and all the kids, including myself, we were able to go to school there. So we joined the school system there and continued on with high school in Malta for a year."

“ We've recently experienced another wave of refugees, this time from Syria. The lessons learned from the Ugandan Asian experience become more relevant and instructive with time.” Mr Fakirani added.

Source: Times of Malta archives



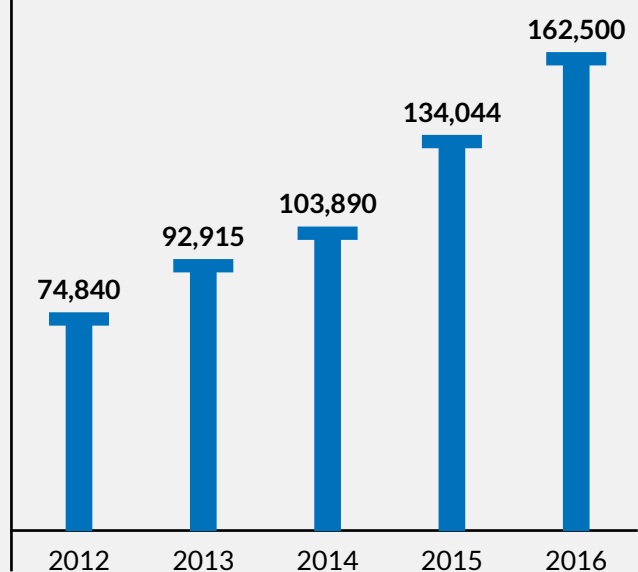


Resettlement remains an important protection tool to provide new opportunities to many people who are fleeing persecution and war. In recent years the United States has been the world's top resettlement country, with Canada, Australia and the Nordic countries also providing a sizeable number of places annually.

Resettlement states provide the refugee with legal and physical protection, including access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals.

Now Malta is one of the receiving countries too. Since 2016 it has resettled and relocated some 185 asylum seekers from Greece, Italy and Turkey, with their nationalities being Eritrean, Syrian and Iraqi.

**UNHCR SUBMISSIONS FOR RESETTLEMENT**  
(2012 - 2016)



The 2018 Projected Global Resettlement Needs estimates close to 1.2 million refugees identified as needing access to this key durable solution in the coming year.





# WORLD REFUGEE DAY **IN MALTA**

Photos: © UNHCR/ Tumer Genctruck

JUNE 20 IS THE DAY THE WORLD COMMEMORATES THE STRENGTH, COURAGE, AND PERSEVERANCE OF MILLIONS OF REFUGEES. HELD EVERY YEAR, WORLD REFUGEE DAY ALSO MARKS A KEY MOMENT FOR THE PUBLIC TO SHOW SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES FORCED TO FLEE.

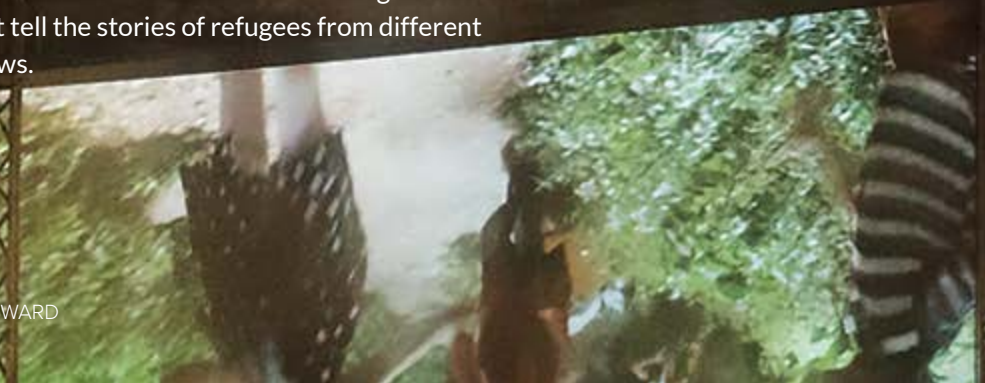
In September 2016, global leaders agreed to work towards a Global Compact for refugees in 2018 where all parts of society stand together #WithRefugees and do their fair share instead of leaving individual states to bear the burden of mass forced displacement.

In 2017, UNHCR collaborated with the Valletta Film Festival to feature a number of movies during the festival that tell the stories of refugees from different point of views.

You can call on these governments to keep their promise by signing the #WithRefugees petition. It asks them to make sure:

- ✔ Every refugee child gets an education
- ✔ Every refugee family has somewhere safe to live
- ✔ Every refugee can work or learn new skills to support their families.

**In a world where one in every 113 people have been forced to flee their homes because of war or persecution it's vital we demonstrate the global public stands #WithRefugees.**







Kahin Ismail, UNHCR Malta Representative, opening the screening of 'Land of Light'.



Herman Grech, Times of Malta, online editor, moderating the debate.



David Ruf, Land of Light director, signing autographs at the screening of Land of Light.



UNHCR supported the screening of the film Land of Light, directed by David Ruf.





**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



Tell the World **YOU** stand  
**#WithRefugees**

**SIGN NOW**

[WithRefugees.org](https://WithRefugees.org)