



Mahsa's experience

From the very beginning, this journey was different for me. At the Brussels airport, during the baggage claim, I saw a man who was deaf and was having difficulties communicating. He was trying to make the baggage handler understand that his luggage was too heavy. The handler was trying to understand him and find a solution. I stared at the scene for a moment, then lowered my head and started preparing my documents, not knowing that I would see this man again. Later, when I found out that my flight gate had changed, I saw him again on the way to the new gate; he was standing confused and bewildered. When our eyes met, there was no need for words. He gestured for help, and I motioned for him to follow me. I took out my phone and tried to talk a little with Google Translate. He was a Palestinian asylum seeker who had obtained a passport in Greece and had come to Belgium with the hope of a better life. But his problems with his employer had dashed all his dreams. Now he had to return to Thessaloniki, homeless, jobless. Tears welled up in his eyes as he spoke of his situation. At that moment, I was just a listener, but I knew that this story was not just his; this was the reality of migration, not just moving from one country to another, but struggling to survive in an unfamiliar world.

This thought stayed with me until I arrived at the OCC. I was responsible for evaluating and monitoring the activities that helped asylum seekers integrate into society through education and cultural programs. The project was supported by the European Commission to give them the opportunity to learn and participate while they waited for their cases to be processed. In addition, I taught English to both adults and children.

But I was not alone. Amani, a kind girl from Syria and I collaborated with each other. Most of the asylum seekers were Afghans and Syrians, and since I spoke Persian and Amani Arabic, we could help them learn English more easily. Despite all their hardships, they looked at life with hearts full of kindness and hope. One day, when I was cold, they brought me tea and lemon with a smile, as if to say: "We understand, you are not alone."

But the truth was that I was also struggling with my own challenges. It had only been three months since I had moved to Belgium to continue my studies. After my interview with IOM and receiving their response, I had a short window of opportunity and decided to use this time to serve them. In Greece, I found myself among people who each had deep wounds on their souls. One day, an Afghan who understood my language was telling me about her journey, about the hours they had spent at sea in danger. Her voice was full of resentment, I knew she was still stuck in that moment. I never said "no" to their requests. If I couldn't change the situation, I could at least lighten their burden a little.

But the most beautiful moments happened in the classroom. Every day, we spent two hours with the children, playing, teaching them English. One of our adult students once told me that refugee camps were like prisons, full of endless waiting and repetitive days. But in the classroom, they laughed, learned, and experienced life in its simplest form. For many of them, learning a language was more than just an education. For them, it was a way to escape the monotony and a hope for a future that might one day be better.

This experience wasn't just volunteering for me. I learned that hardships don't define us, what matters is our ability to persevere and keep going. Sometimes that same warm tea with lemon, a simple smile, even if we don't understand each other's language, can change the world for someone.

I've learned that ultimately, we all have one simple desire, to feel like we belong where we are as migrants.

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