

REPAIR PROJECT

SLOVENIA

NAJMA'S STORY



Najma from Somalia has been separated from her mother and sisters for more than seven years. After coming to Slovenia as a refugee in 2021 she applied for family reunification, but a year after submitting the application she and her family remain in limbo, with no indication if their request will be accepted.

"I have been in Slovenia for a year-and-a-half. I left my family when I was 16.

From Somalia I travelled to Libya. I was there for five years, and then I crossed from Libya to Italy where I was given International Protection. I was transferred from Italy to Slovenia through the legal pathway and granted refugee status here in February 2022.

For a young woman in Somalia, the situation is really bad. My family are still there, about 500 miles from Mogadishu. I have three younger sisters who are still minors and my mother. She is a single mother, she has to pay for everything, and I am the only

one who helps her. I send money from my job here in Slovenia.

If anything happens to my mum, my sisters don't have anybody else. In Somalia it is really not safe, particularly for women. If a woman is raped, the authorities tell the families to resolve the situation. There's no protection.

I applied for family reunification as soon as I could after I was given refugee status. I had to prove that my sisters are my sisters, that my mum is my mum, that she is a single mother, and that she cannot support the family financially without me. I provided everything – everything – that they asked for, but it's been more than a year and I still haven't got an answer.

In Slovenian law, if you're over 18 years old then they say your family is not your family. Because my mum and sisters are not my husband and children, they do not count as my family. I was so shocked – my mother and sisters are the only family I have.

Then they told me it was Somali law I had to prove. In Somali law, if a mother can't support the family alone, an older child can be the breadwinner and the rest of the family their dependents. I proved that as the oldest child I am the main provider for the family. My mum works selling vegetables, but she can't earn enough; they need me to help. They don't have anybody else that can help them, only me.



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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

It has been too long, I need my mum and my sisters, and they need me. I guess I'm the only Somali woman in Ljubljana. Who can I share my thoughts with? If something happened to me, who would look after me?

I have done everything that has been asked of me, but there is no information and no progress. They are not saying no, but they are not saying yes and I don't know what more I can do. If they said I need other documents, or more money, or something else, I could try and do that, but they are not telling me anything.

I have collected all the documents, it has cost a lot of money, and still we're just waiting and waiting. If they were clear what the rules were that would be fairer, but I have done everything they have asked and still don't have any answer.

I am learning Slovenian, I work in a restaurant, and I'm studying to complete my education. I want to study nursing. When I was younger I wanted to be a doctor, but that doesn't look possible now, so I will study to be a nurse. I like helping people. If I am smart, I can finish school in two years, then I would need to go to college for another three years, so five years all together.

When we were preparing the application for the family reunification, we were so happy. I haven't seen my mum in so long. My sisters were so young when I left – I haven't seen them in nearly eight years.

Since I arrived in Europe I have been able to keep in touch with them more and I talk to them almost every day now. At the moment they are healthy, but they are not safe, they can't go outside, their mental health is not good, my mum is under a lot of stress. If our family reunification application is rejected, I really don't know what I will do.

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Before I got refugee status, Red Cross would come and visit the reception centre where I was living, that's how I got to know them. They'd come and talk to people and ask if they needed help.

After the reception centre, we kept in touch and I joined them for workshops, they helped me with the family reunification application, and when I needed a job they helped me find one. I used to volunteer with them as well, but for now I am too busy studying and working.

My Slovenian is not great, but it's getting better. I learned English and also Arabic in Libya, but now I watch Slovenian movies to learn that better.

It's not easy when you are without your family, my mother and my sisters are so important to me, but the rules don't seem to think they are. I just want someone to explain to me what the situation is and what I can do, I can't understand why my mum can't be here.

If my family came I would be so happy. I would show them Ljubljana, but really it wouldn't matter what we did, it would just be enough to know that we were all together and safe.”

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