

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

UNHCR MALTA MAGAZINE 2020

LIFE AFTER RESCUE

EMPLOYMENT OF REFUGEES AND
ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN MALTA

MALTA JOINS GLOBAL EFFORTS
TO ADDRESS STATELESSNESS





ILLUSTRATION: Ed Dingli

UNHCR Malta dedicates this magazine to the memory of **Lassana Cisse**.

Lassana, a 42-year-old man from Côte D'Ivoire, was shot and killed on 16th April 2019 in what is alleged to be a racially motivated attack. His death sparked fear among the refugee and migrant community, especially those living in Hal Far, where the shooting took place. Lassana had been living and working in Malta for four years, he was an active member of society and a good friend to many.

The flowers in this portrait symbolise:

EGLANTINE ROSE: A wound to heal

GYPSOPHILA: Innocence

MARIGOLD: Pain and grief

PHLOX: Harmony

BORAGE: Courage

EDITORIAL

Building Communities

WELCOME TO THE SECOND EDITION of the UNHCR Malta magazine, Building Communities. As the title implies, this edition continues where the first edition Moving Forward left off; focusing on refugees living and working in Maltese communities.

One of our feature articles, Empowering Communities, provides a glimpse into the progress refugees have made in Malta. Refugees and migrants are not passive bystanders but active contributors, forming their own organisations and making an impact in society.

This edition also gives additional space to reflect on the increased number of sea rescues and disembarkations that have happened in Malta in 2019. Unfortunately, the high number of boat arrivals is a reflection of the collective failure of the international community to find durable solutions for people fleeing war and persecution.

The fact that a person's only path to effective protection is by resorting to leaving their lives in the hands of a smuggling network is tragic. While many are rescued, thanks to the brave armed forces, coast guards and rescue NGOs, many perish in the tortuous journeys across desert and sea. Abuse is rife on these journeys. You will

get snippets of their experiences through some of the testimonies from asylum-seekers who travelled through Libya and spoke with us in Malta.

Yet, amid all this suffering, there is also a great deal of humanity. This is demonstrated in the story of Mahat, a midwife from Somalia who even while detained in Libya, helped women to deliver their babies. It shows how even in the bleakest place people show bravery and solidarity with others.

The magazine also features the results of an employment study carried out following consultations with stakeholders and refugees. Employment is integral for the integration of refugees in society, as is also evident in the story of Nawras, a Syrian dog trainer; Sara, who was able to continue her architecture career, and a group of women getting the qualifications needed to build a new life.

It was impossible to include everything in a magazine, and we strive to give the public more exposure to refugees in Malta. Follow us on our web portal — www.unhcr.org.mt — for more stories and information.

Thank you, and we hope you enjoy the read.

Fabrizio Ellul



BUILDING COMMUNITIES is published by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Office in Malta.

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COVER PHOTO:

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The cover includes some of the people in Malta who dedicate their time and work to supporting refugees and asylum-seekers, providing services, guidance, and opportunities for them to feel more at home in society.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

Patricia Blijden, Integra Foundation
Intesar Bashir, Sudanese community

Ritianne Ellul, Youth and outreach worker
Andrea Wien, Hal Far Outreach

Taleb Zaidan, Syrian Solidarity in Malta
Abbas Mussa Jameah, Sudanese community

Regine Psaila, African Media Association
Mohamed Hassan, Spark15

Mario Gerada, JRS Malta

Eman, a refugee from Libya, runs a hair and beauty salon in Hamrun.
“When I see happiness in the eyes of my customer... I feel proud of myself.”

UNHCR Malta campaign for International Women’s Day 2018.

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Looking Ahead



A lot has changed since we published the first issue of the UNHCR Malta magazine *Moving Forward*, at the beginning of 2018. We have gone from a three-year period when there were no disembarkations to a record year in terms of the number of persons rescued at sea and brought to Malta.

Kahin Ismail, UNHCR Representative to Malta

AT THE TIME OF WRITING, over 3,000 people were rescued either by the Armed Forces of Malta or Search and Rescue (SAR) NGOs and brought to Malta in 2019, setting the highest number of sea arrivals to Malta in one year.

In 2018 and 2019, we continued to witness a number of disputes between different Member States or between Member States and SAR NGOs on assigning a port of disembarkation for rescued people. Without entering into the merit of the disputes (this is not the place for such a discussion) it nonetheless left refugees, asylum-seekers and people seeking a better life stranded on board for days or weeks until an agreement was reached on an ad-hoc transfer mechanism.

Malta has often taken a leadership role, not only in shouldering its obligation in rescuing in the Central Mediterranean persons who found themselves in distress within the zones that fall under Malta's responsibility, but also in forging, at times, ad hoc arrangements among like-minded European States for the disembarkation and

subsequent transfers of asylum-seekers.

This is far from an ideal situation. The lack of a predictable mechanism on rescue and swift disembarkation, firstly exposes persons escaping from wars and conflicts or seeking a better life, to grave consequences in the high seas. The number of boat arrivals in Europe from Libya has drastically reduced and continues to drop year after year, nevertheless, people continue to die because of a lack of legal means to reach safety.

Furthermore, the current stalemate imposes a heavy burden on Central Mediterranean front-line States such as Malta, which, without shared-responsibility and solidarity from other EU States will be saddled with demands that may prove to be too high to deal with alone. We remain hopeful that current discussions in finding workable arrangements will lead to an agreement.

The situation has proved challenging for the country's reception system. Malta has made important strides forward into

moving from a system of mandatory detention (of up to 18 months in case of failed asylum applications) to one of having initial reception centres where people are kept for a short duration in a closed centre until they are medically cleared.

Devised during a calm period of few arrivals, the initial reception system is currently being tested, and failing in a number of ways. We are unfortunately witnessing deterioration of many aspects of the reception system. Lack of proper contingency planning, coupled with the dismantling of existing reception infrastructures over the years, has resulted in both open and closed centres being overwhelmed. The lack of available accommodation in open centres has led to sizeable numbers of asylum-seekers being kept in a de facto detention situation at any given time for prolonged periods. Though we are cognisant of the prevailing circumstances, UNHCR's position, in line with the letter and spirit of the Refugee Convention and international law, is that asylum-seekers should, as a general rule, not be detained. Children, and unaccompanied

minors in particular, should never be detained.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS ARE REQUIRED TO IMPROVE RECEPTION CONDITIONS IN ORDER TO MITIGATE AND AVOID ESCALATION OF RECURRENT FLASHPOINTS, SUCH AS THE UNREST WE HAVE SEEN RECENTLY IN OPEN AND CLOSED CENTRES. LONG-TERM PLANNING FOR THE RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEES ARE ALSO REQUIRED AS A MATTER OF PRIORITY.

Another pressing concern is the rise of hate speech towards refugees and migrants. The pressures that 'migration' in general is perceived as imposing on Malta is turning some small, but virulent and vocal, segments of society to mount vitriolic attacks on those they view as the 'other'. We have seen racist comments on social media on the rise. UNHCR

condemns this hateful speech and scapegoating in the strongest terms.

We are encouraged by the stance of political leaders in Malta, pushing back against such divisive rhetoric. However it is sadly not only rhetoric, but also the brutal murder of Lassana Cisse Souleyman in April 2019 that is cause for serious concern. Lassana's murder should be viewed as a cautionary tale against a hostile environment where refugees and migrants are maligned and dehumanised.

The title of this magazine 'Building Communities', aims to acknowledge the fact that people fleeing war and protection both contribute to the local community, and enrich it.

Today, many of the refugees living in the local community are working, opening businesses and sending their children to local schools. Friendships between Maltese people and refugees and asylum-seekers are forged while others may work together. Refugees are nurses, engineers, shop owners and teachers, among other professions. They are also university students and aspiring

graduates who will shape the future of our country.

This spirit of participation, of shared responsibility, is enshrined in the UN Global Compact on Refugees adopted by the United National General Assembly last year. The Compact marks a new era of international cooperation and provides a blueprint for better responses; it is a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognising that a sustainable solution to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation.

All of us have a part to play in achieving these goals, both at the state-level, but also within our communities. It is in the everyday actions of the public, and the work of dedicated members of government, civil society and other stakeholders that one builds the foundations of strong, resilient communities.

Dog Trainer from Syria Rebuilds his Life in Malta

For Nawras, a dog is not just man's best friend. Dogs are also a vital part of his career and livelihood. A Syrian refugee who fled his country in 2012, Nawras settled in Malta and is now a hardworking dog trainer, dedicating his time to improving the behaviour of some of the country's most beloved pets. He talks to UNHCR about how his career started and what he hopes to do in the future.

BY Anna Camilleri | PHOTOS: © UNHCR/Rahma Henchiri



“THE MOST REWARDING PART OF MY JOB IS FINDING THE LAST RESULT. AND SEEING THE DOG BECOME WITH GOOD BEHAVIOUR. THEY BECOME HELPFUL, AND PLAYFUL.”

WHEN THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA ESCALATED, Nawras had no choice but to flee his war-torn home and embark on a dangerous journey to safety. It was 2012, and Damascus was engulfed in violence.

His journey brought Nawras to Malta, where he was granted Subsidiary Protection. A few years later and Nawras is a successful dog trainer with a number of clients, doing something that he has always been passionate about.

“[Dog training] started as a hobby when I was a child,” explains Nawras. “I became a dog trainer when I was 16 years old.”

His plan was never to turn his passion into a career, but after some time in Malta, Nawras says he realised that it made sense for him to pursue a job that was both enjoyable and would support him financially. Being self-employed carries a lot of responsibility, but he likes his independence, and most of all, he likes working with dogs.

“I became a dog trainer because I love animals very much. Especially dogs, because they have very nice characters.”

Of course, like any job, dog training has its downsides, and sometimes training a dog is not very straightforward. Surprisingly, Nawras admits that rather than his four-legged clients, it's dog owners who need to change their behaviour most. “One of the most challenging things is

that I have to teach people to stop treating dogs as humans, and it is quite difficult.”

Nawras also mentions that getting clients took some time and would not have been possible without being able to communicate.

“COMMUNICATION HAS BECOME EASIER, AND I HAVE MY OWN JOB, AND I REALLY FEEL I AM PART OF THE SOCIETY... AS A MALTESE.”

When Nawras first arrived in Malta, he did not speak English or Maltese, and this meant that he faced many obstacles finding a job, getting around and connecting with locals. One of the ways Nawras improved his English was with the support of Integra, a local NGO

that provides support to asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants at its drop-in centre in Valletta, which is where Nawras started to learn English, as well as interact with others from Malta and around the world. This helped him gain confidence.

Nawras found protection and a new life in Malta, and he is using his dog-training skills to make a living. This fun and satisfying job ensures financial stability and makes him feel more a part of Maltese society, as he is contributing to the country and providing a great service to his many clients, both animal and human.

In February 2019, UNHCR Malta released a short video about Nawras, which was shared in Malta and on UNHCR platforms around the world.

DID YOU KNOW?

Holders of Subsidiary Protection make up a large proportion of the persons of concern for UNHCR in Malta. UNHCR Malta advocates to improve the situation of beneficiaries of Subsidiary Protection, who do not receive the same rights as persons with Refugee Status. UNHCR Malta has carried out continued advocacy on access to family reunification for persons with spouses and children in other countries, on improving the pathway to citizenship and also on facilitating better access to social services.

Malta through the Eyes of a Refugee



The Refugee Experience

ABBAS MUSSA JAMEAH

WHEN YOU ARE A REFUGEE OR MIGRANT, it means that you left your own country and started a new life in another country. If you are a refugee, it means that something has happened in your country or region to make you leave home by force, and you had to depart to protect yourself in a safe place. There are many reasons people leave home and become refugees, for example, civil war, political troubles

and natural disasters such as earthquakes or floods.

It's not easy to make a decision to leave your home. It is very difficult, as you must forsake the place in which you were born, sometimes abandon your own family, leave your friends and upbringing, and leave your business, work or trade.

Suddenly you find yourself away from home, walking on an unknown road, with not enough money. It is a big dilemma, how to face your new life, and you might not understand your new situation. Which way should you choose to go? How do you deal with your new situation abroad? How do you learn your rights, duties and responsibilities?

You find yourself facing a lot of problems and issues in a new land. Before stability you have to face the complicated process of applying for asylum. Then you have to learn the laws and adapt to the system of the country in which you settled. After becoming a refugee, the next stage is usually to find work. The system might be completely different to

your own country, and it might take time before you understand.

For refugees to integrate in Malta, the first challenge is language. When anybody tries to learn the Maltese language, it becomes easier to integrate with Maltese. Because language makes people close to each other, and understand each other.

In addition, there is the issue of how the people in the new society accept you. You notice the gazes of the people towards foreigners and migrants in the streets. Some of the locals accept the new people in their community and share life with them, but other people don't accept migrants and foreigners among them, and those people raise their voices high. They believe refugees don't have real problems in their countries and that they are complaining all the time. These people demand the government deport all foreigners.

The mistake that people make is that, many do not understand that refugees come from a bad situation. They left their country, not for an easy reason, it was a difficult decision to leave... I hope the Maltese people understand this.

But even sympathy is not enough to support you, because as they say, somebody putting their hand in water is not like someone who puts their hand on a fire. Only asylum-seekers and refugees understand what it's like to be them.

Looking at our world religions, migration is an important topic. For example, the Prophet Mohamed migrated from his own district because his enemies tried to kill him, and in the Bible, Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt with baby Jesus Christ.

In the past most people migrated and left their countries, and new countries were created, such as the USA, Canada and Australia. My opinion is that all the people should welcome foreigners with their cultures, religions, languages and their variety for a more successful future.

I want people to respect me, I want to be a positive person in Malta. To work legally... to educate myself, and to improve myself all the time, to help Maltese people, to pay my taxes.

One of my happiest moments in Malta was when I found the opportunity to complete my education. In my country I had to stop my education, for many reasons. But here I could continue... even if it takes a long time. Apart from that, my friendships with Maltese people, and working with the Sudanese community, make me happy here.

Abbas is Sudanese and arrived in Malta to seek asylum in 2005. He is an active member of the Sudanese Community organisation. He works full-time and is also studying to become a civil engineer.



More Power in Unity than Division

HOUNIDA ERGHEI

THIS IS MY PERSONAL STORY OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION.

National integration is very significant for a country's unity and integrity. It signifies that even though we all belong to diverse religions, regions and castes, and speak different languages, we must always feel that we all are one. Such a feeling of unity is very important for building a prosperous and strong nation.

I first came to Malta in 2008, and I never intended to stay this long; however, during the uprising of the Arab spring, which led to the civil war, and since Muammar Gaddafi was toppled, the regime in my country collapsed. The consequence of this was chaos, instability and a continuous plunge into civil war.

THIS GAVE ME NO CHOICE BUT TO STAY IN THE SAFE ENVIRONMENT OF MALTA. I WOULDN'T WISH TO BRING UP MY SON ANYWHERE ELSE.

Each person is a vital part of a community. And when you improve the life of one person, you begin to improve the lives of those around them. You break down barriers, and good deeds lead to more good deeds. To bring together all these intense sparks of commitment and community, me and my friends established a Libyan hub for empowerment and integration: Libico. What one can receive from this is a glowing sense of pride, a real tangible sense of belonging to our new home country. And we can celebrate the common ground that unites us.

I would like to say there is more power in unity than division.

Hence, we must always remain united, irrespective of all our social, linguistic and religious differences.

Hounida is from Libya and is a beneficiary of Subsidiary Protection in Malta. She is a founding member of Libico, an organisation aiming to bring more opportunities to the Libyan community in Malta.

“We believe it’s more than setting up an NGO or creating a community, it’s about being authentic, and representing some people who might not be able to do so without the help of the community.”

Mohamed (Moe) Hassan — Spark15



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, an increasing number of organisations led by refugees and migrants have been set up in Malta. Some of these are specific to a country or ethnic group, such as the Sudanese community organisation, while others focus on women or youth, such as Migrant Women Association Malta or Spark15, respectively. What all the organisations have in common is the underlying statement ‘Nothing about us, without us’. It expresses the desire to strengthen and unite refugee and migrant voices by identifying and tackling the common challenges that their communities may face.

Umayma Elamin, Mohammed Mousa, Asma and Mohamed Hassan (Moe) are all members of groups in which they take an active role. With first-hand experience of migration and displacement, they have a particular understanding of their communities’ needs, this being one of the main reasons they decided to start their organisations.

“Most migrant communities get help and support [from local NGOs]... but I wanted to find an explicit role for migrants,” says Umayma Elamin of Migrant Women Association Malta (MWAM). Launched in 2015 with the support of SOS Malta and the Voluntary Commission, MWAM provides English lessons, implements projects and conducts research related to violence against refugee and asylum-seeking women, and operates SAHA!, a catering enterprise run by migrant women and showcasing food from their different cultures.

Umayma mentions that MWAM has been fortunate enough to receive support from the government, as well as capacity building training from UNHCR. Besides achieving official recognition as an NGO, another priority for MWAM was establishing a base from which to work, and it now operates from an office in Hamrun.

Umayma feels she has a responsibility to inspire women to find their voices.

This article is adapted from one that originally appeared in the June 2018 issue of FIRST magazine.

Refugee and migrant participation in civil society is growing with the emergence of organisations led by the very people they seek to support. A number of individuals who form part of community organisations open up to discuss how they are navigating the sometimes challenging reality of being a refugee or migrant in Malta, the difficulties they face and how they are working to carve out a better future for their communities.

BY Anna Camilleri

PHOTOS: © UNHCR/Joanna Demarco

“MY CULTURAL BACKGROUND IS MUSLIM, AFRICAN AND ARABIC AT THE SAME TIME, SO I FIND MYSELF AS A PERSON WHO ENCOURAGES OTHER WOMEN FROM THE SAME CULTURES TO SPEAK UP.”

For the Sudanese Migrant Association, having a space of its own has also been crucial. The association organises English lessons, meals and events at its community centre in Hamrun, which is a hub for many Sudanese people in Malta, including some of the many Sudanese who have arrived since 2018, when there was a great increase in sea arrivals from Libya.

Mohammed Mousa, the Sudanese community’s former president, explains how the space brought the community together:

“Some of the Sudanese diaspora in Malta did not know each other... so we needed a place to talk about our problems, share our ideas, get together and feel more united.”

At the same time, Mohammed emphasises that the centre is not exclusively for Sudanese. “We open it to all nationalities... We have had people from Eritrea and Ivory Coast,” he says. Locals are welcome, too; indeed the volunteers teaching English at the centre are Maltese, and locals have attended various activities, including a documentary screening and meal.

One of the most pressing issues for these communities is social inclusion, and some of their projects aim to tackle that in a



“It is necessary for migrants and refugees to start their own organisation or community group because no one feels the pain of the migrant as much as the migrants themselves.”

Mohammed Mousa - Sudanese Migrant Association

practical way. “Sometimes we feel there is a wall between migrants and Maltese” says Mohammed. “When you make a community, you can communicate... through culture or events.”

Asma, who has been in Malta since 1999, is one of the founding members of Libico, a Libyan community organisation. When asked why Libico was set up, Asma reflects, saying

“IT IS OFTEN THE CASE THAT MANY PROJECTS AIMED AT BETTERING THE LIVELIHOOD OF MIGRANTS AND THEIR INTEGRATION ARE LED BY ENTITIES AND ORGANISATIONS THAT DO NOT EMBRACE MIGRANTS WITHIN THEIR TEAM... THEY ARE DETACHED FROM REALITY.”

The idea is to create unity, no matter where in Libya the members come from, their legal status or their political affiliations. Libico meets regularly for educational, cultural, social and youth projects.

Sometimes an initiative is sparked from a single issue that affects a generation. This is the case for Spark15, a refugee-led youth organisation which addresses access to education, among other things. Moe, one of the founding members, says, “We are collaborating with Integra, Dr. Giuliana Fenech of the University of Malta and volunteer teachers on a project that ensures access to foundation studies at the university.”

The project prepares refugees and asylum-seekers for their IELTS (English language) test, a requirement to enter higher education.

Spark15 is made up of young people with an energetic spirit. Appealing to the younger generation means communicating with them in a creative way. Spark15 has also launched SparkMedia, a video channel which so far includes interviews and reflections on current affairs and local culture —including the idiosyncratic Maltese buses and the many types of encounters, good and bad, that take place on them. The idea is to inform, educate and entertain, while challenging local perceptions of refugees and migrants.

The increase in refugee and migrant participation is promising: members of refugee and migrant communities are becoming more empowered. Through self-representation, they are making and will continue to make an

impact both internally and with the wider public.

They are also instrumental in the work of UNHCR Malta, which has increased its engagement with refugee- and migrant-led organisations, regularly involving them in activities, connecting them with policy makers and the public sector, and giving them support to reach the potential yet untapped in their communities.

UNHCR Malta provides different types of capacity-building support for new organisations, which can apply to UNHCR for the provision of furniture and office equipment, and also for coaching from an experienced community organiser. We believe we should not just appreciate the resilience of the displaced amongst us, but recognise as well the positive contributions they are making to a more socially inclusive society.



“We aim to support any woman who has decided to move to Malta for any reason. To empower her, give her the opportunity to be independent, and to raise her voice.”

Umayma Elamin - Migrant Women Association Malta

Peaceful Coexistence and Social Inclusion

A reflection on integration-related challenges in the Maltese context

In December 2017, the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality launched the long-awaited Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan. In a country where asylum-seekers have been arriving in larger numbers since the turn of the century, and where immigration has increased due to the creation of local jobs, the time was ripe to visualise and structure a plan to better assist in the migrant integration process in Malta.

Mireille Sant, Durable Solutions Officer, UNHCR Malta



REFUGEES WHO HAVE been living in Malta for several years have a right to belong. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees states, “The Contracting States shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees.” Having their war-torn country remain an impossible place to return to due to their personal, life-threatening situation there, they must find in the country of asylum a durable solution, a place to call home.

The Integration Strategy is the first step in assisting refugees in a more comprehensive, inter-ministerial fashion and addressing some of their primary integration needs. With its 16 measures, the Strategy and Action Plan strives to set up a system where among other goals, refugees (and migrants) can learn local languages and become familiar with local cultures; local councils are engaged in better welcoming and supporting the refugees living in their communities; public awareness is raised around refugees through a positive narrative; and an inter-ministerial committee is set up to assist horizontal collaboration for relevant ministries to develop their integration action plans and monitor the progress of their implementation.

However positive and ambitious the Integration Strategy is, it is not, unfortunately, the complete answer to the gaps that still stall real inclusion.

Two of the main hindrances to ever calling Malta home that beneficiaries of international protection voice to UNHCR are the lack of access to family reunification (for those holding a subsidiary form of protection and having spouses and children in other countries) and the long and difficult path to obtaining citizenship.

One can also shed light on two linked, more basic challenges that refugees still face on a daily basis.



October 2019. Breakfast in the Pjazza, a community event in Msida organised by Msida & Birkirkara Community Services, FSWS, Msida Local Council and Changing Communities, with support from UNHCR. © UNHCR/Diana Iskander

One is the fact that refugees experience a lack of systematic access to relevant information, resulting in misinformation and miscommunication with service providers. The lack of knowledge of service providers limits their access to basic rights and other entitlements enshrined in the law. UNHCR and other NGOs usually assist refugees in these situations, but the solution should be comprehensive, not based on whether an individual manages to find legal assistance or social support to intervene in their case.

Obligatory training should be provided to the personnel who offer services to migrants and refugees (front desk officers, teachers, social workers, medical staff, etc.) consisting of basic information on refugees and migration, as well as the entitlements linked to legal status. Written guidance on basic rights should also be provided, making it clear what documentation needs

to be presented and what rights and entitlements are attached to that documentation, including for dependents (spouses and children) of refugees.

ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEES, ESPECIALLY DURING THEIR FIRST MONTHS IN MALTA, ARE UNABLE TO ACCESS INFORMATION CONSISTENTLY ON BASIC RIGHTS AND SERVICES IN A LANGUAGE THEY UNDERSTAND, SUCH AS INFORMATION REGARDING DOCUMENTATION, EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH, HOUSING AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES.

The existence of services and relevant documentation and forms should be known and understood by refugees. Accordingly,

interpretation services and the translation of principal documents should be made available in hospitals, employment centres and social welfare support offices. Services to provide specialised counselling and guidance may be required in this regard. An inter-ministerial interpreters' pool should be created, employing at least two interpreters for each of the main languages, such as Arabic, Somali and Tigrinya. They could rotate among the various departments or be available on call on specific dates. This recommendation is also reflected in the Integration Strategy, which, once implemented, will surely have a profound effect on refugees' daily lives.

Every successful process starts with a first step, often a small one. If all players pull the same rope, be they service providers, legislators, politicians, journalists, refugees or the local community, then peaceful co-existence and social inclusion will eventually become a reality.

Engaging with Employment

UNHCR's regular contact with key stakeholders, NGOs and refugee communities often brings to the discussion a number of challenges related to employment. Employers, government and non-government employment agencies and refugee communities raise valid issues experienced from their own standpoints, with few structures available that allow a space for sharing, discussion and solutions.

BY Sarah Farrugia

WITH THE SUPPORT OF OTHER STAKEHOLDERS SUCH AS JOBSPLUS, the Malta Employers' Association (MEA), the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and the African Media Association Malta (AMAM), UNHCR has organised a number of focus groups with the aim of achieving insight into the difficulties and opportunities they face. Through these focus groups, UNHCR gained a comprehensive understanding of the needs of all involved, sharing stakeholders' concerns in a shared space of mutual understanding and problem solving.

The initiative culminated in a half-day conference bringing all stakeholders together to come up with realistic solutions to the challenges identified during the focus groups.

All the information can be found in our report *Working Together: A UNHCR report on the employment of refugees and asylum-seekers in Malta*. The report outlines the challenges and opportunities found in employing refugees, both from

the employer and the employee perspective.

The main points and recommendations can be summarised as follows:

Service providers are extending their services to refugees

UNHCR commends the support of service providers and encourages further awareness through the use of public events and campaigns of success stories related to integration through employment.

Employers and human resources are recognising the need to adapt to a multicultural workplace

UNHCR encourages further support such as site-specific language courses and cultural training to staff for employers of refugees.

Success stories both from the employers' and employees' side emerged

UNHCR encourages the development of appropriate tools to bridge the gap between refugees and employers through outreach, career guidance and job matching events.

Main challenges and their corresponding recommendations

Lack of clarity or lack of information and administrative challenges as regards the correct procedures to apply for a work permit

To disseminate clear and concise information as to how to recruit refugees and apply for the corresponding work permits depending on status.

Poor level of English, Maltese and IT among refugees

To circulate booklets and deliver courses targeting work-specific technical vocabulary.

Urgent need for courses on cultural orientation, employment rights and current services

To provide information on the conditions of work and rights and obligations of employees along with the work permit and deliver tailor-made courses on cultural orientation, conditions of work and rights and obligations of employees under Maltese law.

Recognition of qualifications and skills

To establish a recognising body to assess the skills of refugees who do not have their certificates recognised or refugees who do not have their certificates while promoting vocational testing



Participants engage in discussion on solutions to common challenges faced by employers and employees. Photo: © UNHCR/Anna Camilleri

and providing on-the-job training, apprenticeships and internships.

Employers are adapting to a multicultural workplace but finding difficulties

To provide employers and all staff with information and training on working in a multicultural environment.

Refugees with protection in Italy or other Member States who are unable to work in Malta

UNHCR will continue to advocate among policy makers for a way to regularise the employment of refugees and encourages all stakeholders who share this concern to also advocate with policy makers and employers' associations to put in place legal pathways to employ refugees with protection in other Member States.

Opening of bank accounts

To raise awareness and assist with the dissemination of information among refugees, employers, NGOs and other stakeholders on the payment account with basic features.

Discrimination and Racism

To create educational public campaigns targeting inequality and combating discrimination while promoting the employment of refugees.

For further information, kindly access the report on www.unhcr.org/mt or email us to request a hard copy.



Working Together – A UNHCR Report on the employment of refugees and asylum seekers in Malta, published by UNHCR Malta in December 2019. Photo: © UNHCR/Diana Iskander

Working Together

P. Cutajar & Co Ltd. is a large import and distribution company in Malta. Like for many other local employers, the team consists of people seeking protection in Malta. Timo, a 24-year-old Somali employee at P. Cutajar, tells us about his work experience in Malta, whilst Jonathan, Timo's boss and warehouse manager, explains the importance of communication and his experience with recruiting refugees and asylum-seekers.

INTERVIEW BY Sarah Farrugia | PHOTOS: © UNHCR/Joanna Demarco

Timo, from Somalia

Can you tell us a bit about your work with P. Cutajar?

The people at P. Cutajar are like my family. They made it easy for me, welcomed me, helped me and showed me everything. We are very close to each other and always work as a team. The most important thing for me is that we work together and understand each other.

Were you given any support to integrate at work?

When I started in the store, the staff helped me every day. If I didn't know something, I would ask them and they would tell me, show me and also spend time with me to learn. I now do the same with new guys at work who want to learn.

How was your experience finding work in Malta?

Before I started with P. Cutajar, it was difficult for me because I was without a job. However, I went to Jobsplus, where I gave them my CV. They interviewed me and

tested my speaking and writing skills. English is important, since they needed a person who can understand the boss. I was very lucky because five minutes after leaving Jobsplus, they called back telling me they found work.

FOR ME THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE WAS WHEN THEY ASKED ME FOR CERTIFICATES. BECAUSE OF THE CIVIL WAR, I COULD NOT FINISH MY EDUCATION.

My education is still in my mind, but I have nothing to show. The moment I arrived in Malta I got a lot of experience. I worked as a cleaner, starting from the bottom and working my way up. I do not have a high-level job, but I am in a good situation. I now have work experience but also life experience. I learnt how to manage myself and live independently.

Do you have any advice for refugees and asylum-seekers in Malta looking for work?

First of all, when you leave your country and come to a new country, you need to adapt and study the people you are living with. Being close to the people and learning from them makes things much easier.

I advise refugees and asylum-seekers to attend English courses so it will be easier to be social. I am living in Malta so I also personally try to learn Maltese. You need to learn the language to build a future. It will make things easier and improve your life as well.





Timo (left) and Jonathan, at their workplace.

Jonathan, from Malta

Some companies struggle when working with a multicultural team. Do you take any measures to make sure everyone on the team feels welcome?

Educating and guiding staff on different cultures, ways of living and religious beliefs is very important. Apart from Somali refugees we have Italians and also Americans... many nationalities. The important thing is to try to make everyone feel comfortable and part of the team. Using some words in Maltese, some in English, accompanied by a few hand gestures here and there, we manage to communicate and joke with each other.

How was your experience recruiting and training Timo?

For recruitment we used the Job Brokerage office in Marsa. We started off with four workers, but then singled out two individuals who showed immediate interest and hired them on a full-time basis. I found the Job Brokerage office very efficient. We use this service quite often, as it is a means to test the capabilities of individuals.

Do you think that working in a multicultural team can have a positive impact on the attitudes of co-workers towards asylum-seekers and refugees?

The refugees and asylum-seekers working with P. Cutajar have integrated so well that the CEO

sent a letter to all staff expressing appreciation to everyone's effort towards integration. There can be individuals with slightly negative attitudes, however the majority are so well integrated that such attitudes are the exception and it would be that employee who feels singled out and not vice versa.

When a person starts to share information or life experiences, I noticed that the attitude starts to change... People start to relate. Once the person understands that refugees and asylum-seekers are here seeking refuge, they realise that they appreciate the same things, such as safety.

Caring for Others, Building a Future for Themselves

A free training course in care work has given refugee and migrant women the opportunity to gain a useful qualification and the prospect of a more independent future. UNHCR Malta met with six women who studied to be carers with the support of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS).

BY Anna Camilleri | PHOTOS: © UNHCR/Joanna Demarco

STABLE WORK AND JOB SATISFACTION provide a sense of belonging in society, especially for refugees and migrants trying to rebuild their lives in a new country. For refugee and migrant women, gaining access to the labour market can be challenging, and JRS Malta, implementing partner of UNHCR, identified this as an issue among a number of women they support.

“There’s a lot of pressure on women, because they need to take care of the family. They might come to Malta with less job experience and less language skills than men, on average, because they are given less importance in the education system of the countries they come from.” In addition, says Julian, there are cultural barriers that affect their access to employment, like “discrimination based on what they wear, such as the hijab”.

“EMPLOYMENT IS KEY IN TERMS OF FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRATION, AND WE REALISED THAT MORE SPECIALISED SUPPORT WAS NEEDED... BECAUSE OF THE MANY DIFFERENT OBSTACLES FACED,” SAYS JULIAN CARUANA, PSYCHOSOCIAL TEAM COORDINATOR AT JRS.

After looking into their needs, JRS decided to support refugee and migrant women to pursue training in care work. Mario Gerada, Employment Programme Coordinator at JRS, pointed out that there’s a “practical reason” that many women want to pursue care work as a career. Malta has an aging population, so carers will be needed increasingly. This means a greater likelihood of job security and stability. Care work is also a very rewarding profession centred

on the well-being of vulnerable members of society.

The training took place in summer 2018 at Future Focus in Floriana, and six women attended the course for a period of eight weeks. Apart from classroom lectures, it entailed a compulsory work placement in an elderly home.

“In my country, we don’t really have elderly homes,” says Meena, one of the students. “My placement was a very nice experience. I didn’t even know that there were people who take care of the elderly, and I found out that there is actually a difference between a nurse and a care worker.”

Meena is from Palestine, she has been in Malta for two years and said that it was not easy to find a job before, even though she speaks English and Maltese. She feels confident this course will secure her a job.



Semma, Funmilayo, Favour, and Kaya studied carework and completed work placements, preparing for their new career.

During their work experiences, the women also said that they got to know the elderly people they cared for. “I was very close with them, and when I finished the placement, they were sad,” says Funmilayo, from Nigeria. She has been in Malta for one year and feels passionate about her new vocation. “I learnt how to take care of the elderly, to make them happy. Because sometimes they don’t have family... So I really want to help them.”

Apart from bonding with clients, the students connected with colleagues in the church homes where they worked. Asked about this, Mario Gerada of JRS noted that it’s very important that refugees and migrants get to be in “mainstream” contexts. A place “where they are not refugees” but employees, students and co-workers.

This was certainly the case for Meena, Funmilayo, Kaya, Semma and Favour, who after this initial experience, and when they have their course certificate in hand, are all looking forward to getting a job either at an elderly home or as a live-in carer.

IN BANGLADESH, KAYA USED TO WORK AS A MIDWIFE. “THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I LEARNT ON THIS COURSE IS COMMUNICATION, AND IMPROVING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ELDERLY PATIENTS SO THAT YOU CAN TAKE CARE OF THEM.”

Initiatives such as these give refugees a foundation upon which to rebuild their lives, while promoting social inclusion, empowerment and self-reliance. The hope is that the training will lead to better jobs or further studies. Whatever their reasons for pursuing the course, the qualification will mean more options, more opportunities and more independence for these refugee and migrant women.

FAVOUR IS FROM NIGERIA AND FLED TO MALTA THREE YEARS AGO WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN. FOR HER THIS COURSE IS A STEPPING STONE THAT WILL LEAD TO A NEW CAREER. “MY AIM AFTER THIS IS TO STUDY MORE. I WANT TO STUDY CHILDCARE.”



Architect Resumes her Career after Fleeing her Country

Sara* is a qualified architect and a refugee living in Malta. After struggling to find a job, she benefited from the Integration Priority Track programme, an integration project which allowed her to study English and get back on track with her profession. She is now working full-time with a local architecture firm, and hopes her designs will have a positive impact on the country she now calls home.

BY Anna Camilleri | PHOTO: © UNHCR/Joanna Demarco

ONE OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES

REFUGEES and migrants face in their new host country is to find a job or restart their career after leaving everything behind. Sara has always been passionate about her profession. A determined and creative woman, she knew what she wanted to do at a young age. "From when I was 11 years old I wished to be an architect."

WHEN SHE BECAME AN ASYLUM-SEEKER, THE UNCERTAINTY OF HER SITUATION MEANT THAT SARA WAS NOT SURE IF SHE COULD EVER WORK AS AN ARCHITECT AGAIN.

Sara and her husband fled their home and arrived in Malta in 2015. The journey was dangerous, but the fear they faced if they stayed in their country meant that they had no choice but to leave. Following their arrival in Malta, Sara and her husband were detained at Hal Safi Detention Centre. She recalls that "it was a very hard time" in detention, not being free to leave and lacking information about the new country they had landed in.

Once she was granted refugee status and released from detention, it was with the support of local organisations that Sara got back on her feet. Sara mentions Father Vella from the Emigrants' Commission and the JRS drop-in centre in Birkirkara, as the two main sources of guidance.

"JRS really helped us. They were with us from the beginning."

One of the most active NGOs supporting refugees in Malta, JRS

is UNHCR's partner organisation for implementation. Through the UNHCR-funded Project Integrated, JRS supports refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers with reaching social inclusion and protection.

Sara was able to benefit from the Integration Priority Track (IPT) programme, which aims to ensure that individuals who have opted for long-term integration in Malta are provided with the free, personalised support they require in order to achieve integration.

For Sara, the IPT programme gave her the financial means to complete an intensive English course at a language school. Soon after she completed the course, her job prospects completely changed: "Before I could not get a job. But then I studied English... and I improved a lot. It really helped me."

Two years later, and with the support of several Maltese people who welcomed and helped her,

Sara says she has job satisfaction working in an established architecture firm with a friendly atmosphere.

At the same time, she laments that refugees in Malta are still perceived with negativity by many locals. "When we say we are refugees, they think that we do not understand anything. Like we do not know how to use a mobile, that we never had a car... They think we are from different world."

Sara does not want to be defined by her nationality or her refugee status; she only wants to be recognised for who she is — a hard-working professional. In this regard, she has already set out to make a difference, taking an interest in the country and hoping to contribute positively to Malta with her designs.

"You know how I know that I feel more at home? Because now when I see some bad architecture, I think it's a pity what they are doing, like removing the trees, and some of the new buildings that do not have any elements of Maltese culture or history. I wish to contribute to improving and changing the built environment in Malta, to make it better."

Apart from being able to express herself through her work, for Sara the most important thing about being in Malta is that she has found safety. She's building a life here with her husband, and together they can reach a future free from harm and persecution. With resilience and determination, she is also working hard and offering her skills to her new home.

"I am free here... Not only, for example, I do not need to wear hijab. It is more than that. I think my mind is free... My mind is in peace, like never before."

*Identifying features have been changed or excluded for protection reasons.

A Woman's Escape from Violence

Aya*, from West Africa, crossed through Mali and Algeria, and then reached Zabrata, in Libya, before she was rescued at sea and taken to safety in Malta in 2018. UNHCR interviewed this courageous woman about her journey.

INTERVIEW BY: Rahma Henchiri

Can you tell us what made you take the difficult decision to leave your country?

I left because of my violent husband. You know, in my country, you don't really have a say in your future husband. I was 15 when they married me to this guy, a cousin, and I could not object. My eldest son is now 19. I was too young when I gave birth. I was also the one taking care of everyone in his extended family because I was their son's bride. I would have to cook extremely big amounts of rice for the whole family every day, apart from all other chores. My husband became really violent with time, especially after he started drinking way more than he did before. I was afraid for my life, because it was getting worse and worse.

What happened when you arrived in Libya?

I spent over one month in detention in Libya. It was horrible. We were not treated like humans. We were so malnourished. They would give you a piece of bread in the morning, only that. And then you'd have to wait until 2pm to get dry spaghetti. And at night it's usually the same spaghetti. I was detained with other people, because we were caught on our first attempt to leave. But this is their game; we have become their "café cacao" [trade].

And they keep doing this over and over to get as much money as possible from every one of us. There is no work in Libya; we, black people, have become their work. You pay at least 500 Euros to leave. So you do the math!

Like many other people fleeing their homes, you embarked on a dangerous crossing of the sea. Can you describe the journey?

They take you to the seashore and then their "friend" catch you and take you to prison. Then you have to pay them money to get out of prison, but they are the same people. It's a network.

We left on a boat from a very small village in the suburbs of the Libyan capital. We used a dinghy boat... you know, those plastic inflatable boats that are not secure and might break any minute. But when you put your heart in this, you're blinded. You don't assess any of these risks. It's just when you get here and you're safe that you look back and think, "Oh, great God!"

IT'S ONLY WHEN I WALK BY THE SEA NOW AND STOP TO THINK THAT WE WERE RIGHT IN THAT WATER SOME TIME AGO THAT I REALISE HOW CRAZY IT WAS... BUT WHEN YOU PUT YOUR HEART TO IT, THERE IS NO GOING BACK. WE WANTED TO LEAVE AT ALL COSTS.

In our dinghy, we were 100 people... Now, of course these dinghies could never have been enough for big numbers of people, but the Libyan smugglers are extremely professional: they know what they are doing. For them, we are not human beings, we are sheep that they stuff together on the vessel. All they care about is money, nothing else. When it's your turn to get on board, they take

you like that and they throw you forcefully into the boat.

What happened when you saw the rescue boat?

When we saw the NGO rescue boat, we were very scared in the beginning because we did not know who they are. We saw it approaching and we heard someone from our boat say that these will take us to prison in Libya. So everyone started crying and panicking until a woman spoke to us in French and told us to keep calm and not to be afraid. When she spoke French, we finally understood it was not the Libyan coast guard. We were relieved. They gave us life jackets for the women first to get on board. You could see everyone crying. I cried so much until I don't even remember what happened later.

How is your experience of living in Malta, and what are the main challenges?

In general, I like Malta because I'm already here and I am working to make a living somehow. The only problem is documents... I am a woman and I am not married here, I am on my own, and that makes a lot of things uncertain for me. If I had protection documents, however, I could have done much more things in my life and I could have felt much better about living in Malta. If you don't have a stable status here, you cannot do much.

I had my asylum interview and I am still waiting for a decision.... But anyway, I thank God every day that I am safe.

How do you feel now that you are in Malta?

Wherever I'm safe, I'm happy. And I don't want my children to go through the same. That's why I'm doing my best and I'm working hard to try and bring them here without depriving them of their dignity like me.

*Identifying features have been changed or excluded for protection reasons.

Malta joins Global Efforts to address Statelessness

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, welcomes Malta's decision to join global efforts to end statelessness by 2024 after it acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons on 11 December 2019.

"This is a commendable step in protecting stateless persons and eradicating statelessness worldwide," said Pascale Moreau, UNHCR Director of the Bureau for Europe.

Malta's accession to the 1954 Statelessness Convention follows the Government's announcement made at the recent High-Level Segment on Statelessness, in which a total of 358 pledges were delivered by governments,

civil society and international and regional organisations, among them 252 by States. In Europe, Malta and other countries announced 40 commitments towards the goal of ending statelessness.

UNHCR convened the High-Level Segment on Statelessness on 7 October 2019 to mark the midpoint of its ten year #IBelong campaign, which was launched in 2014 to eradicate statelessness by 2024.

Statelessness affects millions of people around the world, often denying them access to basic rights and official recognition that most people take for granted.

SOME 3.9 MILLION STATELESS PEOPLE APPEAR IN THE REPORTING OF 78 COUNTRIES, BUT UNHCR ESTIMATES THE ACTUAL TOTAL TO BE SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER.

Hon. Speaker Anglu Farrugia (left) presented the statelessness package, including Mapping Statelessness and the letter addressed to MPs, by Mr. Kahin Ismail, UNHCR Malta Representative. **PHOTO: DOI**



'Nowhere People', a photographic exhibition on Statelessness by Greg Constantine at the Malta Postal Museum, Valletta, December 2017. **PHOTO: © UNHCR/Tümer Gençtürk**



Q&A:

Meet the Refugees in Gozo Volunteering to support their Community

UNHCR Malta has worked with and trained a group of refugees living in Gozo, to serve as focal points for integration-related information within their respective communities. The RFPs (Refugee Focal Points) participate in this project and support their communities on a voluntary basis.

INTERVIEW BY Anna Camilleri & Lauren Borg

THERE ARE CURRENTLY FIVE YOUNG MEN FROM SOMALIA who have been provided with RFP training in Gozo, so that they can be prepared to provide support to other refugees. This may be anything from providing information about educational opportunities, to practical assistance. In addition to their initial, two-day training in 2017, UNHCR has supported the RFPs to meet with more stakeholders and service providers working in Gozo. These meetings help the RFPs gain insight that they can pass on to others.

On 7 August 2018, the RFPs had the honour of a private meeting with President Emeritus H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca. Her Excellency expressed her commitment to the inclusion of refugees and migrants and the importance of the RFPs' role in Gozo. Another meeting with the former president of Malta was held

with the wider refugee community in Gozo later in 2018.

You have been living in Gozo for a few years now, and social inclusion is always difficult on a small island like Gozo. How is the interaction between locals and refugees in Gozo?

Abdishakur: To be honest I cannot say it's difficult, and it is not easy as well. When you live somewhere and you look different to the people who live there, there are some people who understand that we are all the same, but others who think the other way around. Some of them show you they think you are different, they keep you away, and they do not try to talk to you. Some of them welcome you. But I always believe that you have to keep going forward and never look back.

And I always tell the other refugees, "Look forward, don't look back."

We are not living in Malta or Gozo because we choose... I never heard about Malta or Gozo in my life before. We came here because we did not have a choice.

THE COUNTRY GIVES US WHAT THEY CAN. THEY DID NOT HAVE MANY IMMIGRANTS BEFORE, SO YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE DIFFICULTIES THEY ARE FACING.

They try their best, and there are going to be some people who are always talking about the difficulties, and others who are defending us. We try not to feel sad about the negative opinions.

Khadar: Integration is very difficult, and I have been living here for six years. If you ask us, "Do you have Gozitan or Maltese friends?" Everyone will say no. I have other friends who are African, or from other European countries. But refugee people living here are not making a lot of integration with Gozitan people. ▶



From left to right: Khadar, Muse, Yassin, Abdishakur, and Mohammed in Victoria, Gozo. PHOTO: © UNHCR/Matt Hush



Refugee Focal Points and UNHCR Durable Solutions team at a team-building activity in Gozo, 2018. PHOTO: © UNHCR Malta

What made you want to become a Refugee Focal Point? What made you want to become involved with supporting other refugees?

Abdishakur: When I saw a lot of people who need help [in Gozo] and when UNHCR came and they said they need people who want to help the refugee community, at this time I was a student, and I decided to become part of it. It wasn't a big deal, it was just help them, give them some information, show them where the jobs are, give them some information about the rules... and there were lots of difficulties in these things and that's why I chose to do this.

Muse: From my side, it was the idea behind this: when I see a lot of people in the community that do not know what rights they have. Especially me, the first time when I met UNHCR and that day we had a "small course"... before that day there was a lot of things that I didn't know about refugee issues.



Abdishakur is 23 years old and arrived in Malta in 2013. His reason for moving to Gozo was because after fleeing conflict in Somalia, he felt he needed to live in a calm place. PHOTO: © UNHCR/Matt Hush

Why do you think it is important to become involved in supporting the community?

Abdishakur: Because if you ignore something that needs some improvement or help, you know everyone will end up failing in his life, losing what he worked for all his life. As refugees living in Gozo, you know, we do not meet each other, we do not know each other. We are just Somalis who came from Somalia at different times.

When we came here there was a lot of problems we faced, and that is why we decided to get involved. And now we have people who thank us for giving them information, now they start school, they get work. And it is important as young people to get involved in something like this.

DID YOU KNOW?

The security situation in Somalia has been volatile over the last two decades. Various conflicts are playing out, involving the Al Shabaab militia and disputes between clans, often over agricultural land and political control. Civilians are severely affected by the conflict, with reports of civilians being persecuted, injured and killed.

Many civilians are displaced within the country or have crossed the border. The combination of conflict and food insecurity — worsened by climate change — has a detrimental impact on the humanitarian situation.

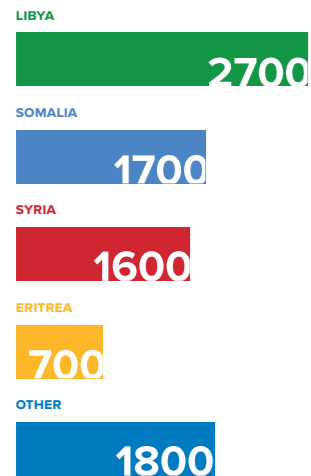
REACHING SAFETY

The last two years for Malta have been marked by a return to boat arrivals, with the first half of 2019 being a particularly challenging period for the country's reception system. Malta is playing a significant regional role in finding solutions, albeit through an ad hoc mechanism among a small group of EU Member States.

BY Fabrizio Ellul

The increased instability in Libya due to its territorial conflicts between rival militia gangs has driven an increase in Libyan asylum-seekers in Malta, who are now Malta's largest refugee population, followed by Somali and Syrian nationals. Most Libyan and Syrian asylum-seekers arrived in Malta through regular means. ▼

ESTIMATE OF REFUGEE POPULATION IN MALTA IN 2019



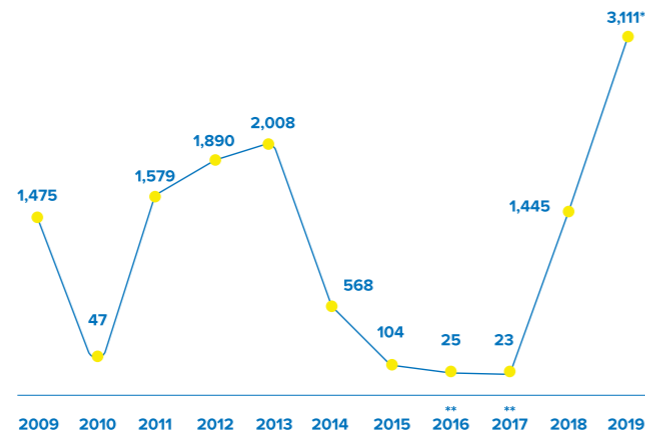
The change in Frontex regulations — such that disembarkation is now no longer automatically happening in Italy but in the closest safe port — meant that Malta started experiencing a return of boat arrivals again following three years of very low to no arrivals due to Mare Nostrum and the European operation.

In fact, the number of disembarkations to Malta for the first 10 months of 2019 has already

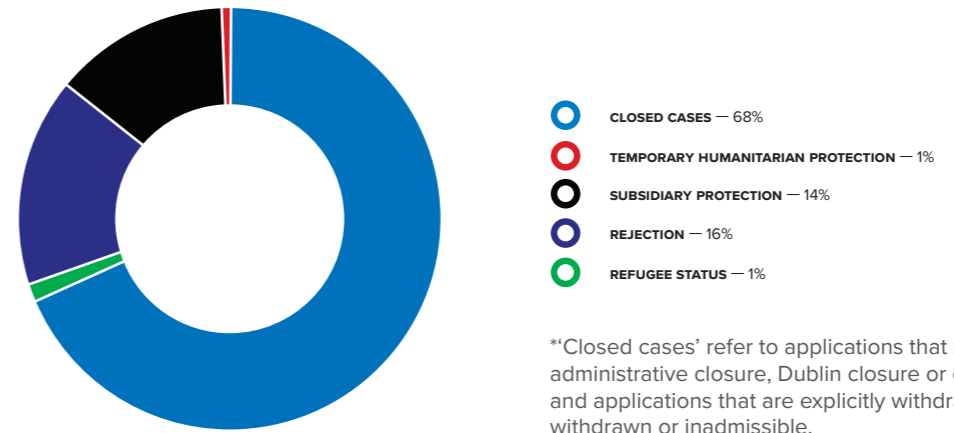
reached a historic high with 3,111 individuals disembarked in Malta, putting to the test the country's reception capacity.

The last two years have also been characterised with several disputes over disembarkation of Search and Rescue NGOs. This has resulted in asylum-seekers and migrants having to spend additional days on board rescue vessels until a solution was found.

SEA ARRIVALS IN MALTA 2009 – 2019 (AS END OF OCTOBER)



ASYLUM DECISIONS IN MALTA IN 2019 (AS END OF AUGUST)



*'Closed cases' refer to applications that result in an administrative closure, Dublin closure or exclusion, and applications that are explicitly withdrawn, implicitly withdrawn or inadmissible.

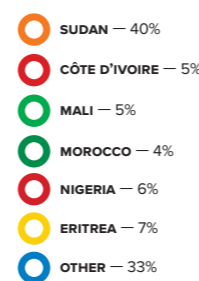
The solution was typically found in ad hoc transfers among a small number of EU Member States, with a "coalition of the willing" agreeing to transfer the asylum-seekers from Malta. Since 2018, around 700 people have been transferred to France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, Finland, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia.

Nonetheless, a recent UNHCR report, *Dangerous journey*, posits that "reductions to search and rescue capacity coupled with an uncoordinated and unpredictable response to disembarkation led to an increased death rate as people continued to flee their countries due to conflict, human rights violations, persecution and poverty".

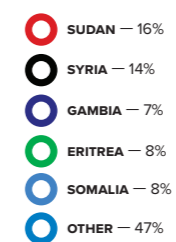
The number of deaths and missing persons in 2018 and 2019 as of the end of August was 3,355.

UNHCR and IOM have called for a predictable mechanism for rescue, disembarkation and durable solutions. They have appealed that consideration of the protection of the human rights of migrants and refugees be a core element of their engagement in Libya.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF SEA ARRIVALS IN MALTA IN 2019 (AS END OF OCTOBER)



ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN MALTA BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN (AS END OF AUGUST 2019)

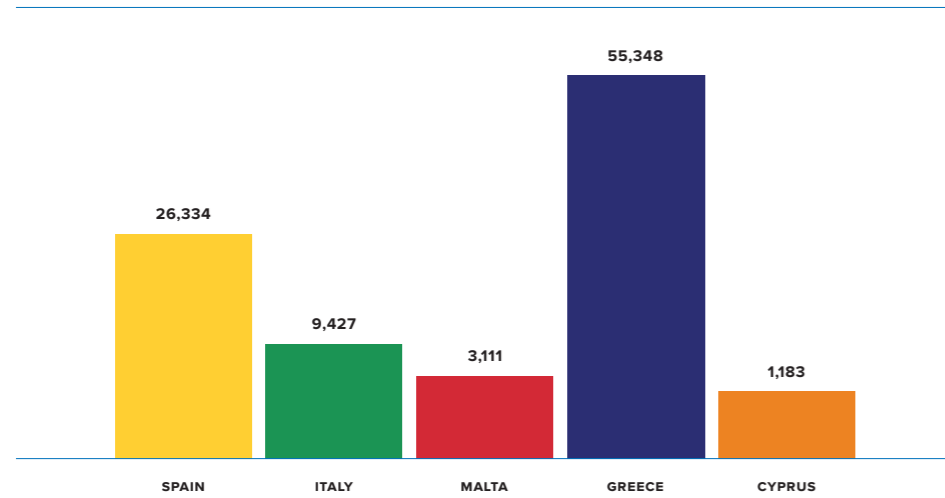


While every effort has been made to ensure that all statistical information is accurately presented, for official statistics please refer to the original sources. Many numbers are rounded off; some represent best estimates.

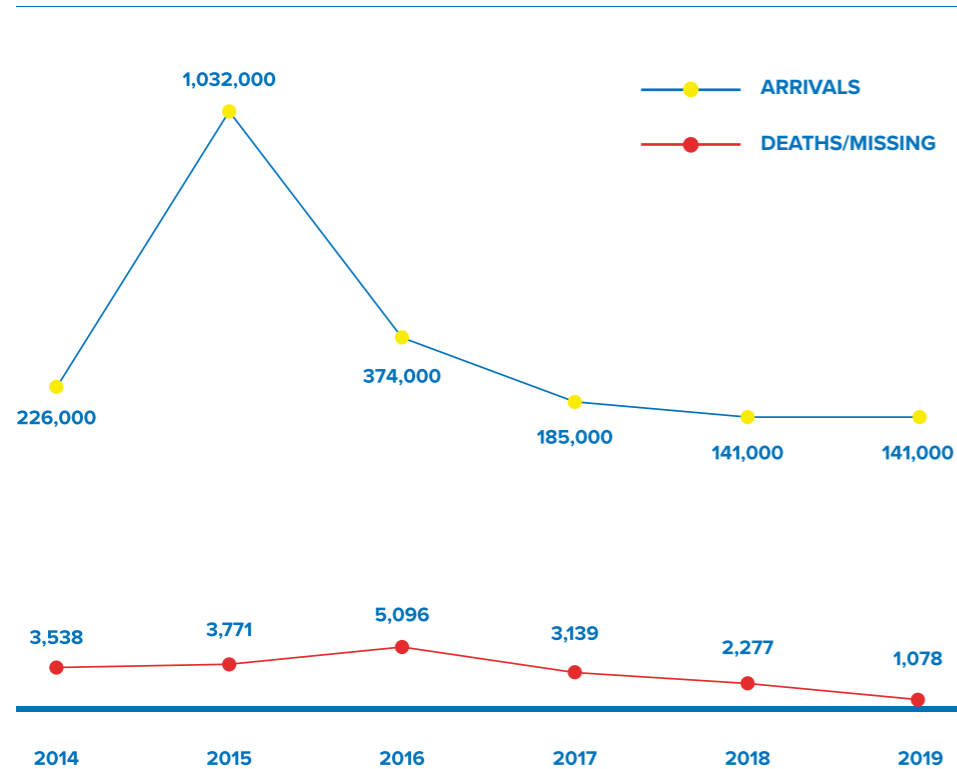
DESPERATE JOURNEYS

At the European Union's (EU) external borders, hundreds of refugees and migrants continue to report having been beaten and sent back across borders (some without the opportunity to claim asylum).

MEDITERRANEAN ARRIVALS BY SEA AND LAND AS END OF OCTOBER 2019



ARRIVALS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND DEATHS/MISSING: 2014-2019

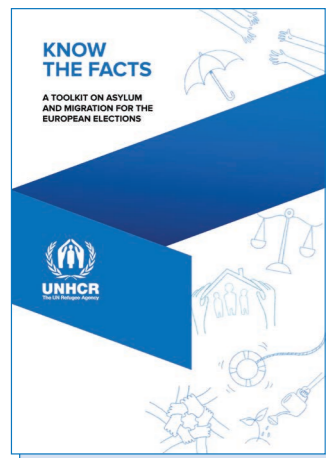


KNOW THE FACTS

A Toolkit on Asylum and Migration

UNHCR Malta, in collaboration with The European Parliament Office in Malta, launched the second edition of Know the Facts – a toolkit on asylum and migration for the European Elections during a public discussion on migration on 2 May 2019 at Europe House in Valletta.

PHOTOS: © UNHCR/Diana Iskander



UNHCR Malta, in collaboration with The European Parliament Office in Malta, launched the second edition of Know the Facts – a toolkit on asylum and migration for the European Elections during a public discussion on migration on 2 May 2019 at Europe House in Valletta.

The booklet aims to provide MEP candidates and the general public with global, regional and local information on asylum and migration, such as relevant statistics, as well as European and Maltese legislation.

During his speech at the launch of the Know the Facts information booklet, Kahin Ismail said, “We want to contribute to constructive discussion and debate on refugee and migration issues, particularly now during an election campaign. It is quite understandable that host communities may have

apprehensions and anxiety about newcomers and the government’s plans for their care and integration.”

“IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL OF US, AND PARTICULARLY ELECTED OFFICIALS, POLITICAL PARTIES AND PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES, TO USE RESPONSIBLE RHETORIC WHEN DISCUSSING ISSUES OF MIGRATION, ASYLUM AND REFUGEES BECAUSE WORDS MATTER, AND THEY DO IMPACT THE VARIOUS COMMUNITIES IN MALTA.”

DID YOU KNOW?

MIXED MIGRATION AND TERMINOLOGY

UNHCR recommends that people who are likely to be asylum-seekers or refugees are referred to as such, and that the word ‘migrant’ should not be used as a catchall term to refer to refugees or to people who are likely to need international protection. Doing so can risk undermining access to the specific legal protections that states are obliged to provide to refugees.

WHO IS AN ASYLUM-SEEKER?

An asylum-seeker is a person who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualised procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee (or given another form of protection), but every refugee is initially an asylum-seeker.

WHO IS A REFUGEE?

A refugee, according to the 1951 Convention (and also Maltese legislation), is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality or habitual residence and is not able to, or because of that fear, is not willing to, avail himself or herself of the protection of that country.

WHO IS A MIGRANT?

No universally accepted definition for ‘migrant’ exists. The term is usually understood to cover all cases where the decision to migrate was taken freely by the individual concerned for personal reasons and without the intervention of an external compelling factor; it therefore applies to persons, and family members, moving to another country or region to better their material or social conditions and improve the future prospects for themselves or their family.



Panel discussion at launch event of ‘Know the Facts’ in collaboration with the European Parliament office in Malta, May 2019.



UNHCR Malta’s Know the Facts booklet was launched in May 2019.

Hear from the people making desperate journeys to reach safety.

As part of its support and monitoring activities, UNHCR Malta provides information to asylum-seekers at the initial reception centre in the first few days following their arrival, mainly on the asylum system and the rights of asylum-seekers in Malta. We also speak to people and hear about the circumstances that brought them to our shores. The experiences of people who have been rescued at sea remind us of the very troubling realities that they are fleeing from, and our responsibility to protect them from further harm or persecution.

RESCUED AT SEA

*Identifying features have been changed or excluded for protection reasons.

RESCUED AT SEA

“I had an older brother, mother and younger siblings. Before I left, I lived with my older brother... He was a truck driver and sometimes I used to help him at work. Then this older brother was in an accident, and two people with him got killed. We did not have insurance, and we were being forced to pay a lot of money to their families. My brother ran away from Somalia. In our culture, if you kill someone from another family, they will want to kill someone in your family in ‘blood revenge’. They wanted to kill me because of my brother, so I ran away.”



YASIN, 16 YEARS OLD,
FROM SOMALIA



© UNHCR/Darrin Zammit Lupi

“I was on the road for about seven months. I don’t know the road we took. I remember we came through a city called Tamanrasset, in Algeria. We went to Libya, through the desert. I was assaulted in the desert. When we arrived in Libya, a driver came to pick us up and took us to a house.”



AWA, 22 YEARS OLD,
FROM CÔTE D’IVOIR

“WE WERE SHOUTING, CRYING TO THE CAPTAIN OF THE BOAT, ‘DO NOT TAKE US BACK TO LIBYA!’ DYING IN THIS WATER IS BETTER THAN GOING BACK TO LIBYA.”



CARL, 25 YEARS OLD,
FROM NIGERIA

“We had no food, we were hungry, thirsty. People were vomiting. I don’t know who rescued us, I saw people come and a big ship came and helped us...Because our boat was leaking, it started to go down. I thought I was going to die. I didn’t know the way to Europe, I didn’t know the way to Libya. I didn’t know the way even to Niger. I was kidnapped. I don’t have anybody here. In Europe I don’t have any friends, I just made friends here in Malta and I am trying to build a new life.”



GABRIEL, 16 YEARS OLD,
FROM NIGERIA



© UNHCR/Anna Camilleri

“My father and mother wanted me to be cut for marriage. Everyone in the family wanted me to do this before I could get married.”



SITA, 20 YEARS OLD, FROM CÔTE D’IVOIRE



© UNHCR/Darrin Zammit Lupi

Solidarity comes with Responsibility

A young asylum system in need of bold reforms.

Paolo Biondi, Senior Protection Associate, UNHCR Malta



OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS,

Malta has changed its approach to people seeking protection for the better, ending automatic detention and adopting a national integration strategy. Malta is no more a port of transit but a country that a number of people settle and invest in, hoping to build a future.

In 2018 and 2019 Malta faced new challenges and yet again showed a spirit of adaptation and leadership in an attempt to find solutions to ongoing EU challenges. Faced with increased numbers of people arriving from Libya, the Maltese authorities acted as brokers in an attempt to find ad hoc solutions by negotiating numerous disembarkation agreements and promoting intra-EU solidarity.

Unpredictable circumstances

As expected, in the context of such unpredictable circumstances, Malta had to deal with obstacles, which have been addressed reasonably well. However, the increased arrivals have also exposed some areas of the asylum and relocation process that require further improvements and alignment with EU standards. It is not unusual for a relatively nascent asylum system to face challenges, so now must be a time for reflection and to learn in order to move forward, showing a spirit of adaptation.

Building on experience

Having supported the authorities with the recent sea arrivals, it became evident to UNHCR that a number of areas require attention. The first-line reception showed the need for more coordinated cooperation among authorities and with local NGOs willing and able to provide support. Following an initial impasse, the authorities improved their internal coordination and started cooperating with local NGOs in order to improve access to basic needs in the reception centres. Such cooperation should be encouraged and continue in a spirit of effective and sincere engagement.

Making good progress

Overall, the asylum system in Malta is making good progress. However, it would benefit from more coordination, preparedness and streamlining, as well as the appropriate allocation of financial and material resources aimed at addressing the increased arrivals. As an example, governmental agencies in 2018-19 have seen their staff and resources put under severe pressure due to a lack of contingency planning, in spite of what was anticipated and, in fact, happened.

The lack of resources and staff also inevitably resulted in some basic reception and procedural standards falling short (for example, the best interests of the child, guardianship, dignified standards of living, detention as a last resort, timely access to the asylum procedure, right to an effective remedy, access to the services of an interpreter). It is imperative that we learn from past challenges as quickly as possible to align the Maltese reception system with the EU minimum standards.



UNHCR Malta Protection Unit meets persons rescued at sea at disembarkation, providing initial information. In the days following disembarkation, UNHCR staff meets asylum-seekers at the initial reception centre to give more detailed information and answer questions. PHOTO: © UNHCR/Anna Camilleri



Detention and the asylum procedure

Other areas which require particular attention and compliance with standards dictated by the EU law are those related to detention and the asylum procedure.

THOSE CLAIMING ASYLUM SHOULD NEVER BE PENALISED FOR ENTERING MALTESE TERRITORY IRREGULARLY, AND THEREFORE DETENTION SHOULD ONLY BE USED AS A LAST RESORT.

When it comes to the asylum procedure and Refugee Status Determination (RSD), it is in the best interests of all those who

have a genuine claim to receive the protection they deserve. On the other hand, those who arrive in Malta and are found not in need of international protection following the conclusion of their status determination procedures should be returned to their country in dignity and safety as soon as possible. Asylum applications need to be processed in a fair but efficient manner.

For this reason, the authorities should make sure that every asylum claimant is properly assessed against the refugee definition and granted the protection status they deserve.

Malta as a leader in the asylum field

Malta, despite its size, is an important actor in the EU context when it comes to migration in the Central Mediterranean. It

has demonstrated leadership in the past and should continue to promote cooperation among EU Member States and its internal stakeholders.

Malta also needs to continue being prepared and allocate sufficient resources to the local competent authorities so that they are in the best position to perform their daily duties. Finally, Malta needs to become a leader in the asylum context, as much in other fields, by not only complying with the EU minimum standards but striving to go well beyond them.

“My target was to get to a place of peace.”

After escaping from Al-Shabaab in Somalia and enduring two years in Libya, Somali refugee Mahat was rescued by the Lifeline search and rescue boat in June 2018. He now has international protection in Malta. In an interview with UNHCR, Mahat describes the danger that forced him to flee his home, his determination to reach safety and how even in the grim surroundings of a Libyan detention centre, he used his skills as a midwife to support the expectant mothers who really needed his help.

BY Anna Camilleri

MAHAT SET FOOT IN MALTA IN

2018 with nothing but the clothes on his back, and arriving in a safe country marked the end of a long and treacherous journey that he had to take in order to survive.

Having grown up in Mogadishu and working in a stable job by his early 20s, Mahat's life was hit by tragedy in 2015, when his father was killed by the armed militant group Al-Shabaab. The murder shocked and traumatised Mahat's family, and when he himself was targeted by Al-Shabaab, he realised he had to flee his home.

“And then [Al-Shabab] told me, ‘Either you work with us or we will kill you.’ So I escaped, instead of them killing me.”

Mahat later learnt that after he had fled Somalia, his family home was burnt to the ground. He then travelled to Libya.

► Uncertainty and Violence in Libya

In recent years asylum-seekers in Libya have been increasingly subjected to unlawful detention in harsh, inhumane conditions. People continue to fall victim to widespread human rights abuses, including violent and degrading treatment at the hands of smuggling networks.

After fleeing Somalia, Mahat was detained in northwest Libya for almost two years.

“In the detention there are a lot of people. It is hot. There is not even a window with air coming in. There is only one toilet, so sometimes you could not get in and there would be a line of almost 800 people.. And they gave us food only once a day. People start to catch diseases, like scabies... and only people with money were brought medicine.”

“IN LIBYA THERE IS NO SAFE PLACE... EVEN IF YOU GO OUTSIDE THEY WILL CATCH YOU AND PUT YOU IN ANOTHER PRISON.”

Detainees in Libya are often tortured by smugglers, forced to phone family members to send money. While Mahat was stuck in detention, he did not have the means to pay. “I told them I did not have money, and they gave me a telephone to call my family. Because I could not get money they beat me with a piece of metal... Sometimes they used electricity, too.”

While struggling throughout his time in Libya, Mahat knew that returning to Somalia was not an option. Despite the cruel reality of the situation, Mahat and other

detainees remained there in the hope of someday being able to reach safety.

“I DELIVERED 15 BABIES WHILE I WAS IN LIBYA.”

Back in Somalia, Mahat used to work as a midwife. It was a career he pursued with dedication, one which provided him with skills that would prove to be beneficial, even in Libya. While pregnant women are some of the most vulnerable asylum-seekers in detention, they are nonetheless neglected and not given any medical attention. For this reason, and for lack of assistance from anyone else, Mahat actually had to step in and provide vital, sometimes life-saving support to expectant mothers in the detention centre. He had to make sure that when the time came, they gave birth safely.

Incredibly, as his time in Libya went on, he actually became the unofficial, on-call midwife in the detention centre. “I delivered 15 babies while I was in Libya,” he says, and goes on to tell one story of when he delivered a baby boy in detention. It was February 2018.

“The mother was already around six months pregnant when she was brought to detention. Around two months later, she started to feel pain. When she went into labour, people were telling her ‘Mahat will help you.’ And some women brought her to me.”

With the assistance of two other people, one of them a qualified doctor from Eritrea, Mahat tried to make the delivery as easy as possible. The detention centre would only bring them some basic medical items and makeshift curtains, but only because Mahat asked.



Mahat at his home in Paola, Malta. PHOTO: © UNHCR/Dragana Rankovic

“BEFORE THE PROBLEMS AT HOME IN SOMALIA STARTED, I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT COMING TO EUROPE. BUT THEN THERE WERE A LOT OF PROBLEMS. EVERY MORNING THERE WAS SOMEONE, LIKE MY RELATIVES AND MY FRIENDS, GETTING KILLED. THEN I FEARED FOR MYSELF AND I RAN AWAY.”



PHOTO: © UNHCR/Dragana Rankovic

“One day before she gave birth, I informed the detention people... I told them that if they wanted to assist her, they can get me some things, and then they gave me a small paper and I wrote down what I needed. We were then given a separate area. Not a room, just a small area covered with blankets around for privacy.”

On this occasion, amid the difficult circumstances and tucked away in one corner of the crowded detention centre, a Somali boy named Abubakar was born, and Mahat was relieved to have succeeded in very risky conditions.

“I was afraid... it is not hospital, so if something happens, you cannot do anything,” says Mahat. “God helped

me, and nothing went wrong with any of the women I helped.”

Over a year later, Mahat still keeps in touch with the mother. She and Abubakar were also rescued by the Lifeline and have since been relocated from Malta to start a new life in Portugal. It is thanks to Mahat that Abubakar and 14 other babies were brought into the world safely, notwithstanding the horrible conditions surrounding them.

► Rescue at sea

As time went by, Mahat worried that he would never be freed from detention, but on the night of 20 June, Mahat was placed on board a flimsy boat with around 130 other people. He knew what a great risk leaving itself would be and was fully aware that many people who make the crossing do not make it alive.

“ALL THE SMUGGLERS PROMISE IS THAT THEY WILL GIVE YOU A BOAT, PUT YOU ON THE SEA, AND THEN IT IS EITHER YOU DIE IN THE SEA OR YOU’RE SAFE. THEY DO NOT CARE.”

After a night at sea in complete darkness, a boat was spotted in the distance. Worried they would be turned back to Libyan shores, where they would face further violence, there was some panic among the people on the boat.



The Lifeline SAR boat docked in Malta in June 2018, with 234 people who were rescued in two operations.
PHOTO: © UNHCR/Darrin Zammit Lupi

“Some people were not sure what to do. Others wanted to jump in the sea. They were afraid, because if the boat was from Libya, they would be killed.”

When they discovered that it was in fact a rescue boat, they were overcome with relief and joy. They were then taken on board the Lifeline. Mahat remembers the kindness of the crew, who warmly greeted all people on board and immediately provided them with medical attention, water and food.

“I feel very grateful that they saved me.”

With the deterioration of the weather and in the midst of a dispute between Member States on assigning a port for disembarkation, the Lifeline was allowed to dock in Malta on 28th June, on the condition that some of the people on board would be relocated to other EU Member States.

“WHEN I ARRIVED ON THE LIFELINE SHIP, I HEARD ABOUT MALTA. THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME.”

Since arriving in Malta and being granted Subsidiary Protection, Mahat has been working to rebuild his life. He is burdened by memories of a difficult past, but he is trying to get back on track.

He now has a job as a Somali cultural mediator for an organisation that provides services to refugees and asylum-seekers in Malta. He enjoys this job, which allows him to support other refugees, but his dream is ultimately to further his studies. “I want to become someone known by people, a respected person... like a doctor.”

This will not be straightforward for Mahat. Even as a qualified and experienced professional, he will have to start almost from the beginning, a stark reality facing most refugees who have had to leave everything behind.

At the same time, Mahat maintains his ambition. He started studying science at MCAST, a higher education institute in Malta, and lives in a shared house with other refugees, where he feels comfortable yet independent. He spends his free time exploring Valletta and other parts of the island.

A year after he was rescued at sea, Mahat has come a long way. Step by step, but not without further obstacles, he is still looking ahead... looking towards his future with optimism, hope and determination.

A Changing and Dynamic Society

Malta's is a changing and dynamic society. We can say that we have been at the crossroads of civilisation throughout our history. Through the ages, we have been a country of both emigration and immigration, as our language, surnames, cuisine and culture clearly demonstrate.



Helena Dalli,
European Commissioner
for Equality

In the 20th century, we were primarily a country of emigration. However, as prosperity grew and Malta progressed, we have gradually moved towards becoming a cosmopolitan society which embraces strength in diversity. Not by luck or coincidence, but through decisions and developments which have shaped our future since the turn of the 21st century.

Our economic success can be cited as a major player in this context. Over the past years Malta has established itself as a Mediterranean hub for economic prosperity and civil liberties wherein the law respects one and all as equals.

This, along with the fact that:

- EU NATIONALS CAN ROAM FREELY AND SETTLE IN MALTA;
- THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS ARE ALSO WELCOME TO STUDY OR FIND GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT IN MALTA; AND
- MALTA HONOURS ITS OBLIGATIONS TOWARDS REFUGEES AND PERSONS WITH SUBSIDIARY PROTECTION AS PER INTERNATIONAL AND EU LAW

further contributes to our ever-evolving demographic profile. Not to mention the Mediterranean migration crisis which has also had its toll on Malta.

Soon after the 2013 election, the Government of Malta recognised the need to change the national discourse around migration and integration.

Since then, as the minister responsible for this policy area, I worked to ensure that we reach this aim.

To this end I set up the Migrant Integration Forum, which assembles the community representatives of the main migrant groups in Malta. The forum informs the government of migrant-specific issues and concerns, and has the faculty to propose solutions as well.

I also set up the Human Rights and Integration Directorate in order to introduce a structured approach to equality, human rights and integration policy in Malta. This was further strengthened with the adoption of the first Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan. Such important progress is testament to our resolve to invest

in integration measures despite unwavering, opposing currents.

Thanks to the structures that were set up, Malta is now offering classes at MQF Levels 1 and 2, in the Maltese language, the English language and cultural orientation free of charge. These courses, oversubscribed in enrolment by migrants full of appreciation that the government is facilitating their equal place in society. Migrants are performing all sorts of jobs and have all sorts of aspirations.

The future of Malta is set.

We are now an intercultural society and we need to foster the inclusion of all those who live here in its functioning. This will open up new opportunities for growth for all of us.

In this regard, I am particularly pleased with the growing number of local councils that are joining the Integration Charter, which aims to make progress in equality and integration at the local and regional levels. Their adhesion to the government's integration efforts, as well as the number of migrants in Malta who are placing a request for integration, are testaments to the willingness

of the vast majority of people to make integration work here.

The response that we are getting gives us hope and encourages us to think big in terms of institutional development.

The Equality Ministry* is in discussion with the Ministry for Education and Employment with regards to setting up an Integration Academy. This academy will act as an integration college where migrants formally learn the two main languages of Malta and our ways, so that they are able to live here as independently as possible while participating in Maltese culture.

I believe that Malta cannot miss out on this opportunity to make our present moment a success.

We need to embrace our new, cosmopolitan selves.

We are richer and better linked to the rest of the world when we welcome and treat well those who live and work among us. We would be all the poorer if we instilled division and discrimination towards particular people and groups.

HATE AND DIVISION CAN BE SOWN BY ALL SORTS OF GROUPS. IT IS UP TO US TO PROMOTE LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING AS WE SEEK TO MAKE MALTA A BETTER PLACE FOR MALTESE AND MIGRANT RESIDENTS ALIKE.

*This article was written while Hon. Helena Dalli held the position of Minister for European Affairs and Equality in Malta.

An Investment in the Future

In December 2017, the Maltese government launched a national strategy to promote the integration of migrants and refugees, and the I Belong integration programme. Alexander Tortell, Head of the Integration and Anti-Racism Unit at the Human Rights and Integration Directorate, outlines the flagship strategy and its aims.

BY Alexander Tortell

AN INTEGRATION INTRODUCTION PROGRAMME is an investment in the future which both migrants and society in general need to undertake if we want successful integration. It gives migrants a start, enabling them to acquire vital skills. It is therefore well worth the effort, and the return on investment is that newcomers to our country become better equipped members of society.

THE I BELONG PROGRAMME

The I Belong programme is one of the main pillars of Malta's Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan (Vision 2020). The programme consists of two main components: language tuition and cultural orientation. The focus of the former is on public and work situations where migrants are likely to require knowledge of Maltese and English, whereas the latter delves into the functioning and values of society, such as

equality. The programme is also split into two stages.

STAGE ONE, leading to the award of a Pre-integration Certificate, consists of basic cultural and societal orientation, Maltese language and English language at MQF Level 1. These courses are being offered by MCAST.

STAGE TWO fulfils some of the criteria required for applicants for long-term residence in Malta. It consists of Maltese language at MQF Level 2 and a course of 100 hours having as its subject matter the social, economic, cultural and democratic history and environment of Malta. The latter is being offered by the University of Malta.

All courses on the I Belong programme are free of charge. People can apply either online at www.integration.gov.mt, by contacting the Integration and

Anti-Racism Unit on **2226 3210** or via email at integration@gov.mt. This project is part financed by the European Commission Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020

MIGRANT INTEGRATION STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN: AN OVERVIEW

Another important part of the Strategy is the Local Integration Charter. It is used as a tool for Local Councils to support each other in order to respond to the integration needs within Malta's increasingly diverse communities by means of an action plan. Most local councils in Malta are already collaborating in the implementation of this charter for the integration and involvement of migrants, and for the promotion of diversity.

The Forum of Integration Affairs is another aspect of the Strategy which is gathering representatives from a range of migrant community organisations active in Malta. The forum advises the government on migrants' integration-related solutions, any necessary amendments to legislation and policy and the implementation of services offered, as well as any other matter related to fostering integration that is effectively mutually beneficial to migrants and residents.

Finally, the Strategy outlines the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Integration. This is a structure chaired by the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality to coordinate the government's actions in the field of integration, draw general approaches and assist horizontal collaboration between ministries and their respective institutions. The Integration and Anti-Racism Unit,

through the Inter-Ministerial Committee, is assisting the participating ministries in developing their respective action plans while monitoring the progress of their implementation through regular meetings with the stakeholders.

“I WANT TO TELL PEOPLE TO JOIN THE I BELONG PROGRAMME AND TO STUDY MALTESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, TO BECOME PART OF THIS COMMUNITY.”

- Abbas from Sudan, who completed the programme in 2019.



A class of students doing the I Belong programme at MCAST.
PHOTO: © Jason Borg (DOI)

COMMUNITY BUILDING

When it comes to integration and creating opportunities for refugee, migrant and Maltese communities to interact, NGOs play an important role. Various local organisations have been responsible for creating educational, enjoyable and memorable experiences for refugees and migrants in Malta.



© Luca Gouder

▲
IOM Malta
WORLD MUSIC
JAM SESSION

IOM teamed up with MCAST (the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology) to organise a World Music Jam Session bringing together musicians and music lovers from all over the globe. Through music, diverse cultures met and blended in beautiful harmony, mixing Algerian tunes on the ukulele with Turkish lyrics and the beat of the Peruvian cajón. This event was part of the TandEM project, which is all about empowering youth in Southern Europe. Through dialogue, young people can actively contribute to changing the discourse on migration while sharing cultures, languages, religions and this time, music.

IAFR and Hal Far Outreach
INFORMATION
CENTRE

The International Association for Refugees runs an information centre in Hal Far in collaboration with the John XXIII Peace Laboratory and Hal Far Outreach. They offer information on living, working and integrating in Malta, as well as CV writing. IAFR and John XXIII welcome all asylum-seekers and those with protected status, as well as failed asylum-seekers. Helping to break their isolation is part of the recovery from being displaced.



© Maria Lopez



© UNHCR/Diana Iskander

▲
Changing Communities
BREAKFAST ON
A BRIDGE

Changing Communities Malta consists of a group of researchers, artists and other professionals with an interest in community building, and emerged from a series of workshops organised by the Valletta 2018 Research Team. Their aim is to work closely with Maltese communities to bridge differences through food and

inter-racial and inter-generational activities. Breakfast on a Bridge was an event held in Marsa in February 2019, where Changing Communities collaborated with the local council, small food-industry stakeholders, citizens and NGOs. A second event, Breakfast at the Pjazza was held in Msida in October.



▲ **Hal Far Outreach**
MUSICOMMUNITY

Peace Lab, a shelter for asylum-seekers in Hal Far, opened its gates wide for a night of music and dance. The intercultural night Musiccommunity was launched by NGO Hal Far Outreach in September, to encourage refugee and migrant performers to get on stage, as well as to entertain and provide some relaxation and enjoyment for the wider refugee community. Local acts participated as well, and the eclectic lineup and buzzing atmosphere among the diverse audience, proved that music truly is a universal language.



◀ **Kopin**
LITTLE BOOK
MAKERS

In 2018, Kopin NGO offered arts and crafts lessons to children aged 8 to 12 years old. The sessions took place at an art and photography studio, Studio Solipsis in Rabat. The children who participated were both from Malta and migrant and refugee children who reside in the open centres. This was a good opportunity for the children to meet and get creative together. At the end of the two months of lessons, the students had created a number of handmade books. They were displayed at the Qormi LEAP Centre. Little Book Makers was financed through the Small Initiatives Support Scheme managed by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector.

◀ **Centru Tbxex:**
SUMMER CLUB
▼

Centru Tbxex, a centre for education and social services in the south of Malta, welcomed children from refugee and asylum-seeking families for a fun-filled summer activity programme. Days on the beach, boat trips, arts, crafts and music entertained and delighted the children in the hottest months. "It is amazing how people from different countries, who speak different languages, can be together, and still communicate despite language barriers and leave the centre feeling exceptionally happy." Deborah Falzon, Programme Coordinator, Trainer and Counsellor.



© Centru Tbxex

Spark 15
FOOTBALL
TOURNAMENT



Spark15 organised a football tournament on Sunday 4th August 2019, bringing together refugees and migrants residing at reception centres and in the community for a friendly but competitive event.

The winners were given a trophy and medals which were presented to them by Spark15 members. This project was supported by UNHCR Malta. Spark15 is a youth and refugee-led NGO in Malta.



© UNHCR/Diana Iskander



Launching of 'Our Island II' at Casino Maltese, Valletta in 2019.
PHOTO: © Elisa Van Brockdorff



PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF
REFUGEES IN MALTA
Our Islands II

A book published in 2019 by aditus foundation contains honest, first-person accounts of what it is like to live in Malta as a refugee or asylum-seeker.

OUR ISLAND II IS THE SECOND book in the Our Island series, after 'Our Island: Personal Accounts of Protecting Refugees in Malta', published in 2018. This second contribution to narrating Malta's historical interaction with refugees gives space to 12 stories — all of them told by refugees in their own words. The book does its utmost to present them raw and unembellished. New arrivals making Malta their own and explaining how that endeavour continues to unfold are the sole agents here in creating an image

for the reader — rather than either being rendered anonymous and invisible by generic news coverage, public discourse and government policy, or being spoken for through the work of their NGO advocates.

aditus foundation is extremely happy to have been able to gather accounts that not only tell us how the contributors have lived the Malta experience but also give us an insight into how Malta lived — and is continuing to live — the refugee and migrant experience.

aditus foundation is a non-governmental organisation established in 2011 with a mission to monitor, report and act on access to human rights in Malta. Named for the Latin word for 'access', their work is focused on the attentive analysis of access to human rights recognition and enjoyment.

aditus is one of the main organisations in Malta that supports refugees and asylum-seekers alongside UNHCR.

"THE MOVING PERSONAL ACCOUNTS IN OUR ISLANDS II COMMUNICATE EACH CONTRIBUTOR'S UNIQUE EXPERIENCES, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME REVEAL TO THE READER SOME OF THE SHARED STRUGGLES STILL ENDURED BY PEOPLE WHO HAVE FLED THEIR HOMES IN SEARCH OF SAFETY. THE BOOK SERVES AS AN IMPORTANT REMINDER OF WHY WE PERSIST IN OUR WORK TO SUPPORT REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS TO BUILD A LIFE OF PEACE, DIGNITY AND OPPORTUNITY."

KAHIN ISMAIL, UNHCR
REPRESENTATIVE TO MALTA

A Community Brought Together by Football

Set up by a Syrian refugee in Malta, a new football team is giving refugee and migrant players the chance to play in local leagues. Players compete in matches while creating a sense of community. The founder of Syria-Gżira FC, Taleb Zaidan, and other team members tell UNHCR about their experience so far.

BY Jordan Apap PHOTOS: Syria-Gżira FC

SYRIA-GZIRA FC IS THE BRAINCHILD of Taleb Zaidan. Taleb is a Syrian refugee who has been in Malta for five years and in that time has managed to set up his own business, NGO and, most recently, an 11-a-side football club. The team was registered in mid-August 2019 and is currently playing its first season, taking part in the local Swan Amateur Football League. At the time of writing, Syria-Gżira FC have already won some matches.

Taleb decided to start the club after meeting some fellow Syrians and other enthusiasts, who were all interested in playing football formally but did not have many opportunities to do so. Many migrants and refugees struggling to integrate in Malta have difficulties finding teams they can train with while they are just starting out. So for many of the players, this team is an opportunity to become engaged in society while practising their hobby.

As the club manager, Taleb's main aim is to support the social inclusion of refugees and migrants in Maltese society: "If a player is good, no one cares where he is from. He will make connections while playing. And those that are really good will have the chance to move on to more established clubs."

Taleb has also faced some obstacles in setting up this team. Getting everything organised and having everyone show up to training on time seemed to be the biggest challenges initially, while language barriers also presented an obvious hurdle. But Taleb is unfazed.

IN HIS WORDS, "GOOD PLAYERS JUST UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER. IT'S ALMOST LIKE FOOTBALL CAN BE ITS OWN LANGUAGE." — TALEB ZAIDAN



This attitude is beyond significant, considering how many different nationalities are represented in Syria-Gżira FC. At the time of writing, this young and growing team already included players from Malta, Syria, Palestine, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria and Ghana.

Muhammed Nuradeen, from Ghana, and Ali Mohammed, from Nigeria, have both been in Malta less than a year and are very glad for the opportunity to play for this team. When asked what they liked most about it, Ali Mohammed said, "It's all about the chance to meet people, exercise, have fun and keep fit. It's our hobby and we like to meet people through it."

Omar Rababah, a local, first division football player, serves as a volunteer coach and management assistant with the team. He faced a number of challenges in bringing it together, including



training players with little to no experience and trying to help with social and transport issues. Still, he considers his overall experience with Syria-Gżira so far to have been very positive, particularly watching players from all corners of the world coming together to collaborate, with the common aim of playing good football.

Omar says he would have expected to be met with more challenges in coaching such a diverse team:

"OF COURSE ALL OUR PLAYERS COME FROM VERY DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS. BUT THROW A BALL BETWEEN THEM AND WATCH ALL THEIR DIFFERENCES MELT AWAY."

Coach Omar hopes that teams like Syria-Gżira FC and all the migrants playing with other squads in local leagues will help challenge negative stereotypes. In terms of his goals for the season, he is interested in getting points but not necessarily set on taking the league. It is the team's first year after all, and so he is more focused on playing well and making sure that everyone involved feels like part of the team, "the most important aim being that everyone has fun, and that being on the team brings a sense of satisfaction to all involved".

In setting up the football team, Taleb also had the support of Peter Busuttill of the Malta Football Association.

A Safe Space for Learning

How Blue Door English is providing a welcoming learning environment for refugees and migrants in Malta.

BY Anna Camilleri PHOTOS: © UNHCR/Joanna Demarco

FOUR TIMES A WEEK, EAGER LEARNERS of various nationalities gather to improve their language skills. Walking through the eponymous blue door under St. Andrew's Scots Church in Valletta, where the English lessons take place, one can immediately hear the voices of enthusiastic teachers explaining some new word or phrase and the sound of students diligently practising their pronunciation or having conversations about all sorts of topics.

Blue Door English may have as many as five classes taking place simultaneously, with up to 80 students on busy days. There are five different levels, starting from basic literacy to pre-intermediate English. Students certainly feel the benefits of the classes, as they explained to UNHCR when we visited.

"What I like most about the class is that by learning, we know that eventually we will be more useful in society... Also in daily life, we can just talk to people." — Ahmed Yahyah, from Sudan

"Before I came to Blue Door English, I didn't really like Malta. But now, this is new salvation for me... Before in Sudan, I studied IT. I am not working in IT right now, but when I learn English, I hope I can work in this here in Malta." —Shazali, from Sudan

Apart from the valuable education being provided by Blue Door English, for many of their students it is also about feeling accepted and treated with respect and with dignity. Many have recently arrived in Malta after a difficult journey across the desert and sea, so having opportunities like these lessons helps them to integrate and focus on the future.

"I AM LEARNING ENGLISH, BUT I COME HERE ALSO BECAUSE I MAKE FRIENDS AND MEET GOOD PEOPLE," SAYS ONE STUDENT FROM LIBYA.



Childcare is provided for the women's class, which takes place twice a week.

Blue Door English provide classes in basic literacy all the way up to advanced level.

Kristina Abela, the Programme Coordinator for Blue Door English, emphasises the importance of ensuring a safe space where students can feel at home. "The school is different to others in that before all else, we keep in mind the challenging circumstances asylum-seekers and refugees are often dealing with. Rather than get them to try and fit into a system that we have created, we continue to adapt and recreate a system that suits their needs."

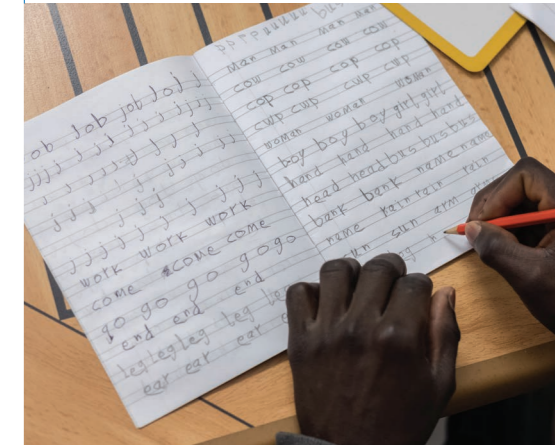
"WE FIND THAT WHEN A STUDENT FEELS LIKE THEY ARE IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT, LEARNING NATURALLY FOLLOWS."

Apart from the evening classes, a special morning lesson includes childcare on the premises, which caters for women with young children. "This class is especially important, as migrant women are at risk of feeling alienated. After

the women attend the class, they normally go for coffee and a bit of window shopping in Valletta, so the social aspect to the classes cannot be overlooked," says Kristina.

The NGO is volunteer-led, with around 20 volunteers in roles including teaching, childcare and administration.

Justine Lubnow, a teacher at Blue Door, echoes Kristina's positivity in the experience she describes. "Volunteering here has opened my heart to bursting point. I have seen students transition from holding a pen for the first time in their lives to being able to read, write and converse within the space of six months. Wherever fate takes them in the future, they are now equipped with basic literacy skills, which will hopefully help them on their way. This is something which makes me immeasurably happy."



Empowering Women and Sparking a Conversation

Every year, the international campaign **16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence** encourages states, humanitarian organisations and civil society to highlight and show their commitment to ending violence against women. The 16 Days campaign has become a key event on the calendar for UNHCR Malta.

BY Anna Camilleri



Panel discussion on SGBV and projects empowering refugee women in Malta, in December 2019. This followed a film screening for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. From left: Andrea Wien (Hal Far Outreach), Umayma Elamin (MWAM) and Nicolette Schembri (AWAS). PHOTO: © UNHCR/Joanna Demarco

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, SUCH AS domestic violence, intimate partner violence and sexual harassment, is prevalent throughout the world. In the context of forced migration, women may have to flee their country due to incidents of SGBV, which may even include forced or child marriage, female genital mutilation and trafficking. In addition, many refugees and asylum-seekers (both men and women) are at a high risk of sexual violence on their dangerous journey across borders.

The 16 Days campaign aims to educate the public about violence against women, as well as working with and empowering survivors to seek support. The campaign kicks off annually on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and ends on 10 December, which is Human Rights Day.

UNHCR Malta has taken part in the campaign in both 2018 and 2019, by collaborating on the organisation of activities to empower all refugee women, and by organising public events that bring women's issues in the local context into the conversation. UNHCR also wishes to support organisations that provide opportunities for women to become more active members of society.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

In 2018, two soap-making and information workshops were organised in collaboration with the St. Jeanne Antide Foundation as part of their SOAR project tackling domestic violence. Elaine Compagno, who headed the soap-making initiative, explained why an activity like this can have an impact: "Just the fact that the refugee women could go out of the centre and socialise with other women is already something that is empowering them. Women who work and live in isolated places, such as the open centre in Hal Far, may suffer exclusion and isolation. We need to create moments of socialisation."

In 2019, Hal Far Outreach organised employment, self-defence and dance workshops for women as well as SGBV information sessions for both women and men in open centres. UNHCR hosted a panel discussion between stakeholders working with female asylum-seekers and refugees, and survivors of SGBV, where the importance of social activities to provide a sense of belonging and boost confidence was highlighted.

DID YOU KNOW?

UNHCR defines protection as "all actions aimed at ensuring the equal access to and enjoyment of the rights of women, men, girls and boys of concern to UNHCR, in accordance with the relevant bodies of law (international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law)." As such, UNHCR views the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as an integral component of its mandate.

UNHCR, together with states, shares the responsibility for ensuring that refugees are protected against sexual and gender-based violence. Some of UNHCR Malta's activities in this regard have included the following:

SGBV Training: In 2017 and 2018, UNHCR Malta provided SGBV Prevention and Response capacity building training for Maltese government officials, NGOs and community-based organisations. **WHO IS A MIGRANT?**

Supporting SGBV Response Services: In 2018, UNHCR began supporting a number of NGOs under Project Integrated, which provides SGBV psycho-social and legal support to asylum-seekers in Malta and conducts outreach in the open centres to raise awareness.

SGBV networking events: UNHCR Malta has organised four SGBV Roundtables, two in 2018 and two in 2019, in which stakeholders work together to share information on available services.

THE WORLD AT A GLANCE IN 2019

UNHCR Malta takes a look at some of the main events of 2019 through the lens of photography. We also bid farewell to Sadako Ogata, High Commissioner between 1991 and 2000, who passed away this year.



LIBYA: EVACUATION OF REFUGEES TO NIGER

January 2019. Somali siblings Fares and Sausan were released from a Libyan detention centre and will be evacuated to Niger with their mom and 127 other refugees.

UNHCR opened its Gathering and Departure Facility (GDF) in Libya in December 2018 as a life-saving alternative to detention centres. After advocating for the release of asylum-seekers and refugees in detention, UNHCR transfers the most vulnerable to its GDF, where they are offered accommodation, food, clothing and, especially, a safe place to stay before being evacuated to UNHCR's Emergency Transit Mechanism in Niger, where durable solutions are sought for them.

© UNHCR/Tarik Argaz



SYRIA: PEOPLE ARE SLOWLY RETURNING TO THE DEVASTATED OLD CITY OF HOMS

March 2019. Three siblings, Kawthar, Yousef and Omar, walk with their father through the rubble of their neighbourhood in Homs.

On his fourth visit to Syria as High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi said the magnitude of the humanitarian needs for those returning home was staggering. In 2018, across the country, an estimated 1.4 million displaced Syrians returned home. Where access is possible, UNHCR is helping to rehabilitate homes, repair schools and re-establish health facilities and bakeries. Millions still remain internally displaced and over six million live as refugees in other countries.

© UNHCR/Vivian Tou'meh



SYRIA: HIGH COMMISSIONER VISITS FAMILIES RETURNING TO WAR-RAVAGED TOWN

March 2019. "When we first returned, there was no water or electricity."

UN Refugee Chief Filippo Grandi meets the family of Abdelkarim at their home in Souran. They returned to a debris-filled house in September 2017, and the father of nine spent months repairing it with help from UNDP and UNHCR.

© UNHCR/Andrew McConnel



ETHIOPIA: YOUNG SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES DESPERATE TO ACCESS EDUCATION

August 2019. A South Sudanese refugee child flies a kite in the Jewi refugee camp in Ethiopia.

Two-thirds of the 2.2 million South Sudanese refugees in East Africa are children. One-third of those who live in Ethiopia do not have access to primary school, and the vast majority do not continue to secondary school. At the Jewi refugee camp, which hosts 54,000 South Sudanese in the Gambella region of western Ethiopia, classes are overcrowded and there are not enough textbooks. But UNHCR, with partners such as Plan International, is providing additional classes for children and adults who have missed out on education because of the conflict back home.

© UNHCR/Alissa Everett

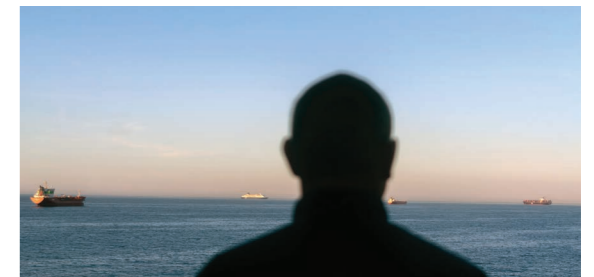


MOZAMBIQUE: CYCLONE IDAI LEAVES TRAIL OF DEVASTATION IN COASTAL CITY OF DONDO

March 2019. An aerial view of the city of Beira, Mozambique, and the extensive damage to homes, buildings and trees.

Cyclone Idai was the largest ever to hit Africa. It made landfall near the Indian Ocean port city of Beira and the neighbouring city of Dondo on March 14, 2019, its 270 km/h winds and floodwaters, covering over 3,000 square kilometres, wreaking havoc. UNHCR is working with governments and humanitarian partners to send tents, tarpaulins, solar lanterns, cooking utensils and other emergency aid for tens of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons who lost their homes and livelihoods when Idai's torrential rain and flooding swept across Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi.

© UNHCR/Alissa Everett



SPAIN: MEDITERRANEAN SEA

June 2019. A man looking at the Mediterranean Sea from a ferry heading to Spain.

© UNHCR/Alissa Everett



VENEZUELAN REFUGEE VANIS AND HER ONE-MONTH-OLD BABY, LUANNA, IN THEIR NEW HOME IN BRAZIL

September 2019. Vanis and her son, Alejandro, 20, left Venezuela because of insecurity, food shortages and a lack of health services and medicine. Vanis went through a lot to get to Brazil, unaware that she was pregnant. Her baby, Luanna, is only one month old. The family is now living in the Brazilian capital, Brasilia. “It’s very sad to be away from family in difficult times. Like most Venezuelans, my family is also far from me. I was very close to my daughter, and it was very hard to leave her.”

UNHCR provides registration and information services, shelter and protection in the Venezuelan emergency for vulnerable Venezuelan families throughout Latin America. In Brazil, UNHCR is present in the northern region, offering shelter, food, clean water, psychosocial care and safe spaces for children.

© UNHCR/Alan Azevedo



June 2000. High Commissioner Sadako Ogata’s visits orphanage in Burundi.

Former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata, who led UNHCR from 1991 to 2000, passed away in Tokyo, Japan, in October 2019.

Ms. Ogata became High Commissioner shortly after the Cold War came to an end, which triggered profound changes in the global political landscape and uprooting tens of millions of people. Under her leadership, UNHCR mounted large-scale emergency operations in response to crises in the former Soviet Union, Iraq, the Balkans, Somalia, the African Great Lakes and East Timor, as well as helping millions of refugees return home in large-scale repatriation operations in Central America, Africa and Asia.

PHOTO: © UNHCR/Paul Stromberg



LIBYA: LARGEST EVACUATION TO DATE LIBERATES REFUGEES FROM DETENTION

November 2018. Vulnerable men, women and children who were being held in detention centres in Tripoli and Zintan wait to board a plane taking them to Niger.

© UNHCR/Sufyan Ararah



Banner advertising UNHCR’s first annual Global Refugee Forum at UNHCR Headquarters, Geneva. PHOTO: © UNHCR/Susan Hopper

MALTA JOINS THE FIRST GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM

IT PROVIDES A BLUEPRINT FOR GOVERNMENTS, INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO ENSURE THAT HOST COMMUNITIES GET THE SUPPORT THEY NEED AND THAT REFUGEES CAN LEAD PRODUCTIVE LIVES.

In December 2019, Malta formed part of a historic gathering of nations to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them.

The Global Refugee Forum, held in Geneva on the 17 and 18 December 2019, is the first world gathering on refugees of its kind. The Forum is a critical opportunity to build momentum towards achieving the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees and strengthen our collective response to refugee situations.

The Global Compact on Refugees is a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognising that a sustainable solution to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation.

The Global Compact on Refugees is led by UNHCR with Member States, international organisations, refugees, civil society, the private sector, and experts.

What are the four key objectives?

- ▶ Ease the pressures on host countries
- ▶ Enhance refugee self-reliance
- ▶ Expand access to third-country solutions
- ▶ Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

Recognising the Resilience of People who have Fled

To mark World Refugee Day 2019, UNHCR Malta organised an event in the beautiful setting of Pjazza San Gorg, Valletta. We brought together a range of people from refugee and migrant communities, NGOs, government agencies and the general public to honour the resilience and contribution of refugees and asylum-seekers in Malta.

ON WORLD REFUGEE DAY, members of the public had the chance to listen to and converse with asylum-seekers and refugees living in Malta.

In the activity I Have Something to Say, a total of nine people were asked to talk about a topic of their choice and reflect on how the refugee experience or their work has impacted their lives. People were invited to take a seat in the circle and to listen to what each speaker had to say.

On World Refugee Day, members of the public had the chance to listen to and converse with asylum-seekers and refugees living in Malta. Our speakers were Shazali, from Sudan, Abdishakur, from Somalia, Taleb, from Syria, and Luisa, from Venezuela.

The remaining five speakers provided a closer look at what it is like working in the field. We were honoured to have Father Dionysius Mintoff as one of these speakers.

Fr. Mintoff set up Peace Lab in 1971, and the centre in Hal Far has been welcoming asylum-seekers in need of a home ever since. There was also Dr. Ahmed Bugre, the founder of the Foundation for Shelter and Support to Migrants, Vanja Vajagic, from the Therapeutic Services unit at AWAS, Elisabeth Brumat from UNHCR Syria, and two volunteers from NGO Hal Far Outreach.

I Have Something to Say provided people with a chance to really listen to and engage with people they may not usually have the opportunity to meet.

By the end of the activity, we directed everyone's attention to the big screen, for the screening of six short films related to refugees and social inclusion in collaboration with the 2019 Valletta Film Festival.

UNHCR Malta has been collaborating with the festival for five years, bringing films about diverse refugee and migrant experiences to a local audience.

We also debuted a short film made especially for the occasion by Anthony Mizzi (Randon films) for UNHCR Malta. The film, A Place Like Home, features Barbara, Taleb and Mohamed, three refugees and asylum-seekers living in Malta.

UNHCR recently published the Global Trends for 2018, which shows that there are currently over 70 million forcibly displaced people in the world, including 25.9 million refugees. World Refugee Day serves as an important reminder that globally, and of course in Malta, we should always look for ways to show solidarity with refugees.



I have Something to Say activity invited the public to listen attentively, in a group, to the thoughts of refugees, asylum-seekers and people who work with them. PHOTO: © UNHCR/Niels Den Hollander



Fr. Mintoff (left) and Kahin Ismail on World Refugee Day. PHOTO: © UNHCR/Niels van Hollande



the **world** is changing.
so should our **refugee response**.