

REPAIR PROJECT

SLOVENIA

MOHAMMED'S STORY



Mohammed was a paramedic in Gaza before he fled, eventually arriving in Slovenia. After nearly three years apart, his family joined him in Ljubljana where he now works as an inter-cultural mediator, supporting asylum seekers and refugees as they arrive and adapt to life in the country.

"I worked as a paramedic. During the 2014 war we were called to rescue a family. A little girl had been killed, she was just like my daughter. After that I knew we had to get out. My daughter was only six, but had already lived through two wars.

I was granted a visa for Turkey, but couldn't get permission to leave Gaza before it expired. Eventually we realized the only way for me to get out was to pay to escape into Egypt. From Egypt, I flew to Istanbul and after that travelled overland, mostly on foot. I had promised my family I wouldn't get in a boat.

In Greece I was critically injured in a car crash. Several other passengers died, and I spent ten days in hospital before staff told me to leave. When I left Gaza I weighed 94kg, but now I was just 64kg.

Crossing the border into Slovenia, it just felt safe, and that was the most important thing – it felt like a place where my family would be safe. I applied for asylum, and after 11 months I was granted status. In the reception center it was really tough.

The ban on working used to be for nine months after applying for asylum, but has been reduced to three, which is positive. People get caught up working illegally because they need money, and often end up being exploited or trapped into criminal work.

Fortunately, the Red Cross gave me an opportunity to volunteer and be active with them, but a lot of people don't realise this is available to them. Volunteering is a great way to generate real integration, to make friends, learn and practice the language, and feel you are doing something worthwhile.

Now I work as an inter-cultural mediator helping people who have newly arrived to understand and adapt to life here. Because I have been through what they are going through, there is some immediate trust, and speaking both Arabic and Slovenian, I can be a bridge between cultures.



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To find out more about the achievements and findings of the REPAIR project – read our online report, and access our online toolkit using the QR Codes.



Online Toolkit



Online Report

When you get refugee status it's great news, but after living in a reception centre for so long, you only have 14 days to find new accommodation. To rent an apartment you have to have your own bank account, which in Slovenia is very hard. And to access government social support you need to have an address – it is a big spiral. There are so many things you need to work out; how to find a doctor, how to register with the health service, everything like that.

People's mental health and living situation needs to be stable before they can properly settle and integrate. Newly arrived families can find it impossible to get a long-term rental agreement so they have to keep moving home. It is really disruptive, especially for children who keep having to change schools and make new friends.

I applied for Family Reunification as soon as I could. It's an incredibly difficult and complicated process, requiring a lot of documents. If you want to be reunited with your spouse and children then the process might take three to four months, but for other family members – in my case I applied for my mother, as well as my wife and kids – it is even longer and more complicated. We waited a year, and even after the positive decision, it was extremely difficult for my family to leave Gaza. In the end, through the Red Cross we were able to help facilitate them leaving.

When they arrived in Slovenia, we hadn't seen each other in almost three years. I was so nervous, I didn't sleep properly for days before. When we first saw each other again my children were shy – they hadn't seen me in so long, it made me so emotional. But my wife reassured them, and they jumped on me and wouldn't let me go. They wouldn't even let me go to the toilet!

My son turned six two days after arriving in Slovenia. The last time I had seen him he was three. I feel so sorry for all the years we were apart. For the first few days, whenever I left the house my son made me promise I would come back and not leave them again. In his mind, if I left I might disappear

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again. Now we have a new daughter who was born in Slovenia, and I want to spend as much time as I can with her and all of the family to make up for the years I missed.

The children have adapted so quickly, they learned the language and are doing really well in school. The teachers can't believe they have only been in Slovenia for a year. My daughter still has trauma from life in Gaza, but she is getting support, getting better and feeling safer. When my kids first arrived in Slovenia, they saw a mountain rescue helicopter and were terrified, for them a helicopter meant soldiers and fighting. Recently we saw a helicopter again and the difference in their reaction was amazing, I was so happy that they can experience a normal, peaceful life.

My mother is over sixty and it is harder for her to adapt, but she is making friends and developing her social life. She is learning Slovenian with the Red Cross and takes part in activities like crochet club. My daughter is great at drawing and wants to be a fashion designer, but my son wants to be something different every week, this week a footballer, next week he wants to ride horses. They can be whatever they want, I am just happy we are together.”

Images are for illustration only