

**SMS** - SUPPORTING THE GREEK AUTHORITIES IN MANAGING THE NATIONAL RECEPTION SYSTEM FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND VULNERABLE MIGRANTS



**THIS IS**



**OUR**



**STORY**



Funded by the  
Asylum, Migration and  
Integration Fund of the  
European Union



**IOM**  
UN MIGRATION



This booklet contains unique stories from people, who have been living in open accommodation sites all over Greece during 2020. With the valuable support of colleagues in the field and the excellent collaboration with migrants' communities, 15 interviews have been conducted with migrants who wanted to share their stories in public. People with special talents and thirst for knowledge, children with dreams for a better future, men and women who seek to be active in their everyday life and develop their skills, take the floor and share their experiences.



## SMS - Supporting the Greek Authorities in Managing the National Reception System for Asylum Seekers and Vulnerable Migrants

IOM supports the National authorities in the management of all long-term accommodation sites in mainland Greece and aims at ensuring dignified and harmonized reception standards for applicants of international protection. As the delegated authority to the European Commission, IOM has developed the intervention and implements this project in partnership with UNICEF, as the co-delegated authority, and other partners such as the Danish Refugee Council Greece (DRC Greece), Arbeiter Samariter Bund (ASB), the Municipality of Athens - through the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA) -, ARSIS, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), METAdrasi, Zeuxis and Terre des Hommes. The project is funded by the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission (DG HOME).

### COMPONENTS

- **Site Management Support (SMS):** Supporting the day-to-day management of the accommodation sites by performing activities such as data management, reception and reallocation, distributions, and care and maintenance.
- **Protection:** Supporting vulnerable groups through provision of direct assistance, with special focus on psychosocial and legal support and child protection, as well as the creation of safe spaces for children and women.
- **Interpretation:** Providing interpretation services facilitating the communication of beneficiaries with site actors, as well as hospitals.
- **Non-Formal Education:** Providing quality learning opportunities to children, youth and adults, through homework support classes for children, educational visits and others.
- **Community Support and Engagement:** Facilitating access to accurate and comprehensive information and service mapping, encouraging participation of asylum seekers to meaningful activities, education and livelihood opportunities for adults in and outside the sites.
- **Unaccompanied Migrant Children:** Managing Safe Zones within selected sites through specialized Child Protection Partners to ensure maintenance, provision of food and non-food items, recreational activities and specialized legal and psychosocial support.
- **Capacity building:** Organizing capacity-building activities to enhance skills and facilitate the handover of services to the Government of Greece.
- **Areas of action:** Mainland Greece

“Thanks to the six languages I speak (Pashto, Urdu, English, Hindko, Punjabi, Farsi) there are many refugees and migrants I can communicate with. Currently Greek has been added to the list, as it is the seventh language I want to master. Work is truly important to me but, at the same time, painting is where my heart belongs to.”



## JAMEEL KHAN

### A multilingual painter

“Chester Bennington’s voice and his songs, have kept my spirits up during the rough moments. I managed to reach Greece in 2016 and have lived in camps for the most part up until 2018. His lyrics were my strength, they inspired me, they kept me going.

I was just sixteen then... soon to turn seventeen, having my younger brother with me; our father had not yet made it to Greece, and he was stuck in Turkey. So, Bennington was my guardian angel. Now, in my twenties and, although things have changed for the better and I have potential and prospects, Bennington is still by my side. Thanks to IOM, where I have been working as an interpreter since 2018 with the SMS project, I have a healthy daily routine and the means to achieve my goals. Painting is one of them. The first time I came to realise I was good at it, was in primary school where I received the basic knowledge around it. In the past years, sketches, drawings, and paintings allowed me to express my deep emotions, my inner self.

I like to paint this way; I put music on -Bennington remains my top choice- anything negative disappears. I chill and I create. Looking back on my recent past, raking it up is something that happened to me often, yet not in a bad or painful way. Working with migrants and refugees was a wish of mine because I can understand what they are going through

thus, now I can help my fellow human beings offering them useful services and a friendly hand like the one that was offered to me when I mostly needed so, which I grabbed and used it as the springboard for a better future. Thanks to the six languages I speak (Pashto, Urdu, English, Hindko, Punjabi, Farsi) there are many refugees and migrants I can communicate with. Currently Greek has been added to the list, as it is the seventh language I want to master. Work is truly important to me but, at the same time, painting is where my heart belongs to.

Until now, I have participated in a dozen exhibitions in Athens and Thessaloniki and I was about to travel to Budapest for another exhibition, but it got cancelled due to COVID-19. My latest participation was at an event in Thessaloniki organized at the French Institute, while many works of mine have been sent to Germany, Belgium, USA, Luxembourg where they were exhibited and sold to art lovers. Studying is a dream of mine and, ideally, I would like to go either for engineering or architecture. I am a strongly motivated person who finds inspiration for solutions in art. As for Greece and Thessaloniki in particular, it is my home turf and I do not wish to leave it. I see it as my haven and, right now, I could not imagine building a life away from this city.”

## FATIMA HAIDARI

## “Focus on my goals”

Fatima Haidari, a mother of three, originally from Afghanistan, had a long and difficult life journey. She had to overcome many challenges to finally reach her own happy place; knowing that her children are safe - even though they are miles away from her. “Now my daughter, 15 years old, and my son 12 years old, are staying in a shelter in Germany, as unaccompanied minors. I live in Malakasa camp, in Greece with my younger son who is 9 years old. I’m trying my best to educate myself and my son through internet, books and classes that are taking place in the camp. I studied hard to get my diploma in English and finally made it. Now, I’m working as an interpreter in Solidarity Now.” Fatima admits that she faced many difficulties since her early years. “I was a migrant since I was a young girl. I was born in Pakistan from Afghan migrants. I had to move in Iran for my husband and then we moved together to Afghanistan. One year and three months ago, I made a life changing decision for me and my kids, we moved to Greece without telling anyone - not even my husband.”

“Our marriage was decided by our families. When I was 13 years old, they announced me that I had to leave school and get married. I didn’t want to, but this wasn’t something I could avoid,” she recalls. “My husband and I lived in Iran for quite some time. As migrants we faced many problems. The most important was that our children were out of school. Unfortunately, education wasn’t an option for them. Even though I’m not very well-educated, I tried to teach them at home everything I knew. That was my motivation; to learn more for me and for them.” “As a child I wanted to be a teacher. I wasn’t given the chance, but it seems to me that I did it my own way for my kids.” “It was difficult, but I didn’t have a choice.

I didn’t want my children to be uneducated. I wanted them to be useful for the society, to find their own path. And education is the only way to do that.” Her strength and invincible will to shape hers and her children’s life in a free and safe future, made her make the big decision.

“I could see that my story would be repeated. My daughter was 14 years old, so my husband and our families thought that it was time for her to get married as well. I couldn’t let that happen. This time, I managed to do something about it. I decided to move to Europe with my children. Even though I knew that it was going to be a difficult and very dangerous route. I wasn’t sure that we were going to make it, I had to take the leap of faith. Not for me, but for them. Without telling anyone we left.” “I didn’t care having a good or even a better life. I just wanted to support my children. To be educated, to help them find their own selves; to become better people and have options.” “Me and my son reached Alexandroupolis, in Northern Greece. My daughter and my other son are in Germany.”

“It’s been a long time since the last time I saw them. I’m trying to be helpful for the society in Greece and let the time go by. Of course I want to reunite with my children, but what matters to me the most is them to live safe and be free to choose their own life path.” Fatima has managed to create her daily routine in Malakasa: “I was looking for a job. IOM staff and Solidarity Now encouraged me to apply for the position. So here I am, working as a translator. I’m very happy that I can be helpful for my community. I feel that I can relate to their stories and support them. In the future I’d like to educate myself more, learn Greek, become a social worker and become even more useful.”



“ I want to reunite with my children, but what matters to me the most is them to live safe and be free to choose their own life path. ”



“Psychological equilibrium and stability are priorities for me. Music and wrestling are an ideal combination to achieve it.”



## ESMAIL GHOLAMI

### Strength of music

“Wrestling is a family tradition; it is really something special for me and my family. I started practicing 20 years ago, when I was fifteen years old. I was taking part in local championships, but I did not have the chance to participate in international tournaments. My dream is to become a professional athlete and compete in an international level. Sportsmanship is a communication bridge between nations,” says Esmail after finishing his guitar lesson in Malakasa open accommodation site. Esmail came to Greece from Afghanistan two years ago with his wife and two children. They are currently staying in Malakasa open facility, where Esmail, together with professional Greek teachers, teaches guitar to children in the camp’s music school run by the non - profit organization “Connect by music”. Among his students is his older son Milad. “I want my children to learn how to play a music instrument and I also want to share my music skills with them. Music brings balance to our lives and helps us escape from the everyday difficulties. If you combine music with wrestling you manage to achieve psychological equilibrium,” Esmail says with his calm voice. “Physical strength is one thing, but when I combine music with sports, I also feel strong inside and this is very important for me and my family,” he adds.

Esmail is also following training sessions in Athens with his Greek wrestling coach who is very proud of his progress and devotion. His coach, impressed by his strong will, his daily commitment to commute by train back and forth daily and his performance during the intensive wrestling training, was ready to include him to an International Refugee Team for the Tokyo Olympics. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, trainings have been put on hold, but the camp is always a good place to practice! “When the camp was under quarantine, I had the chance to teach wrestling to children in the camp, almost on a daily basis. Children’s response was amazing, and I knew that I was a good example for them. Wrestling is a combination of mind and body and that means discipline and concentration,” says Esmail. Esmail is an asylum seeker who wants to stay in Greece and watch his children growing and going to the Greek school. “I want my children to learn the Greek language like I do. I have reached A2 level in Greek and English language as well, and I am also following online courses to enhance my skills,” he says. Esmail’s language classes are part of the non-formal education component, as organized by IOM and Solidarity Now inside Malakasa camp in partnership with UNICEF.

## FARZANA HAKIMI AND FERIDON RAHIMI

### Sharing the knowledge

“We want to learn, and we want to teach! Learning a language is a very important communication tool,” says Farzana Hakimi, after finishing her English language course with young female students in the open accommodation site of Malakasa, close to Athens. “Teaching strengthens the bonds between the camp community and brings people closer, especially the children, who are eager to learn new things,” she says with a smile on her face. Feridon Rahimi (42) and Farzana Hakimi (36) came to Greece from Afghanistan thirteen months ago. They spent four months in Moria Reception and Identification Center, before their transfer to Malakasa camp in the Greek mainland. “When we were in Moria, we noticed that children had a lot of free time and we wanted to do something interesting for their everyday life. Now that we are in Malakasa, we managed to implement our idea,” says Farzana. “With the support of IOM, we have managed to organize English language courses for boys and girls. I run a class with girls and my husband is helping young boys three times per week,” she adds. The classes of Farzana and Feridon are complementary to the courses that IOM, UNICEF and Solidarity Now run for the site community, in the framework of the site management support. “COVID-19 has affected the lives of all people in the country, including ours and the camp has been under quarantine in the past. We acknowledge the

need to follow the rules and the importance of safety, but at the same time we want to do something nice for ourselves and the children in the camp.” Feridon and Farzana believe that teaching children a new language is an investment for the future. In parallel, they both organize recreational activities to make the class more productive and colorful. “The positive response we get from the children and their parents is our biggest reward. Living in a camp has a lot of challenges, but at the same time communicating with children helps us alleviate the stress we may feel from time to time,” admits Farzana who also teaches her little daughter Mahya. “We are both students and teachers,” says Feridon. “We also follow English language lessons and at the same time we learn the Greek language. We want to be a good example for our children,” he adds. With the support of IOM and Solidarity Now teams, Farzana participates also in special community groups, organized in a weekly basis, focused on female population in the camp. “It is important to motivate women to get out of their containers and communicate their thoughts. Those groups support our socialization into the community and help us build relationships based on trust and confidence.” Farzana and Feridon met each other when they were children and since then they are together. They are staying in Malakasa camp, as asylum seekers.



“Teaching strengthens the bonds between the camp community and brings people closer.”



“Team work, trust, discipline, respect are the life values that basketball has taught me.”



## MOHAMMAD HUKEM ASKARI

# Dreaming through basketball

“Back in Afghanistan, I remember myself watching on TV my role model Michael Jordan and imagining it was me on the screen scoring instead of him, dreaming of the day that I would feel free and safe to enjoy basketball as well. When we first came to Greece, I couldn’t imagine that my dream would come true eventually.” Mohammad Hukem Askari, a 17-year-old Afghan boy, who is currently staying with his family in Malakasa camp, confesses the difficulties he faced in his early life.

“We didn’t have any playgrounds in Afghanistan, so it was difficult for me to play basketball with my friends. But, the more difficult it was, the more I wanted to play.” Mohammad had to leave school when he was in 7th grade in order to work as a translator and help his family make ends meet.

“Once I started working, the situation became more difficult and dangerous for me and my family, so we were forced to leave. Ever since the day we arrived in Malakasa camp I feel more optimistic. Once I saw the backboards in the camp, I felt so excited. I started immediately practicing.” Mohammad had the chance to participate in the AntetokounBros Academy. NBA

player, Giannis Antetokounmpo, and his brothers created the academy in order to support vulnerable social groups in Greece. The aim is to provide access to sport, inspire through education, and give scholarships to open pathways in life.

“One day, the IOM staff informed me that I could participate in AntetokounBros Academy. They told me about Giannis story, his background and how he managed to accomplish his goals. His life path is so similar to mine. He is an inspiration to me. It was like a big dream coming true.”

“During our first training in the Academy I realized why basketball is the ultimate sport for me. It’s not only about the joy of the game. It’s the team work, the trust, the discipline and respect - the life values that teaches you, while you’re playing.”

“I’m the oldest child in my family. Through basketball I’d like to show my brothers that with team work we can achieve everything in life. Just like Giannis and his brothers did.” Mohammad is looking forward for the lockdown to finish and the Academy to reopen. He’s practicing almost every day in the camp to get better. He wants to continue his studies and combine them with his favorite sport.



## ZAHRA MORADI AND SAKINEH RAHIMI

### The value of education

Zahra Moradi and Sakineh Rahimi, two women with similar backgrounds met accidentally in Ritsona camp and united to create a better world through education. Zahra and Sakineh were born and raised in Iran from Afghan parents. They lived as migrants with their husbands and children and faced the same challenges.

“We were facing racism in Iran. Our children weren’t entitled even to basic education. The situation was really bad. The Afghan society in Iran organized classes in abandoned buildings secretly”, Sakineh admits.

“Since our children weren’t allowed to get education, me and other ladies were teaching children at home, almost every day. We had created our own schedule and home classes”, Zahra adds.

They both highlight the value of education; “Education is a light able to change a child’s life. This is the way that children are able to support themselves, their families and the society in general.”

Education was also the element that brought the women together. They both attended English classes that were taking place in the camp, under the non-formal education component, as implemented by IOM in partnership with UNICEF and Solidarity Now. They enjoyed learning a new language.

“Learning a new language is like opening a new world. Especially, here in Europe, it is essential to speak English.”

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19

restrictions and lockdown the classes stopped. Their community in the camp proposed to IOM team to support them in creating their own classes. Both women volunteered teaching English for beginners to anyone who was interested. It turned out to be a success.

In total, 30 people living in the camp are voluntarily teaching English, Farsi, mathematics, handcrafts and more than 100 people of all ages are attending the classes.

“We wanted to do something for our children. During the lockdown the kids were playing all day. All mums of the camp wanted this to change. Our husbands also supported our initiative. Zahra and I already have learned the basic rules and vocabulary of the English language and we thought that it would be a great idea to participate as teachers,” says Sakineh.

“The students loved the classes! During the teaching period, no one has missed any of our classes. We feel happy and content for contributing in our community. The lack of education was among the reasons that we left Iran. We didn’t want the same thing happen to us here,” says Zahra.

“In collaboration with IOM team, we have created a weekly schedule and we use special spaces to conduct the lessons, always following COVID-19 protection measures. We believe that education is the way to create a better future for our children and our society.”



“Education is a light able to change a child’s life.”



“I created a book with my travel up to Greece in order to sensitize people all over the world and raise awareness towards refugees’ lives.”



## MURSAL BIBI AHMADI

# Studying towards integration

“My name is Mursal Bibi Ahmadi and I am 21 years old. I come from Afghanistan and more specifically from the city Mazar-Sharif. I am here in Greece for 9 months now, along with my family. My family consists of 6 members, me, my parents, my 2 sisters (14 & 10 years old) and my baby brother (5 months old). I have finished the 9-year basic education in my country. I have received the praise of the best student by the school’s principal. After my high school graduation and because I loved mathematics, I started as a university student at the department of Economics for 1,5 year. At the university, I had to deal with new lifestyle, we were not children anymore, we had started to “become” and “act” like adults. Unfortunately, I have postponed my education due to my flee from my homeland. We were forced to leave our country and our house in order to save our lives. My father and my sister had already faced difficulties and we didn’t have any other option. Our journey from Afghanistan to Greece began almost a year ago, in 2019. First, we

stayed in Iran for 2 weeks and our next station was Turkey. Eventually, we came to Greece. Looking back on time, my best memories are those with my grandmother, when I was younger. Life was easier back then, even though I was a role model for my younger sisters, something really stressful for me, but at the same time a great honor. I had plenty of time for drawing and making dreams for my future. My biggest ambition till now is to give exams for Oxford University. I want to attend Legal and Economic Study. Moreover, one of my desires is to help people voluntarily in any way I can. I used to provide my assistance to NGO Happy Caravan as a volunteer-interpreter and I created a book with my travel up to Greece in order to sensitize people all over the world and raise awareness towards refugees’ lives. Last but not least, I want to succeed my integration by attending school and learn the Greek language, because I wish to complete my studies on economics and start my life here in Greece.”

## FATIME HASIMI

## Painting is the key to healing

The healing process for Fatime Hasimi started the day she began painting again. Fatime, originally from Afghanistan, along with her husband, her 3 children and 7 grandchildren are currently staying in Ritsona camp.

Fatime recalls her birthplace, her childhood. She loved painting ever since she was a little girl. When she speaks about art, her face lights up. As a child, having no colors or paper, she used the mud in the front yard of her house to create beautiful flowers and the faces of her parents and brothers. "I was trying to captivate the happiness with my fingers." Now, she uses her grandchildren's colors to create her paintings. Fatime holds the portraits of her family, with pride. "I only miss the portrait of my daughter," she says and her eyes water.

"My daughter lives with her family in Afghanistan. It's been 5 years since the last time I saw her in person. I miss her so much." Fatime holds another painting inspired from Afghanistan.

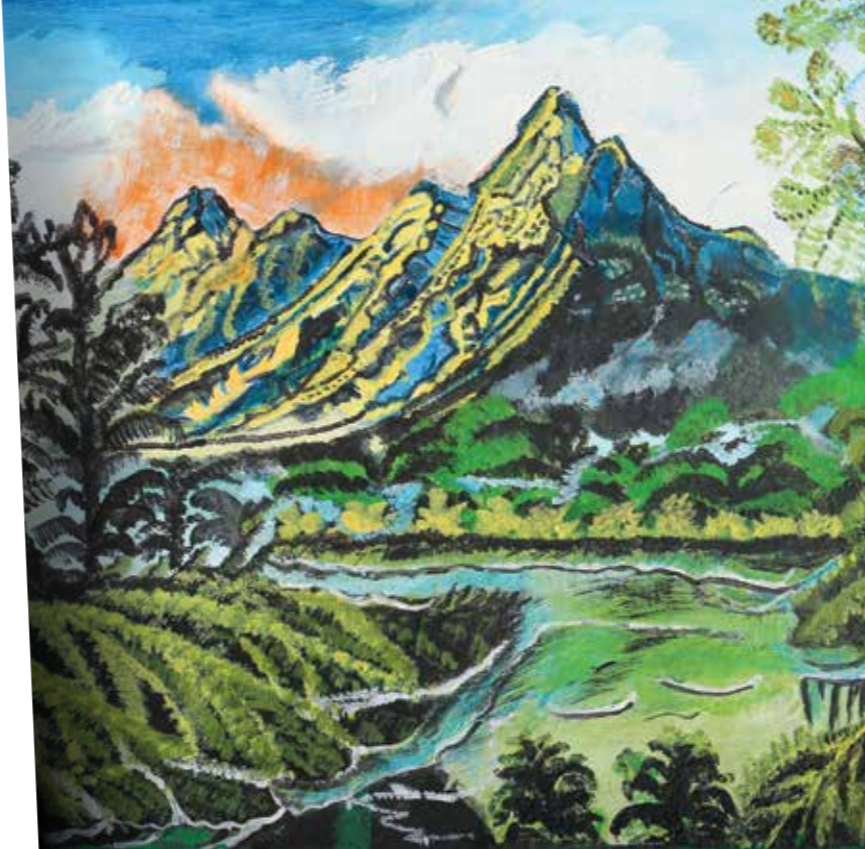
"I love that place, but we were facing many difficulties. One day a bomb demolished our house while I was in it. I broke my hand, my back and my neck. I was in terrible pain and stayed in

hospital for several months. I was in a wheelchair for 3 years. The incident made us realize, something we already knew; we weren't safe anymore and we had to leave." "At first we reached Turkey and stayed there for 3 years. Two years ago we reached Samos."

During all these years due to her bad health condition and the challenges they were facing, she couldn't paint. She couldn't even move her arm and grab a pencil. Ever since, she was feeling anxiety and depression.

"One day my husband gave me a paper and a pencil and told me to draw what I had in mind. It was a challenge for me. At first, I was hesitating, but when I drew the first line, I knew that the healing process had begun. It was like a miracle. Gradually, I started feeling better and better. My mind escaped the pain, the sadness and sorrow and was filled with colors and beautiful landscapes. Even today when my husband sees me sad or depressed, he gives me a pencil and says to me; If you love me, paint."

Fatime is dreaming of the day she will be reunited with her daughter and create the portrait that she misses so much.



“ At first, I was hesitating, but when I drew the first line, I knew that the healing process had begun. It was like a miracle. Gradually, I started feeling better and better. ”

“ Interacting with people inspires me and I wish someday to become a cultural mediator in an international organization that helps refugees and migrants all over the world.”



KHALED AL HAMADI

## Love for foreign languages

“My name is Khaled Al Hamadi. I'm 20 years old and I am from Syria. I have been staying in Greece for three years. I first arrived in Chios island, where I stayed for 5 months and then I was transferred to Andravida open accommodation facility. Members of my family are currently in Iraq and in Germany. When I was in Syria I studied in high school and during my staying in Greece I studied in the Greek public school. I speak English and Greek and one of my future plans is to study the German language as well. I have already participated in German, English and Greek lessons organized by IOM, under the non-formal education component. I have been living in Andravida camp for some months now and I am trying to be an active member of this small society.

During my free time, apart from playing the guitar, I am organizing activities in which other children in the camp can take part. I was also working as a volunteer escort to an IOM bus which transferred children to the public school. Interacting with people inspires me and I wish someday to become a cultural mediator in an international organization that helps refugees and migrants all over the world. This is the reason I am interested in studying foreign languages. Everyone has a different personality, but sometimes we share the same thoughts, same fears, same hopes. I strongly believe in communication between people, regardless nationality and religion. I want to say that I am optimist person who makes dreams for the future.”

## SAHER AHMED

From a, b, c to...“may I help you with Greek?”

“I was in a haze”, Saher tells IOM, his bright eyes depicting his intense emotions of the first days post his arrival into Greece. “It was all about unknown shapes and funny sounds.

All was... Greek to me and Greece was a foreign land”. IOM met Saher at his compartment at the long-term accommodation site in Drama, inside his neat room.

Twenty-nine-year-old Saher has been through a lot in the past two years. Forced migration, solitude, seclusion.

A young man who had suddenly become a stranger among strangers. He remained a Kurd from Iraq -his identity would never change- but his mother tongue, Sorani, was no longer useful because of the new norm in place. He and his family had migrated to Greece. Consequently, the Greek language had taken over and dominated his everyday life. But he did not know how to speak it, thus he could not communicate with people easily. Everything was new to Saher and for the first eight months he was lost, as if someone had pulled the rug from under his feet. “I could not speak, I had no friends - no chat time for me,” he remembers. It was about time he acted,

he decided. The number one secret to his own life success was taking baby steps each day. No tutor by his side yet with the help of dozens of Modern Greek language online applications at first, he sensed he could break the ‘code’. “Ligo, ligo,” he says now in broken but fine Greek, that means ‘little by little’ referring to the progress he made. Following the initial hiccups then came the thaw. After moving from place to place around Greece with his wife and their little boy, and before being transferred to IOM’s facility in Greece’s northern city of Drama, opportunity knocked and Saher took advantage of it. While in the city of Veria, he got the chance to attend night school classes of Greek for two months.

That boosted his learning capacity, offered him potential and paved the way for further improvement language wise. Thanks to his effort and devotion the funny shapes of Greek letters began making sense. The task has proved rather arduous, however, Saher chose a one-way ticket.

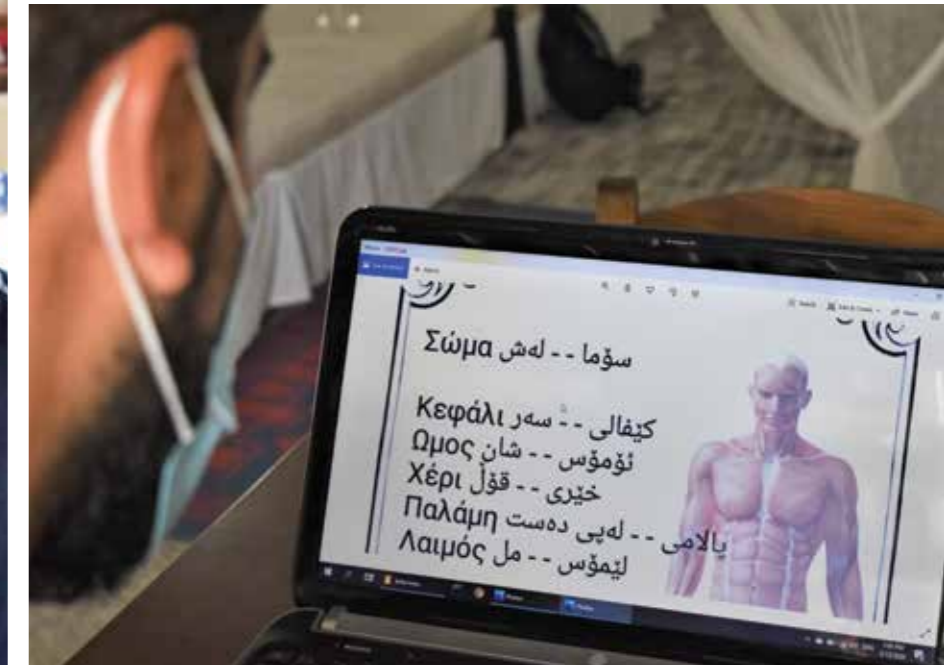
He grew to love the Greek language and he even began helping his wife to learn it too. It was many times that he repeated



“ I transliterated Greek letters, words, even whole sentences into Sorani, so that a new learner would know how they are properly pronounced. I reached a point where a word’s meaning was not everything. What I wanted the most was to understand and learn the pronunciation of the new vocabulary.”

“It is a beautiful language, I like it,” while we talked. At a later stage, he realized that the volume of his notes was large. Their neat structure and the sufficient material at his disposal were enough to allow him to consider a crazy though an especially brilliant plan; that of creating his very own and the very first Greek-Sorani phrase book. One which would be sheer bliss to other Sorani speakers who would wish to learn Greek from scratch, the easy way. “I transliterated Greek letters, words, even whole sentences into Sorani, so that a new learner would know how they are properly pronounced. I reached a point where a word’s meaning was not everything. What I wanted the most was to understand and learn the pronunciation of the new vocabulary. So, it was mainly out of necessity that I began with the transliteration scheme. And it worked out just fine. It is a useful tool that makes the learning process more fun and brings results faster.” Challenges feed his mind while his persistence and perseverance earned him a trained ear in Greek. “I realized that accomplishing something is only a matter of strong will and proper goal setting. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Putting all my notes together was that first step that triggered my next move. Compiling a handbook was an unstoppable flashing light in my head. I became positively obsessed with the idea.” And day after day, it was taking shape. He allowed himself a new... best friend, his laptop -his notebook becoming the runner-up. First, he chose the right frame, then the theme fonts and he got down to serious business. Step number two -the most time-consuming part- was digitalizing his handwritten notes. Saher shared his all-out effort with IOM

staff working at the long-term accommodation site in Drama who in turn talked about it to their Solidarity Now colleagues, also active at the facility. Not long after that, IOM and Solidarity Now personnel suggested to Saher to get his digitalized work promoted into a printed version. “Are they joking?” - “This was my thought at first but then I thought to myself that this was a great honor and an exceptional opportunity to realize a dream of mine. Up until then, seeing it printed had been wishful thinking. However, their proposal was for real and it could act as the springboard for other similar projects of mine in the future.” His next thoughts come unexpectedly but he is precise, using simple Greek language nevertheless exact and correct wording that leaves no room for misinterpretation. “When this ‘publication’ is over, my aim is to dive into the next language tool. The difference will be that, instead of translating and transliterating from Greek into Sorani it will be Greek into Kurmanji as well Greek into Arabic. I hope I can make it,” he added. Learning good Greek has been a major factor that played a role in his decision to live in Greece with his family. “Other Kurds tell me they will move to Germany or the Netherlands or that they dream leaving Greece. Not me. Greece is beautiful, the people are kind, the weather is nice, and I feel it suits me as a country. So, why look for yet another new base? Discussing the matter with my wife we both come to the same conclusion: we wish to settle in Greece.” Saher is now a recognized refugee and he is building his life in Greece. He has rented an apartment in Northern Greece, under the EU funded project HELIOS.



Thanks to his effort and devotion the funny shapes of Greek letters began making sense. He grew to love the Greek language and he even began helping his wife to learn it too.

Your eyes are the witness of death

Your midnight moan  
is the secret of your land

Death symphony waking up  
the world at midnight,  
Becoming a new poem

I am breathing in the same air,  
where you are breathing

I am walking the same land,  
where you are walking

My difficult days are the same  
as your difficult days

How do you pull me via chain  
while you pretend to be kind?

We are the same  
Just my name is  
woman



## SOGAND ABBASI

### An ode to strength

Through melancholy, evocative poems, Sogand Abbasi, a young woman from Iran, expresses her inner thoughts, feelings and unfolds her incredible story of strength. “I began writing poems at the age of 14. Back in Iran I was working as a playwright and actress.” Sogand holds a degree in Persian literature and uses poetry as a tool to communicate with people. Her daughter, the people she has met, her life story are among the things she’s getting inspired of. She is taking words from anywhere. When she first came to Greece with her husband and her daughter, they were staying in Moria Reception and Identification Center. “Even in the worst of times I continued writing. One night in Moria I heard a woman suffering. I wrote a poem for her.”

*Your eyes are the witness of death  
Your midnight moan  
is the secret of your land  
Death symphony waking up  
the world at midnight,  
Becoming a new poem*

At the moment, Sogand and her family are staying at Vagiochori accommodation facilities. She explains that she was forced to leave her

country, as her life was in danger. “I was a member of a well-known movement that protests against forced headscarves (hijabs) on women. I was not feeling safe. But that didn’t stop me. I continued fighting for my rights as a woman, and for my freedom to choose my own life; my daughter’s life.” “I converted to Christianity after befriending an Armenian family that was always there for me. I could be physically punished even for that, as well as losing my daughter. I chose to leave my country, hoping that in the future things will change.” Sogand is dreaming of being able to play in the theatre again and one day publishing her poems. She feels grateful for being in Greece, despite the difficulties her family is facing. Her only priority is to provide her daughter a safe and free environment where she will be able to achieve her goals. She expresses her gratitude to the country that has accepted her and prays that the women in her country remain strong! Last but not least, she mentions her ambition to publish her poems one day; “There is not a poet who does not wish their poems to be published,” she says while laughing.

## AMIR HUSSEIN IBRAHEMI

## The teenager who wants to become a doctor

Amir came to Greece from Afghanistan. He is 16 years old and he already knows what he wants to do with his life. "Since I was a kid, I remember myself wanting to be a doctor. I know it is difficult and requires a lot of studying, but this is what I want to do. I know I have my family's support in that," he says.

Amir Hussein Ibrahemi is currently living in Ritsona open accommodation facility with his father, his mother and his siblings, one brother and one sister. He loves spending time alone and he really enjoys being part of Greek and English language courses inside the facility. IOM in coordination with UNICEF and Solidarity Now, are organizing language courses for the community in the camp, in the framework of non - formal education activities. "I like physics, chemistry, biology! And what's not to like, I told you I want to become a doctor," he said during the interview, which was organized via Skype due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Amir speaks English and Greek as well and that's why he is not only a student in the camp courses. He is also a teacher for adults, who have just started to learn the languages. He uses the internet as a tool and enjoys watching videos online for practicing his language skills.

"I don't feel awkward at all when I teach older people! On the contrary, they are showing a great interest in learning and this is

very positive," he said with his beautiful smile. As an aspirant doctor, Amir could not avoid commenting on all images around the globe, with people and scientists making superhuman efforts to fight COVID-19.

"When I see all the doctors inside the hospitals with their uniforms, I realize that medicine can help people who suffer. It is not only a profession. It is an act of sharing and giving. We all know that scientists are trying to find the vaccine again COVID-19. And this is something I would like to focus on in the future. Research and treatment for rare diseases," Amir says with confidence. Amir had the chance to be part of the "Children Of Refugees in Education-CORE" project. In coordination with IOM's Community Support & Engagement team, CORE aimed to enhance skills and abilities that encourage intercultural dialogue and promote integration among refugee population in the accommodation facilities. Amir and six more Ritsona residents with different backgrounds attended the project. The participants were given the chance to broaden their vocational skills and discover their strengths.

"Being part of this special team, made me really happy," says Amir. "I enjoyed working and interacting with other people from the community to strengthen my life skills. I realized the value of communication and creativity," he admits.



“When I see all the doctors inside the hospitals, I realize that medicine can help people. It is not only a profession. It is an act of sharing and giving.”



“I feel grateful that I have made friends in Greece. School has helped me a lot in so many ways.”



ZEYNAB KARIMI

“Nature makes no discrimination”

15-year-old Zeynab Karimi lives in Kavala open accommodation facility with her uncle’s family. They arrived in Greece two years ago (2019) from Afghanistan. The road to Greece was challenging and caused her considerable losses. Along the way, her parents and siblings were forced to return to Afghanistan. Even though she’s far away from them, she’s dreaming of the day they will be reunited. Until then, she is making sure she captivates every single moment of her life through her photos. “Photography is my passion. I love capturing nature through my lens. I really want to attend photography seminars. Maybe in the future I’ll have my own professional camera,” says Zeynab. “Nature inspires me. It makes me feel safe and welcomed. Nature makes no discrimination, accepts us in its beauty exactly the way we are. This is why I love so much capturing landscapes,” she admits. Zeynab attends the 2nd grade in Kavala high school and during the lockdown, as most of the children at her age,

anticipated returning to school. She speaks Farsi, English and she learns the Greek language at school. “I feel grateful that I have made friends in Greece. School has helped me a lot in so many ways,” she says. Zeynab wants to become a doctor or botanist. “A doctor for humans, or a doctor of nature,” she says while smiling. Zeynab used to write as well mostly novels. She likes making stories in her head and creates a better world through her pencil and imagination. She reads literature and poetry from her mobile phone; her favorite writers are Tony Abbott and Nick Arnold. “When I was in Afghanistan, I was writing a lot. On my way to Europe, my notebooks and my pencils, were taken away from me. It was a traumatic experience and a big loss for me,” she recalls. “I’ll start writing again soon. My dream is to have three novels ready within the next ten years! I want also to participate in a photo competition! But first I need to finish school, go to the university and reunite with my family. Do you think have time?” Zeynab wonders.

## MARWAN MOHAMMED

## A story of faith and motivation

Marwan Mohammed, 24 years old, came to Greece in 2020 from Benin, a country in West Africa. He is a professional football player, with a lot of talent and love for the most popular sport in the world.

"I had a good sports journey," Marwan recalls. "I had the chance to play for four different sport clubs," he says while showing to IOM staff his participation certificates in his tablet. "My life in Benin was good, until my family was under serious threats due to political reasons. Back then I was living with my uncle, who got attacked and stabbed. I was really afraid," he says.

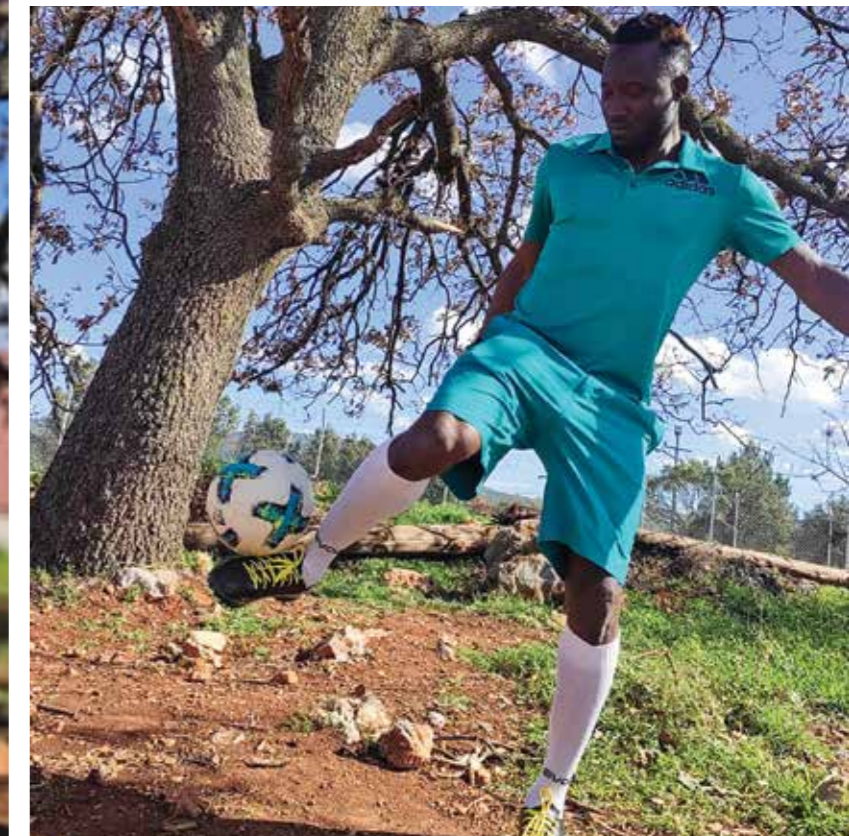
This was the moment when Marwan decided to flee his country. The road to Europe was not easy, and as many migrants who are seeking for a better and safer life, he reached Greece through Turkey.

"I arrived in new Malakasa camp in mainland Greece. My love for football always accompanies me. That is the reason why we decided to create our own football club here. We meet every morning at 9:30 for training and running. The support of all residents is admirable," Marwan admits.

The new Malakasa camp, was created under very challenging conditions, following Evros incidents in March 2020.

"Creating a football team was a motivation for a lot of people in the camp. This wouldn't have happened without IOM's support," says Marwan. "They realized how important this initiative would be for our psychology. It is not a secret. When you keep your body in a good shape, you have a stepping stone for a better life. COVID-19 has affected everyone's life, including ours, and the movement restrictions impose significant challenges in our everyday life. Football is a good answer to all that."

Marwan Mohammed has a dream; to find a manager and to further develop his skills. He has never stopped thinking about his parents and finding ways to support his family. "Life is not easy, there are good and bad times for every human being. That is our nature and I am determined not to give up! One day you may hear my name, maybe as a player in an international team. Do not be surprised!" he says with faith and self-confidence.



“ Life is not easy, there are good and bad times for every human being. That is our nature and I am determined not to give up! ”

“ I want to share my knowledge with other people, especially with children. We must be active and creative. During this challenging period, we cannot let ourselves stay inactive.”



## RAHIM HAIDARI

### A restless mind

Rahim Haidari came to Greece from Afghanistan. His excellent computer knowledge, allowed him to be a valuable assistant during IT classes, organized by IOM in Kavala open accommodation site, in collaboration with the International Hellenic University.

Rahim speaks fluently English, Farsi, Dari, Urdu, Pashto, Indian and Turkish and he worked as a link between the University professors and the beneficiaries who took their first steps in computer use. There were people, who did not speak the English language and Rahim contributed the most to the continuation of the courses and the productive communication between teachers and students.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, computer classes were organized through online platforms. With the phrase “Ok sir”, Rahim was giving the green light to the teacher to proceed with the exercises. He is 32 years old. With his wife and four children, they came to Greece in the summer of 2019.

“I am not an economic migrant; I am a refugee of war. I had a great job making a lot of money there, but it doesn't matter when your children are not safe and live under constant threat and danger,” he says. With excellent knowledge of technology

and foreign languages, a degree in computers and training in radio frequencies and telecommunications, Rahim abhors stagnation.

At his first station in Greece, in the site of Nea Kavala in Kilkis, Rahim was supporting other residents in English language courses. He was motivating children to participate in the classes. As a result of this, he achieved to attend as a teacher to six classes per day of 25 children each. “I want to share my knowledge with other people,” says Rahim, “especially with children.”

“We must be active and creative. During this challenging period, with the pandemic and the difficulties in finding a job, we cannot let ourselves stay inactive” he says, stating that his great desire is to study further, while revealing that he has started intensive courses to learn Greek. “If I managed to find a job in Greece, I could stay here forever. I like the country, but at the same time I acknowledge all the difficulties people are facing due to the economic crisis. Unemployment remains one of the biggest social challenges,” he adds.

Rahim has big dreams for his children. “I want to present them to the community as people with an education, but mainly as people with kindness and a willingness to offer.”



## Supporting the Greek Authorities in Managing the National Reception System for Asylum Seekers and Vulnerable Migrants (SMS)

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