



**WEMIN**

Migrant Women  
Empowerment and Integration

# WEMIN PROJECT

**DOCUMENTING MIGRANT  
AND REFUGEE WOMEN'S  
STORIES OF CHANGE**





## Introduction

The WEMIN project (Migrant Women Empowerment and Integration) aims to implement and promote a comprehensive integration model for migrant/refugee women (MRW). Through direct interventions in women populations and through experience-sharing among partners social, cultural, educational and professional aspects of inclusion will be addressed and active participation will be achieved. It is co-financed by AMIF (Asylum Migration and Integration Fund) and has a duration of 24 months: from January 2018 to December 2019. The project partners are the following:

- Hellenic Open University – Greece
- ALDA – France
- Folkuniversitetet stiftelsen vid Lunds Universitet – Sweden • Ifa Akademie – Germany
- Oxfam Italia intercultural societa cooperativa – Italy
- Associação Renovar a Mouraria – Portugal
- Southside Partnership DLR Limited – Ireland
- Collectic – Spain
- Olympic Training and Consulting Ltd – Greece

The long-term effect envisaged is to empower migrant and refugee women to participate actively in the sociocultural life of the host societies, better assist the integration process of their children and competently pursue educational, voluntary or vocational activities in line with their visions and the given context. At the same time, the interaction between women of the host and migrant societies during the project activities is expected to combat stereotypes on both sides and improve their intercultural communication skills thus challenging the hegemonic discourse on migration.

Through the experience-sharing and dissemination activities it is envisaged that large audiences of the general public and stakeholders involved in migrant integration will increase awareness about cross-cultural dialogue and gain access to relevant tools and practices, within and outside the partnership countries.

This booklet gathers the testimonies of migrant and refugee women that have participated in WEMIN activities in the partner countries. Each story is different: some women share their integration process in the host communities, others are focused on how WEMIN has helped them to improve their lives and there are even some stories where women talk about their past.

This document intends to disseminate these women's voices around Europe, and therefore to contribute to their empowerment: their stories, often silenced, are important and need to be heard. With this booklet we aim to change the negative narratives about migration and migrant and refugee women in particular.

There is no better way to raise awareness about an issue than to share the personal stories of the people involved, to show that they are real people and not just anonymous numbers. Through the next pages the reader will be welcomed to join these 54 women, coming from many different countries, on their current lives in 8 European countries.

We hope you will enjoy reading through this document as we have enjoyed working on this project with MRW women.







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## ALA

I joined Rafika's Conversation Classes in Dublin last Autumn. As a migrant woman I am really happy that I can practice my English skills free and meet other migrant women. As a rule we choose a topic and then discuss it. It helps me to increase my vocabulary, train my listening skills and discover new customs and cultures. We also discuss different situations and Ireland's rules that helps us to stay here more comfortable. Thank you for these classes!"



## AMANY Egypt



*Dublin Bay*

My name is Amany Aly, from Egypt. I have been in Ireland since January 2018. I came here to study and to work. I am looking to gain new experiences and for a better life. Now I am finishing my master's degree in food safety management at TU Dublin. I have participated in the English class since Sep.2018. My main reason for attending was to improve my conversation skills and speak more naturally. After a while, I realized that not only my speaking skills had improved but also the ability to communicate and share my thoughts with the others

spontaneously. Moreover, I feel I have more confidence and an increase in my self-esteem as well. Also, the subjects and lessons and topics helped me to learn about the Irish culture and customs. For instance, the National Museum visit was very useful for me as it helped me to understand how much the Irish citizens struggled for freedom. Also the programme assisted me to establish new communication networks and make friends that helped me a lot to expand my social network.

## **AMIRA IBRAHIM**

### **Syria**



Amira Ibrahim came to Germany as a refugee woman. She was forced to leave her home in Syria because of the war. In Syria, she worked as an embroiderer. She collected great experience in working with fabrics and textiles. Amira Ibrahim is ambitious. She has always dreamed of a career in the fashion industry, including designing for the big designers and fashion labels. But war and flight seemed to have destroyed this dream at first.

In Frankfurt, she got in touch with a start-up company called "Stitch by Stitch". The small social enterprise works with women, including five refugee women. One of them is Amira Ibrahim.

"This is like a family to me. I have many friends here," said Amira. "Stitch by Stitch" is on course for growth and success and has presented its first own collection. Also included are designs by Amira Ibrahim and her fellow refugee women. She creatively combines western designs with traditions, colors and embroidery techniques from Syria. A red robe reminds of a traditional Afghan cape. For the rule coat, innovative and environmentally conscious PET bottles were processed and reused.

"Stitch by Stitch" is an idea born by the different goals and backgrounds of two women. Nicole von Alvensleben and Claudia Frick have teamed up with professional dressmakers who had to leave their homes due to war and violence. They set up a B2B tailoring workshop to quickly and efficiently produce small series productions for other local start-up fashion labels.

Language deficits or missing qualifications should not be an obstacle to employing or qualifying refugees in real working life. The two female bosses immediately notice a

women's professionalism of the sewing ability, even without an official certificate. The craftsmanship is cross-language - the sewing as a global language. This also benefited Amira Ibrahim. Her professional embroidery skills were also new to her fellow "Stitch by Stitch" colleagues and they were able to learn from her.

In addition to Amira, other women who have fled work at "Stitch by Stitch". Esraa, Reyhane and Iman bring a variety of sewing and embroidery skills from their homeland, which now enables them to integrate in Germany. Anyone commissioning a collection from Amira and her colleagues receives professional work of a high quality. But the women also demand a reasonable payment. That their idea has become a well-run company is due to the professionalism that everyone brings along, say the "stitch-by-stitch" founders.

Amira Ibrahim is meanwhile an well regarded embroiderer for Haute Couture and has embroidered an evening wear for world star Shakira. Her apprenticeship as tailor which started in October 2017 in Germany, has more than paid off. Amira lives her dream!



## **ANDREIA Brazil**

Andreia is from Brazil. She moved to Ireland with her husband a year and a half ago and has a two year old son. She lives in a town outside of Dublin city but travels in on a Saturday to attend English language classes offered through the WEMIN project. As she is at home all day caring for her son, she does not have many opportunities to meet other people so enjoys going to the classes for this purpose as well. As she says "About the English

class on Saturdays, it's not just about learning English, but meeting and talking with other women who inspire me with stories about their lives and their good experiences and bad experiences in Ireland. How they cope with everything, helps us find the courage to keep trying to be better here, in this new place that we choose to call home, and during those happy moments, we improve our English."

## ANNA

“The English class in Dublin is a great opportunity not to be isolated in the new environment and connect with people, who are exactly in the same situation with you. It is easier to solve our problems together.

I really enjoy to be a member of our multinational group and discover traditions and cultural aspects that I was not familiar with before.”



## ARACELY



*A picture by Aracely, taken during one of the WP3 activities (getting to know the city of Barcelona)*

1. How did you find out about the course?

I went to "Salud y Familia", an entity that I knew with the help of a friend. I was looking for some help. There, I met Griselda and she talk about this training and this opportunity. I was really interested on the digital part of the training, as I thought that this is a good way to learn about the local culture.

2. What have you learned?

I had not touched a computer for many years, and I was afraid of not being able to learn within this tool; and now I am very proud of myself, since I can use Internet, contact my family, send emails, files, edit documents with the drive, and do many things with the computer.

3. Do you think it is important to take this type of course?

Today everything is computerized, I think it is important to learn from these tools because even to go to the bank, I have to use the new technologies. Thanks to this training, I can do many things by myself.

4. What kind of difficulties have you had?

Mainly caring for my daughter; I had nowhere to leave her, or anyone to help me with her care.

5. How could you solve them?

In the classes, the space is baby-friendly. This make possible to attend the class with my little daughter and enjoy the training.

6. How has the training helped you, personally?

It has helped me a lot. Before going to classes, I felt discouraged and began to have depression. When I started going to classes, I noticed that I have learned a lot. This has motivated me to move on, to do more things on my own, to feel more confident, to apply the learning content in real situations. I feel that now I'm more independent, and I don't need help to do things like, let's put an example, asking the doctor for an appointment.

## "BAHAR" Afghanistan

"Bahar" was born in Afghanistan but she had to leave the country when she was 6 months old. She lived most of her life in Iran and in exile. She is 24 years old and comes from a big family. She came to Greece in 2017, almost one and a half years ago. After a short stay in a Greek island's hotspot, she came to Athens where she struggles to make her dreams come true.

"Bahar" is a very dynamic young woman, full of energy and positive thinking. She told me she was the one to convince her parents and family members to leave Iran: *"One day I gathered all my family and I told my brothers and sisters: look at our father. If we stay here, we will grow up and be exactly like him. There is no possibility to change our fate. Is this what you want?"* Sometimes she feels responsible for all the difficulties they have faced and still facing since they came in Greece, but she does not regret it and hopes for the best: *"I like to set goals in my life. Every day I write down one goal. Exactly three years before we left Iran, on the same month, I had written it down in my diary, that on three years from now we will leave."*



"Bahar" has been trained as a seamstress in Iran, following her mother's profession and will. Although she didn't like it in the beginning, her job experience for a well-known designer made her change her attitude. Realizing her talent and skills, she decided to attend a school for fashion design. It was not an easy decision, since in order for her to find the money to pay for the fees, she had to persuade her previous boss to give her a loan.



Her boss loaned her the money but to assure that “Bahar” would pay her back, she kept her passport. Until today, she hasn’t got it back.

Her last job in Iran was in a local clothes industry. She was designing and cutting patterns. Asking her what are her favorite colors, she replies: “I like green and red, but when I design I usually use grey, black, blue black. This kind of colors. I don’t know why”. She shows me some of her designs. Very beautiful, original and of a modern aesthetics. A black long dress with a colorful embroidery in the front, drew my attention. “Bahar” explained that it is a typical traditional embroidery of her country.

During the last period, “Bahar” has been working in a Greek dressmaker’s lab. Although “Bahar” does not speak Greek and her employer does not speak English, they manage to cooperate. However, “Bahar” states that she is not treating her with good manners and that she makes her work too much: “She all the time tells me “do this, do that”, and speaks to me in with bad manners. I am a human too, I can’t stand it. I am just staying because I am in need of money.” In parallel, “Bahar” is working tirelessly to make her dream come

true, that is to put on a fashion show in Greece with her own designed clothes. She keeps designing and trying to find a place for the show and to gather money to buy the garments needed to make the clothes. She is very optimistic and while being in Greece she has met different people who are willing to help her. When I ask her why she wants to hold this fashion show and what is her ultimate goal, she replies: “My goal is to create a very good work portfolio so as to apply for a student visa in Canada. I want to continue my studies in fashion design. I never had the chance to study. In Iran I didn’t have the right because I was from Afghanistan. I want to go to the university. I like reading and learning and I always read.”

Being a very sociable person, who enjoys meeting new people, the hardest thing for “Bahar” in the beginning was not being able to communicate because of the language gap. She does not yet speak Greek but WEMIN’s courses have helped her start reading. However, after coming in Greece she has learned English quite well and she can in that way communicate with people from different nationalities.

## **BAHAR KARA**

### **Syria**

It took Bahar Kara several months to get used to her new name. She does not want to have a picture taken of herself and have it printed. She is still afraid to be recognized and persecuted, tortured and humiliated by her older brother and family. Thanks to special language and integration courses for women and special offers in Stuttgart for persecuted women, Bahar Kara has succeeded in building a new and self-determined life.

Bahar was born in northeastern Syria in the area of Al-Hasakeh as a member of a Kurdish minority. She spent her childhood with her family in different places. Bahar does not know her exact date of birth and age. It was not recorded at birth. A medical examination after her arrival in Germany at the end of 2015 revealed a biological age of 24 years. Her date of entry now is her official birthday. "For me something like a second birthday," says Bahar today, "although the first few months were terrible in Germany."

Bahar grew up in an area with many other ethnic and religious groups besides Kurds: Syrians, Aramaeans, Orthodox Christians, Maronites, Yazidis and various Muslim groups. As a child, Bahar remembers, she had friends and playmates from different families. But she sensed that her parents, and especially her older brothers, paid more and more attention to the fact that she does not play with "the others" but with "her peers" and spends time only with them. Bahar attended various schools. Again and again her father or her brothers forbade her to go to school. She learned secretly with friends, one of them from a Christian family whose older brother gave them books.

In 2013, the expulsion of Kurds and Christians in northeastern Syria by the IS began. One of her brothers died after a gunshot, He was wounded by IS fighters. Her mother and older sister were abused by IS fighters. Bahar hesitates to recount these memories.

When her eldest brother learned that she was secretly meeting a Christian girl and even had contact with that girl's brother, she was beaten and imprisoned by her own brother.

At the end of 2014, Bahar managed to escape. She dropped off at a medical appointment near the city of Amuda, which is close to the border with Turkey. She found shelter with a group of women with a similar fate. She learned that her brother was looking for her with handbills in mosques, on markets and on Kurdish fighters. She had regular meetings with her friend's brother in the meantime. With the help of smugglers succeeded in the beginning of 2015, the escape over Turkey by land to the north of Greece. In addition to the fear of the smugglers, she had a constant fear of being recognized by her brother's guarantors and middlemen, abused and killed. On the Albanian-Greek border, she

found refuge in an institution of the International Red Cross.

After an adventurous journey through the countries of the Western Balkans, she arrived in Stuttgart in September 2015. She was officially registered as a refugee in the meantime. The fear of being recognized in Stuttgart was great. One night she thought she had seen a friend of her brother in the street. The man had "peculiarly fixed her" and compared it to a photo on his mobile phone. She was able to protect herself through a protection program for women, lived in special accommodation and got a new name and identity. Today she lives with the brother of her Christian friend, attends vocational training as an early-childhood educator and volunteers at a women's charity.



## **BEAUTY** **Nigeria**

"I'm worried about the job. I go everywhere to submit my CV: shops, restaurants, families' services. My dream is to find a part-time job so I can continue taking care of my daughter when she gets out from school. With the Italian language, it is still difficult; talking to my daughter's teachers is not

always easy. Now my little girl attends kindergarten and seems happy to go. When I leave her there, she doesn't cry anymore, and she can't wait to see her friends."

*Photo credits: Beauty*

## FAITH Nigeria

"I go to school three days a week, the teacher taught me many things: to talk, to greet, to ask for information. I learn how to write documents for job searching and to be independent in attending training and services. After school I often go to the African shop in the city, there I meet friends and I can talk and share my feelings. I still don't have Italian friends, still I feel more at ease with friends from my country and with whom we understand each other without problems. Anyway I know I have to overcome this difficulty and to look for a job I have to improve Italian

otherwise I will not succeed in finding a job!"

#WEMINproject #womenpower

*Photo credits: Maria Nella Lippi, Oxfam Italia*



## **FAIZA** **Algeria**

I have really started to live my life at 24 years old, as before my parents were deciding everything for me. I have an older sister who stopped her studies at 19 years old. She stayed at home, and I could see through her what I would become: a housewife cooking at home, which is not a world that interests me.

We moved to France when I was 7 years old with my sister and my 2 brothers. The 5th child, my brother, was born in France. I was the middle child and was the ugly duckling, I escaped in books. School helped me a lot even if I was not the best one. What helped me was sport and everything that was related to arts. I had a French teacher who did not focus on grammatical mistakes but rather on writing itself, and he encouraged us to write. I loved to read books like Stephen King, with real stories, not romantic novels. I loved to dream about an exciting and adventurous life and I was living it through books. On the weekend, we did nothing except receiving guests, or my parents would visit other people. We were not going to Algeria for holidays. There was not such a thing like a culture shared by our parents. I was told that I was a girl so I didn't had the right to do this or that. But in the meantime, I was part of two

different cultures and it was not easy for me to see the others enjoying and having fun. So I started to protest and complain and we were beaten, my brother and I were the two pet peeves. Even if we were adults, we were considered as children.

All the projects I had were going up to smoke. I wanted to become a caregiver but my father was against it because I had to sleep at the working place. I then decided to see my teacher in charge of organising summer exchanges because I needed money to pay my room and I didn't want to live alone. The same evening, she received a call from a woman in Spain that needed an au pair. I directly accepted but it was my father who kept my identification documents. So I requested for a French nationality. Since I couldn't go out without my father, we worked on a system with the mayor of the city Reichstett, in order for me to request my citizenship. So I left, and when I returned I went to see this teacher and I met a woman that was there with her. This woman offered me to move in her house in exchange of my cleaning service. So this became my second family, it was like finding a second mother.

Nowadays, I still keep contact with them. Later, I decided to start studying again, I was 25 years old and I didn't want to be a caregiver anymore.

I never had problem with integration while being adult at work or elsewhere as I arrived in France as a child and I went to school. The only difficulties I faced were at school when we arrived in France. We were the 4 Arabs always together, excluded from the other children of the classroom. When something happened like theft or getting head lice, it was "us", our fault. Then, a new headmaster arrived and he changed everything: he mixed us with others, he wanted us to get to know each other and ensure that there were no more differences. This helped me to move on but the difficulties were rather cultural and familial. At 30 years old, I went back to school to pass the competition to become a monitor-educator. I later moved to Jura (East of France), and married a French man. We didn't have any problem with religion or culture.

Finally, school really helped me because it has opened my mind. Through books, I managed to escape, with the stories first, and later thanks to my personal development to discover and understand life.

The information centres for women and families have also helped me a lot, especially because they give legal advice. At this time, they were also providing financial help for training courses or temporary difficulties. When I came back from Jura, those associations helped me a lot during the time I needed to get back on my feet, for instance by providing food baskets. I have also seen a family and social advisor to which I could confide when I needed advice. I have also worked on my-self, in order for my situation not impact my children. To give it back, I helped them out for instance during Christmas Eve. I couldn't give money but I engaged my time and I did it with a happy heart and a happy mind.



## "HADDA" Algeria

There are two stages [in my journey], I prefer to forget the first because I felt like I was "erased". Whether in France or Algeria, it doesn't change anything since I was at home, I wasn't going out. The second was full of difficulties with young children, without any income and with the fear of losing my children. The first people to help me were the neighbours, they were all mobilised. One gave a mattress, the other gave the dishes, etc., since my ex-husband had taken everything.

And then there is my social worker, because she did her job, and even more because she believed me. But the person who helped me the most was Mrs. Yvette, who opened her door to me. She was a volunteer at an NGO. Once, I went there, I had no income or family allowances. My social worker sent me there for the food aid basket. I remember it was the beginning of the school year and I didn't even have money to buy my son a school bag, I cried and Yvette came to me, I told her my story, my story touched her and she kind of adopted me. I must admit, it wasn't easy. I didn't know any laws, I had young children. She was the one who

explained everything to me, the system, how it works, really everything!

Then I started going out, working and all this with fear in my stomach, fear of losing my children because I was being chased by my ex-husband in Algeria. I was summoned to the police station, I was received like a criminal, I came across a really unpleasant policeman! So I kept this fear, I wanted my children to be well. I wanted to emancipate myself and work and not just stay in France to benefit from the help as my ex-husband used to say. I didn't come here by choice, I was forced to come.

I found myself alone with my children, and with my ex-husband still receiving the benefit, I went to the office for family benefits and told them my story, but as they say, "the law doesn't protect fools". I said everything, but everything I said was used against me, I was told that the housing assistance benefits are attributed to "Mr. and Mrs.", so I had to refund the overpayment. I ended up with a debt of €8,000. I tried to write letters but nothing worked and I paid it back.



To help get a first job, I was receiving the allowance for single women and I was invited by the office for family benefits, it was an opportunity for anyone in a single-parent situation to help them work. I went there, and I was given written and oral tests, which I passed. Then I was directed to an association for women or anyone who wants to return to work. I also did training courses with an employment centre for refresher courses in French. I really had to do these upgrades because I knew the system in Algeria, but not here. I encourage all women to go to this association for people who want to return to work because I was able to choose, say 'I can do this, I want to do this'. I was able to use my knowledge, my experiences in Algeria for example.

She [Yvette] showed me everything, the system, the culture, the way of life. I celebrated Christmas with her, she dressed as Santa Claus, my children believed in it, they were naive. She supported me, she coached me, now we use that term, well she coached me! I didn't do anything without her, I did everything with her. Now, we see each other from time to time so as not to cut ties, to get news, she considers me a member of her family.

There is also Mrs. Berthelot, my lawyer. It's thanks to her that I succeeded. I worked at Mr. and Mrs. Berthelot's house and while talking to her husband, I told him my story, he told me that his wife is a lawyer. I told her I no longer trusted my former lawyer and asked her, "Can you take her place?" It is thanks to her that I have managed to be relaxed and have a clear conscience, without thinking that one day he [my ex-husband] will come and take the children from me. In fact, there is no law that says that my children belong to me or to him. Then there was a judgment specifying that the children have to stay with the mother but that the father can come and see them whenever he wants. And that's when I met Faïza. Every other weekend I went out, I enjoyed it and so I met Faïza on the "on va sortir" [we're going out] website, and we have a lot in common, we're from the same area, we have a similar situation, we're the same age, our children are about the same age too and they go to their dad's house on the same weekend. She became my coach on the heart side, intimate, personal. Because even in terms of dating, I was still in a submission pattern, if it wasn't for her I would have made the same mistake as the first one, with my ex-husband.

## **HAMIA**

### **Algeria**

Hamia is from Algeria. She is 40 years old, married with five children. She came to Greece in 2017, almost one and a half years ago, and her last child was born in Greece.

She has completed journalism studies in Algeria and she has done many different jobs such as seamstress and teacher of Arabic and French languages to children. She didn't wish to speak about the last job she performed before leaving her country.

The trip from Algeria to Greece was especially difficult for Hamia, since she was pregnant and her health condition had worsened. When I asked her about the things she has brought with her from her country of origin, she replied: "The last night before I left my country, my mother had given me golden jewels as a gift and also my sister's family had all given me something as a present, but it all got stolen during the journey. It was

like a jungle. We were walking up to 10 hours in the dark. It was very difficult. We lost all our things."

The first time in Greece was also very tough for Hamia:

"It was difficult here, very difficult. I could not eat, the food had a bad smell and the living conditions in the island within a tent were very difficult. I was feeling very bad. Every day I felt tired, I felt sick. During the pregnancy all vitamin levels were very low. Because of that, the delivery of the baby was very difficult. It felt like I was giving birth for the first time. I believed I would die. Hopefully, the doctor could speak French, and the nurse, too, and this helped a lot."

After seven months in a Greek island, Hamia and her family came to Athens. She immediately got into a hospital. "I can't remember anything from this first period. I was only going to the hospital and then back home."

Nowadays, Hamia's health has improved and her everyday life is rather getting into normal: "In the building where we are staying with my family there isn't anybody who speaks Arabic. But in the flat opposite ours, there is a lady speaking French, living there with her family. And we greet each other, and they are all very nice to us...In the neighborhood I visit the supermarket and the children's school. They go to Greek school and they have learnt the language. When I speak to them, they tell me, 'you don't speak Greek, go and learn and then come and speak with us.' I need to learn the language for the children. To help them in school, to read with them the books they get taught in school. I can now slowly read the words, but I do not yet understand what I am reading, the meaning of them."

Asking her about her dreams for the future, Hamia says: "The only thing I want is to work. To rely on myself. To be able to rely on ourselves... I miss

working. Ok, as a teacher I can't work. Because since children here speak Greek I have to first learn Greek. But, I can work for example in a small sewing industry, since I know this job very well ...Greece is the country we intend to live. We had decided it from the very beginning. We left our country just to have freedom. Here we have found it. Our children go to school here and if we also find a job, we have no reason of wanting to change country."

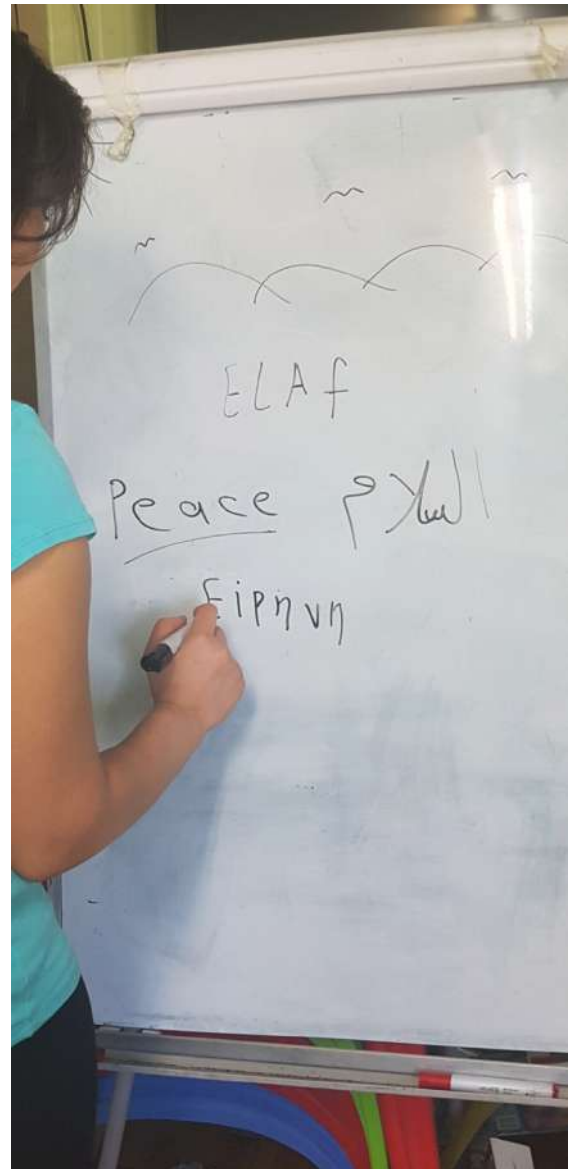


## ILAF Iraq

Ilaf is 19 years old and since 2017, she has been living in Greece. She comes from Iraq and her native language is Sorani. In the end of 2016, she decided to leave Iraq with her family, being already married and pregnant on her first child. The undergoing war between two tribes at the area of her origin, as well as her pregnancy, were the main reasons that made her leave her country for Europe. Ilaf left Iraq with her husband and his own family (father, mother and sister), with the unique initial desire to be able to live in safety.

After several attempts, they arrived in Greece. In the meantime, Ilaf had given birth and her baby girl was already four months old. Since for the Greek authorities Ilaf was still a minor, they all initially stayed in a hosting camp in Orestiada.

After she became an adult, they were all sent to the refugee camp, where they are settled nowadays. In the beginning, everything was difficult for



her, in Greece. On her first walks around Athens and outside the refugee camp, she visited Omonia Square.

The scenery and images, made her realize the need for herself and her family to integrate into the local community, in an attempt to make the future they dreamed of when leaving Iraq, come true. Starting Greek language courses was a first step towards this direction.

Ilaf said: "Today I can say for sure that I should have started my lessons in Greek earlier. However, even now, I'm glad that I was able to take part in your WEMIN lessons". Participating in the courses and starting learning Greek, made possible to have small talks with local people on everyday issues.

In addition, empowerment sessions have helped her to use the appropriate vocabulary depending on the various places and settings, like in a hospital or in services units. Now, she feels more comfortable when shopping in the market and even when visiting a doctor for her daughter. Being so pleased with her achieved progress, she says enthusiastically: "By learning the Greek language, I am happy to be able to show you

that I appreciate what you have done for me. In fact, I urge all women who want to stay in Greece, no matter how busy they are, to make the decision to participate in Greek lessons. Their efforts will be rewarded". It is a fact that WEMIN interventions have helped Ilaf to regain her self-confidence, seek better living conditions for herself and her family, and most important, keep on dreaming! Her next goal has already been set: after WEMIN actions are completed, she plans to enroll in a hairdressing school so as, to become a hairdresser and work as such in the future.

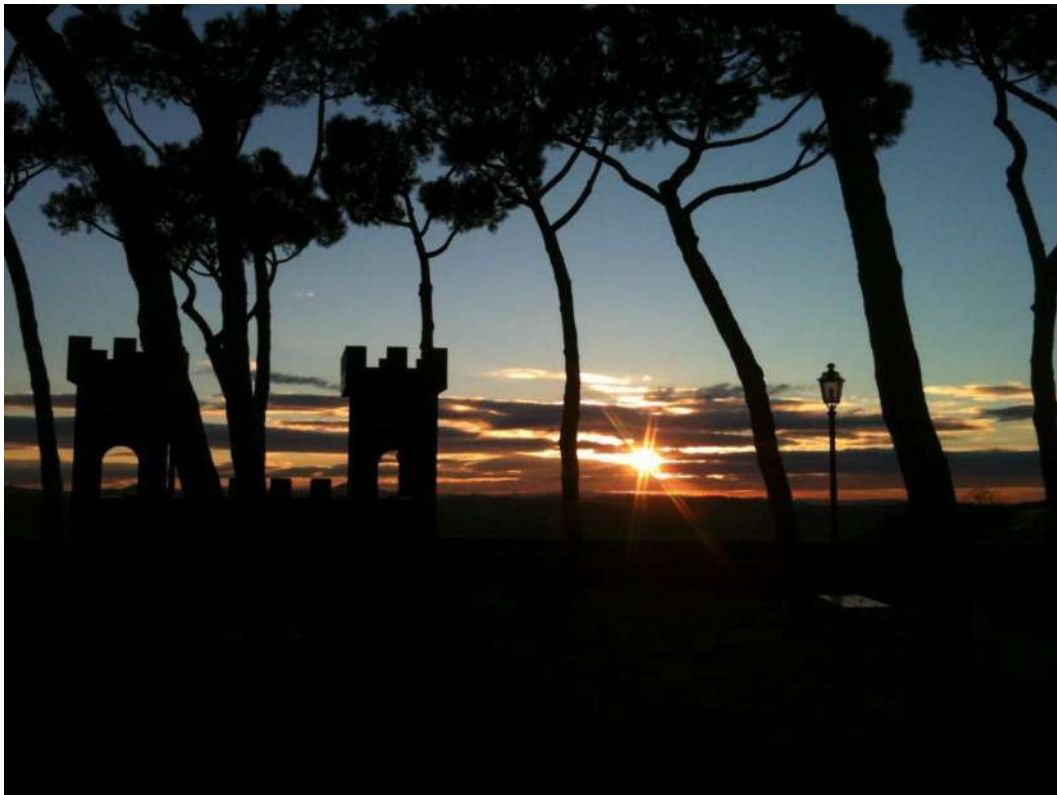
Last but not least, a permanent and absolute priority for Ilaf is raising her daughter in the best way! As she explained, when a woman starts her own family in Iraq, her entire life is devoted in raising her children. Ilaf hopes to do well in both, accomplishing her daughter's upbringing and achieving her personal goals!

## INTESAR Egypt

Intesar does not want to take a picture of herself; she prefers to share the place where her children play after school.

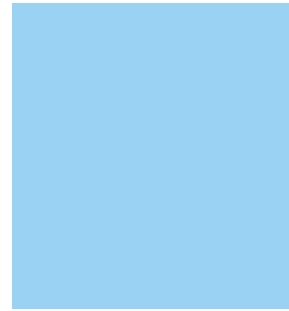
"For me, Italy is very similar to Egypt. People are kind: at the post office, at the hospital, at school, at the supermarket; mothers at the playground a little less. What job would I do? I've never worked, I don't know what job I'd like to do. I don't want a particular job. My desire is just to work"

*Photo credits: David Meseguer Oxfam Italia*





## ISRAT Bangladesh



Israt is proud to say that she get her degee on Business Administration in Bangladesh. She was living in Rampura, and she get married when she finished her studies. Then she left her parent's house as she went to live with her husban's parents. A new live was waiting for her, so exciting.

Looking for new horizons and a better future, she and her husband came to live in Barcelona. However, Israt misses her family. A lot.

Israt knows that job opportunities are much better when you have accredited studies and you master

the local language, that's what motivates her to study and participate in the Wemin program.

This incredible women explains that, in her free times, she loves to talk by phone with her family, keep in contact with them and keep them updated with the different and amazing stories about her little child.

Now, she is strongly convinced to continue to participate in Women program because she wants to help her child with the school's homework and help her family by finding a more qualified job for her.

# **JULIA AXONOWA**

## **Kazakhstan**

Julia Axönowa stands for a special group of women who came as migrants to Germany and Europe, about which there is little talk: migrant and refugee women of German background. Julia Axönowa came to Stuttgart from Kazakhstan four years ago. In Kazakhstan her family belongs to the German minority. However, only her grandmother spoke a little German. The common and everyday language of the family is and was Kazakh or Russian. In Kazakhstan Julia attended school and started studying. However, she felt more and more that her chances of a good career as a young and committed woman in Kazakhstan are limited.

The history of the German minority in Kazakhstan is old. In 1895, there were already the first German branches in the area around

Akmolinsk. The ancestors of today's Kazakh Germans were forcibly relocated after the dissolution of the Volga-German Republic from 1941 by the Ministry of Interior of the former USSR and they were forbidden to perform some special professions. Many Kazakh Germans were forced laborers in labor camps.

In 1979, the idea of forming an autonomous region of the Germans in Kazakhstan failed due to the massive resistance of the native Russian and Kazakh populations. Many experienced institutional discrimination. Many families decided to emigrate to Germany. Only a few sought a new beginning within Russia.

In comparison to other women who come to Germany as refugees or as migrants in search of work, Julia Axönowa had some advantages.



As a so-called "German-born" and after an "orientation phase" after her arrival in Germany, she immediately got a right of residence, a little later a German passport and citizenship. In the fast run she had to learn German. Within a year, she managed to speak German so well that she could start studying. Now she is about to finish her Master's degree in cultural studies. In Kazakhstan, she used to work as a teacher at an educational center. The challenges of getting along in her new country were enormous for her. Many unwritten rules, cultural peculiarities were new to her. She had to work out a lot for herself and always work parallel to school and her studies in order to earn money for her life in Germany.

She was able to build a circle of friends at the university, in her neighborhood and at work. She enjoys her contacts with other women with migration or refugee backgrounds. However, she always has to listen to remarks that as a German immigrant she had an easier

life and "just got things" for which other migrant and refugee women have to work hard and fight for.

German language and integration courses helped Julia to feel safer and cope with life in Germany. Today she designs training materials and courses that help new immigrants to arrive well in Germany. She is in good contact with her family in Kazakhstan. Today she goes for vacation to her old home in Kazakhstan. She does not want to return permanently. Her private as well as professional future is in Germany and in Europe.

## KATIANE Brazil



*English on Dorset Street*

Katiane is from Brazil. She has lived in Ireland for three years. She works full time but would like to find a job in her field. When asked about her experience attending the English classes provided through WEMIN she said "I meet amazing migrant women, from different countries and other cultures but with the same feelings and issues. All of us are trying to live our lives here after years in our own countries. Everybody has experienced going through similar situations and difficulties to be here. It's a relief to be part of this."

Khadija is 30 years old now. She enjoyed her childhood in Ouad Lau (Morocco), where she lived with her family near the beach. When she got married, she left school and, that same month, she and her husband decided to come to Barcelona.

Here her husband's family was waiting for them. Her first child arrived very soon, and after that another one, a little girl

that now is two years old.

Khadija responds to the question "what do you like to do most in your free time?" and she explain that, since she got married very young, she haven't been able to finish her studies in Morocco, so she whants so study, learn Spanish, Catalan and technology, because this will help her to find a job.

## **KHADIJA**

### **Morocco**



## **LAILA CHEBBI**

### **Maghreb**



Laila Chebbi has fled the Maghreb states. She is 37 years old and has three children who go to school. As a trained pastry chef from the hotel branch in her country of origin, she arrived in Germany in 2017. Due to her qualification and strong motivation, she joined a program called "Strong at work - mothers with a migration background join the labor market."

With this support, she made her first professional experience in the home economics area of a retirement residence and felt right at home there. In addition to her baking skills, she was able to score with language skills in Arabic and French among seniors.

Her friendly, empathetic and humorous nature was well received by the residents and her colleagues.

Meanwhile, Laila speaks German at B1 level. The beginning was difficult. She is ambitious and has been making every effort to expand her language practice. The language and culture courses specifically for women helped her and increased her self-confidence. At the same time, she has learned how everyday working life in Germany works and how to apply for a job.

This was successful: she has signed a permanent employment contract with the retirement home as a domestic service worker on a part-time basis and has been earning her first own money in Germany since June 2018. She is proud, not only for her cakes and that "her senior citizens" like her bakery, but also for her success in starting a new life for herself and her children on her own in Germany.

The project "Strong job - mothers with a migration background join the labor market" is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the European Social Fund as part of the program "Strong in the Job". Since July 2017 women with a refugee background have also been among the target group of this federal program.



## **LALI** **Georgia**

I am Lali, I am from Georgia and I have lived in France for already 3 years. To be a migrant is very difficult; here you must start your life from zero, and what and who you were in your home country doesn't matter, nor the success that you had. In September I enrolled in the Strasbourg University. The activities of the WEMIN project gave me opportunities to be active, to meet women from other countries and to share our experiences. ALDA is a truly important element for me here.

## LARIB Pakistan

I'm Larib and I came from Pakistan. I live in Portugal with my family and my favorite thing about Portugal is the beach. I love going to the beach with my family. In Portugal I have learned many things... I want to study to become a doctor. People are very nice, but I miss my country, my family who stayed there, my friends. I've been learning Portuguese at Renovar a Mouraria with Wemin project.

The project also gave me the opportunity to participate in workshops with people from different nationalities, learn from them things about their culture, participate in the decoration of the big popular party "Arraial de Santo António" and make new friends from Portugal, Nepal and India. I also had the opportunity to taste food from several different countries and my family had a street food point at the popular party in June. It was very fun and we all were very happy to feel part of the neighborhood.

My young brother attends the Study Support groups at Associação Renovar a Mouraria, as well and I also did a training program to become a local guide in the framework of another European project "Migrantour - NewRoots".





## **LEILA** **Bangladesh**

*Leila was a participant in the WEMIN English classes and other WEMIN events. She has now found employment in an information technology firm and she believes that WEMIN helped her get to where she is today. She has written her story in her own words:*

When I first came to Dublin my English level was good but I had difficulties to speak fluently or have a conversation with others. I knew that the only solution was PRACTICE. I started to do some online search to find English classes where I discovered WEMIN English Language & Communication class. Joining WEMIN English Language &

Communication class was a relief for me, I could practice my English but also make friends, share experience and have a social life. I attended to several events organised by WEMIN such as International Women Breakfast where I met interesting people. Thanks to this classes I feel that my English is way better, I made friends and I learnt a lot about the Irish culture. I could apply for a job and now I'm working and I'm fully integrated to the Irish society. Thank you WEMIN.

## MANEMA Guinea Conakry

.In my Country I was graduated in Law. Now I have to start again my life. Three times a week I used to go to school. Now I attend a cooking course where I learn Italian cuisine: especially Tuscan cuisine. I go to the vocational training five times a week from 9 am to 5.45 pm. We cook with the teachers and we do both practice and theory. The thing I like most is the practice! I like to understand how recipes are prepared, especially how

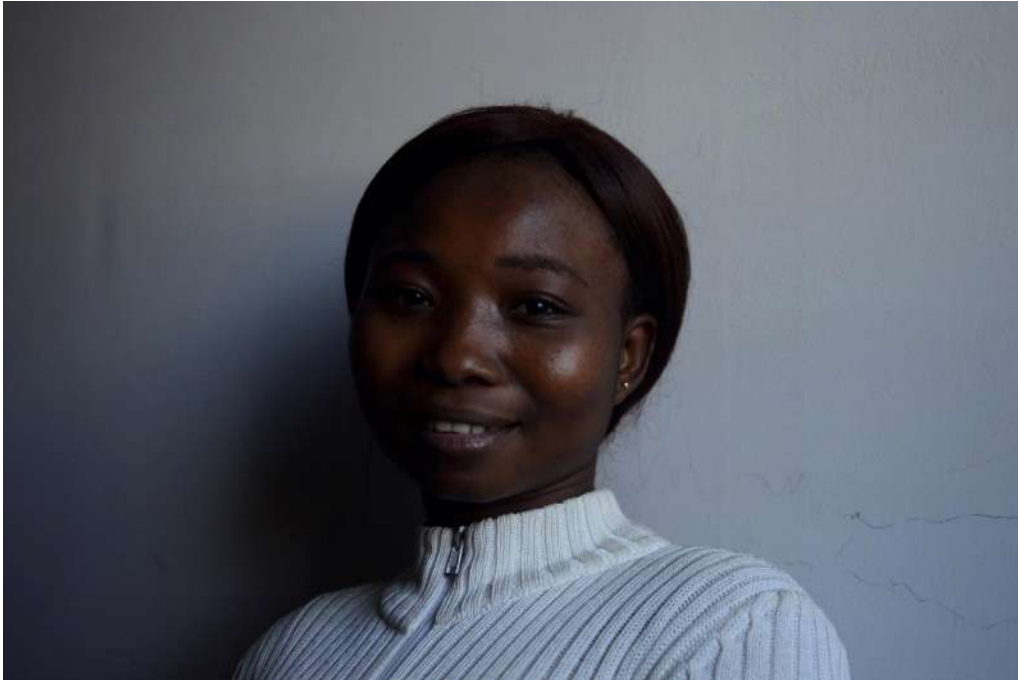
to make bread, fresh pasta. I am also able to make a good pizza. At the training they thought me the “maths” of cooking: if you mess up an ingredient, everything will go wrong. I have to study more to learn how to make good cakes. In November I will begin an internship in a restaurant in town!

*Photo credits: Nadin Formenti Oxfam Italia*





## MARIAMA Ivory Coast



When I ask Mariama where she comes from, she replies that she is from a small village, close to Florence. Her country of origin is far away from her now.

"For me, Italy was a country that respects people's rights. I imagined Italy like this, before leaving. What impressed me once I arrived were the woods, the forests, I didn't

expect so much green. People are kind, I met some Italian women, one of them is a saleswoman in the supermarket, at the bread counter. We are friends now!"

*Photo credits: Anna Pasquale Oxfam Italia*

## "MARIE" Cameroon

Marie is 32 years old and she is from Cameroon. She has studied marketing and she has been working as a teacher in her country, teaching French to small children. Being in serious danger, she left Cameroon in 2017.

Marie paid a lot of money to a man for helping her with her trip. When she arrived in Istanbul, Turkey, he introduced her to a woman who promised to help her to issue a residence permit. Instead, she got Marie into prostitution and kept all her documents.

"After this man left me, the woman told me this is the place you will stay and the place you can work. Work, which work, I said? You will see, she said, if you need residence you have obligation to do that. Do what? Sleep with men...This woman did me a lot of harm, also beating me, and torturing me in very bad ways. In the morning this place was normal and good, but in the night many men came. What this woman made me, I won't understand it in my whole life. I

didn't eat, I was only crying all day..."

Marie had been suffering this situation for six months, until one day she met a girl who helped her escape from this woman's house. "I told her I want to go to the police. She told me this was not a good idea, since I did not have any papers. Turkish don't know of human rights. If you go and accuse this woman, maybe she puts somebody to kill you. The only option you have is to run for Izmir, and from there to Greece." Marie was despaired and thought of returning to Cameroon, but fortunately this girl paid for all her transportation expenses and Marie arrived safe to Izmir. There she worked for almost a month in a garment business, so as to gain some money to pay for her trip to Greece. Along with thirty more persons, she crossed the Aegean Sea in a boat, wearing no life jacket since she didn't have enough money to pay the trafficker for it. However, she managed to arrive safe in a Greek island and then reached Athens.

"...When you have faced too many problems, you think now they are finished. I believed again that God exists, that he picked me and brought me to a paradise that I will not be in danger of being killed again....I am alone here and I have nothing, but if you are in a place that you feel secure and you are not afraid that somebody is going to kill you, you hope that one day you will have a family again. You see, when I come to school and I see all of you I am happy. I cannot stay in my house. To make what? I am happy of learning Greek. Because I want to speak. I want to be very important for this country. My intention is to work. I went in a hotel to work, where they were asking for English and Greek. The man there told me that if I learn to speak Greek everything will go well and I will find a job. So, this gave me power again to learn...I want to be useful for this country. I cannot be useful if I do not speak Greek. It is my obligation to learn it and to come here every time. Each day I come here I have one objective: to learn one sentence.

This gives me power. When I don't come to school I feel like sick, I am missing it. Even if I can't come from the beginning, even if I am sometimes late, I want to come. I live together with six girls in an apartment. They all have documents, but they don't go to school to learn Greek. Me, I have no documents but I come. Not just now, I started learning Greek since I was in the island. From 8.30 o'clock in the morning I attend different kind of courses here in Greece. When I get back home at night I say, ok God, everything went well today, I take my shower and I relax ...."



## NATIA Ukraine



I already knew some elements from Italian history, geography and literature before coming. I like Florence very much, I love art a lot and I hope to visit the museums that I haven't seen yet. I did a cooking class, this is also my passion. But most of all I would like to go back to

teaching. In my country I was a professor of literature. Now I miss the books, I miss reading in my language, but above all I miss teaching. I would do anything to teach again.

*Photo credits: Anna Pasquale  
Oxfam Italia*

## **NINA**

### **Nepal**



My name is Nina. I´m from Nepal, from Kathmandu. I Live in Lisbon and I`m 26 years old. I´m in Portugal since August 2018. I speak Nepalese and English. I´m also married.

I have brown eyes, long hair and I´m short.. I love Portugal because the weather is similar to Nepal. I think Portugal is a country with lots of history and development. I came to Portugal because my husband was already living in Portugal.

I´m learning Portuguese at Associação Renovar a Mouraria and also participating in the arts and crafts workshops on Saturdays. We are doing crochet with wired made from plastic bags and creating decorations for the popular party of Lisbon Arraial de Santo António, using recycled materials. I have already met women from Portugal, Brasil, Germany, Romania, Bangladesh, Japan and Spain.

I have a part-time job cleaning houses, and I´m trying to find a proper job. I would like to learn how to cook Portuguese food..

## NARGES

I have been in English class for a few months. I learned a lot of new things and I feel my English has relatively improved.

For first time I could call my daughter's school , it was so interesting. Also i met a number of ladies from another countries with different cultures, and I'm so happy about that."

Nawruz 2019



## OUSTINA Russia

"I have left Russia to come in France in 2007 with my two children. I have been helped a lot by local associations for migrants and refugees. For instance, I have been provided with housing and food for lunch and dinner.

Later, I have moved in my brother's place but I didn't like it at all because I could do nothing and I just stayed at home doing nothing. His house was small with only one living room and a bedroom. I arrived to Strasbourg in 2011. I could not benefit from social housing so I looked for private housing and I found a flat. Then I looked for a job and I obtained my first job in a packing company. I have resumed French classes with a local association. I wanted to pass a training to obtain a professional qualification to work in early childhood care, as it had always been my dream. However, due to the lack of job

offers in this area, I had to undertake professional training for being an employee in supermarkets in charge of filling shelves. I have started my first missions on the 25th of March.



## SHARIFE Afghanistan

Sharife is a woman from Afghanistan where, before leaving, she had a comfortable life and even operated her own business. However, in January 2016, due to safety problems in her country, she and her husband made a decision to leave the country with their children and to reach Germany.

An important motive for the couple's decision was their desire to ensure safety for their children and their right for going to school and studying. They managed to arrive in Greece, and after successive changes in their place of residence, they ended up in a hosting campus in Attica.

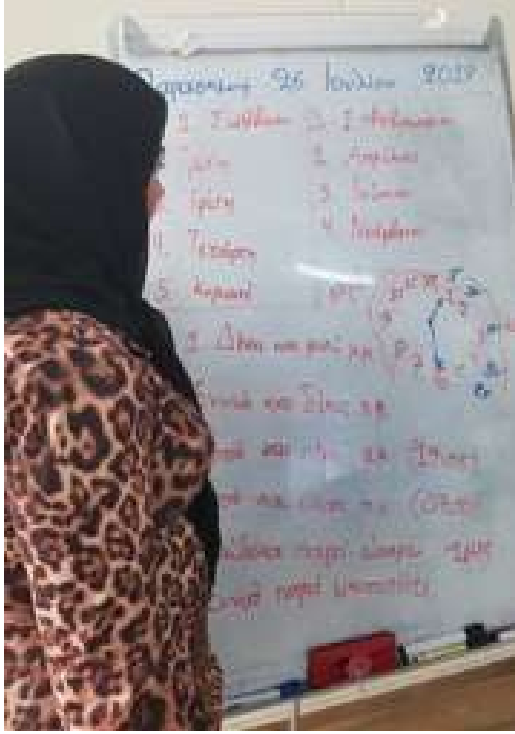
Realizing, though, that their prospects in Greece were limited, they decided to continue their journey to Germany. Initially, it was Sharife's husband who left and arrived in Germany. The youngest son followed due to his serious health problem as he needed immediate medical treatment.

Sharife had to trust the child in a family she had met, who were going from Greece to Germany.

Everything turned out well and the child met his father. Recently, Sharife with the rest of the family members in Greece have started the process for their family to be reunified in Germany. Meanwhile tough and since her husband left, Sharife's life has changed significantly! The difficulties she faces in raising her as children on her own, are many: she worries about their safety and feels strongly the responsibility she has undertaken. The best possible care of her children is her main concern in all her decisions.

Sharife does not speak Greek yet, a fact that exacerbates her problems and makes her feel weak. Neither can she keep track of her children's progress at school, nor she can communicate directly and effectively with trainers and social services – this is a situation that frustrates her a lot!





She has realised that until the family reunification in Germany is completed, learning how to communicate in Greek with the staff of the services and structures she visits, is necessary!

This is the reason why she seeks to participate in educational activities; so, when she learned about the launch of the WEMIN training course, she expressed her interest immediately! Today she is one of

women who has not missed a class, while her progress in Greek is obvious! She is a very dynamic woman, smiling and willing to do things!

“If all the lessons I attended in these three years were like yours, nowadays I could speak and write Greek fluently. Lessons were done in a comprehensible and correct way. The trainer, as well as the interpreters, helped us greatly to achieve what we have achieved so far. I would like very much to continue learning Greek, because I feel my progress is obvious. I had never felt such warmth and had never loved a class that much ..”

Last but not least, talking about Greece, she says that she likes it very much, as it has beautiful landscapes and very friendly people. However, she believes that conditions are not easy for refugees to cope with and this is the reason why most families choose other European countries as a place of residence.

**SHUMAILA**  
**Pakistan**



I describe Renovar Mouraria as an NGO that supports immigrant people without asking for anything in return. The Wemin project is one of the programmes held by this organization.

Some of these supports are the teaching of Portuguese as a foreign language directed at immigrants and the arts and crafts workshops integrated in the Wemin project, in which I participated, study support for children and young people, legal support services, among others.

The Wemin project gave me the opportunity to represent my culture at a major cultural event, namely through the presentation of Pakistani food.

It has supported me in setting up my Pakistani food sales business and whenever possible invites me to attend various events and activities with my cuisine.

I am very grateful to Renovar Mouraria and all the techniques that work in this association and project. Here I learned to help people without asking anything in return, I learned Portuguese, I learned about Portuguese culture.

Happiness in life is not permanent so when you have happy moments in life, enjoy it to the limit and forget all the sadness. I wish you all the best so that you can continue to do an excellent job.

## **TASMIA**

### **Bangladesh**

This is Tasmia. I'm currently in Lisbon which is the capital of Portugal. Lisbon is the oldest city of Western Europe. One can visit many historical places here. I'm enjoying this place a lot. Lisbon is a stunning city of Portugal, and is one of the most charismatic and vibrant

cities of Europe. It is a city that effortlessly blends traditional heritage with striking modernism and progressive thinking. As a holiday destination, Lisbon offers a rich and varied history, a buzzing nightlife and is blessed with a glorious year-round climate.



One can visit Rossio Square, Baixa, Alfama, Algarve, Cascais, Belem. I would like to share my experience with you about some places where I have already visited. First of all, I would like to tell about Rossio Square, it is a main square since the middle ages and it has been the setting of revolts, celebrations, bullfights and executions. Then, the amazing Cascais sea beach which is one of the amazing places one can visit. Another is Alfama, an area that is constructed with different historical monuments. It will take the whole day if I talk about the history and the beauty of the country.

Now I am gonna talk about an important issue of my life. As I am living here as a migrant woman, I was in need of some basic things here to simply live. All of this became easier after I got the address of Renovar A Mouraria. Firstly, I faced some issues to live here with the legislation. One time I heard that Portugal is serving free consultancy with a lawyer for migrant people and I benefited from it, a lawyer actually gave me information about the very valuable things I have to take care of. She also

told me about the Portuguese language course provided by Renovar A Mouraria, free of cost, in the framework of a European project called WEMIN. After joining the class I got to know about other activities of the project which is an opportunity to meet other migrant women and share each other's experiences. Here we can do some arts and crafts. This opportunity of meeting different migrant women has changed my life as I am a very much fond of making new friends. This is so informative, inspiring and innovative I must say. We are doing crafts from waste things. For instance, tetra packs, plastics, glass bottle, and glass bowl. In my opinion, this is a huge step to save the environment. People can also get influenced by doing such things. Renovar A Mouraria has taken a big step by doing this. In addition, they give a chance to work to migrant people. From the first day I joined them I found them so helpful. I believe this organization can bring enormous changes in Portugal. My good wishes will be always for them.

# YASMEN ALTALLAWI

## Syria

In 2014, the now 30-year-old Yasmen Altallawi from Syria came to Germany. She had to flee from her homeland. After attending integration and language courses, she managed to speak German very well in just under three years. Today she is studying Civil Engineering in the fourth semester. Yasmen has already studied this subject for two years in Syria. Her studies had to stop because of the war. In Germany she was able to build on the experience of studying in Syria, but had to start all over again from the beginning with the first semester.

Her very special attention gives Yasmen Altallawi, in addition to her studies, to her two children. They are 10 and seven years old. They came from Syria with her and parents. Unfortunately, her husband was victim of conflicts in her home country. He died at the age of 25 years. He was shot in the street. The loss hurts until today. Yasmen lives in Stuttgart at her parents' place. They are a great support to her, especially when looking after the children. Her daughters now attend kindergarten

and school. They speak very well German. Her parents still have a hard time with the German language, despite many courses. At home all speak Arabic. This is good for their daughters because they automatically speak both languages perfectly. For her parents, the German language is difficult, the courses are demanding. Only in the specific courses of WEMIN it was possible to consider the special learning needs. Yasmen's parents are motivated to speak German well. Good knowledge of the local language and culture helps to better cope with everyday life.

At the university Yasmen was able to quickly build a new circle of friends. She enjoys the international and cosmopolitan atmosphere in Stuttgart and has both local friends, as well as friends who came from far away like her.

The success of Yasmen and her children also motivates her parents. In the meantime her father feels so secure with the German language that he wants to work a little bit again.

Despite his 72 years, he would like to help out as a trained painter in a painter company in Germany.

The reason why Yasmen, her parents and the children came to Stuttgart is - in addition to the good integration policy of the city - her sister. She has been living in Stuttgart for some time and is married to a German partner. Her sister helped her with the family reunification. Yasmen's two younger brothers are also in Germany and are studying medical technology. Her older sister married a man from Saudi Arabia and lives there.

Yasmen and her family worry about their eldest sister. She still lives in Syria. The parents are very worried about her. The Internet now allows to stay connected, but the situation on the ground in Syria is still unstable and dangerous. Yasmen tries support her parents best possible with the many questions and problems they have. In the meantime she has a good network in Stuttgart, knows where to find help and knows advice centers.

Yasmen often feels torn between the different tasks and roles she has. She is a mother, a student, she manages her

family and her parents, cares for her brothers and wants to create and enjoy her life in her new hometown as much as possible. Through the city of Stuttgart she met other volunteer women. Today Yasmen leads the project "Frauenpower" of the city of Stuttgart and is a member of the Syrian student association of the University of Stuttgart. Yasmen has arrived in Stuttgart. She is actively shaping life in her new hometown!



*"The WEMIN project gave me the opportunity to represent my culture at a major cultural event, namely through the presentation of Pakistani food. **It has supported me** in setting up my Pakistani food sales"*

Shumaila, Pakistan

*Being a very sociable person who enjoys meeting new people, the hardest thing for "Bahar" at the beginning was not being able to communicate because of the language gap. She does not yet speak Greek, but **thanks to WEMIN courses she started reading.***

"Bahar", Afghanistan



*"I'm glad that I was able to take part in the WEMIN lessons. Participating in the courses and starting to learn Greek, **made possible** to have small talks with local people on everyday issues"*

Ilaf, Iraq







*"The activities of the **WEMIN** project gave me the opportunity to be active, to meet women from other countries and to share our experiences. **It is a truly important element for me here"***

Lali, Georgia

*"About WEMIN classes: "I meet amazing migrant women, from **different countries and other cultures, but with the same feelings and issues**. All of us are trying to live our lives here after years in our own countries. **It's a relief to be part of this"***

Katiane, Brazil

***"Joining WEMIN English Language & Communication class was a relief for me, I could practice my English, but also make friends, share experience and have a social life. I attended to several events organized by WEMIN, such as International women Breakfast where I met interesting people. Thanks to these classes, I feel that my English is way better, I made friends and I learned a lot about the Irish culture. I could apply for a job and now I'm working, and **I'm fully integrated into the Irish society. Thank you WEMIN"*****

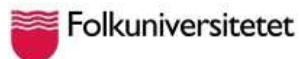
Laila



## Coordinator



## Contributing partners



Colectic

Tecnologia per la  
transformació social



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