

As part of the Urbact methodology , the Arrival Cities partners have all established Local Support Groups(LSG's). One of the criteria that the network established at the outset was to ensure that each LSG had the involvement of people from the target group(s). Bringing people from the target group into the work of the network will ensure that the Local Action Plans that each LSG will produce as the key outcome of their work will have their input. In the next few editions of our newsletter we wish to present some of the LSG members who represent the target group.

We begin with three members Angela from Riga, Aidan from Thessaloniki and Harry from Oldenburg¹.

The three stories in effect encapsulate the wide disparity of experience that migrants have had since arriving in the EU.

What's really striking is how the dominant image that we have of migrants currently , namely arriving on boat from either turkey or from north Africa , in fact fails to recognise the ongoing flow of migrants who have arrived through more conventional means. So Angela who migrated to Riga from South Africa less than one year ago, arrived by plane. Harry who in fact has been in Germany for over 34 years came via the former GDR. Only Aidan has come by boat into Greece and since the closure of the border has ended up in Thessaloniki.

The reasons for migration are also diverse. Angela is in Riga because her husband got a job there and she simply followed. For Harry (Lebanon) and Aidan (Syria) it was to escape civil war in their respective countries.

For Angela the process of "arrival" has also been much smoother than for Harry and Aidan.

"The employer helped us to find a place to stay at the beginning. Then we found another apartment, in which we can stay long-term."

"We sorted out our documents at Citizenship and Migration board. Me and my husband speak English and we got all documents from Latvian employer. Therefore, we did not have a lot of problems with official recognition in the country."

In contrast for Aiden and Harry the process of arrival was not easy.

Aiden arrived in Greece in February 2016 and went straight to Idomeni in order to cross the Greek-FYROM border and make his way to northern Europe. He had no connection in any European country. When the Balkan route was closed in the beginning of March 2016, he stayed in Idomeni, hoping that the border would be open again. But it didn't so he was transferred to Softex camp, one of the worst refugee camps in northern Greece, a few km out of Thessaloniki.

Harry also encountered difficulties upon arrival:

"I had also 5 years prohibition of work and residence restriction, my asylum application was rejected, general feeling of uncertainty. I had no notion what comes up now to me....I initially lived in refuge residence, after that I looked for an apartment by my own". There was "no official support, only private support and own initiative

However it would be a mistake to assume that Angela has not faced problems.

¹ The names have been changed to protect the identity of the three individuals

“I face problem with getting too much attention due to being visually different from local population. I cannot enter the bus and disappear among other people in a bus. Once I was going by bus with my little son and I was attacked by a man who spit on my face and started shouting at me. Since then I am afraid to use public transport.”

For Aiden, the process of arrival has had a heavy toll on his mental health.

In the camp he did nothing but waiting. No opportunities to socialize and get outside the camp. He felt isolated and this had a negative impact on his health. Stability is the only thing he needs: “I want to start my life but I need to know where this will be!”

Despite these difficulties all three are however, upbeat regarding the future. Angela likes her new city.

“I consider Riga to be a good and safe place for children and I am happy about the kindergarten my son goes to. I am studying in one of the universities in Riga and I get a lot of support from local and international students. I hope to find a job after I graduate from university.”

Harry also very much likes aspects of his new home. “I like the way that there is an ordered structure, relative firm and open political

debates, freedom of expression, the benefits of social protection and social services”

Aiden has also had some good news. In January 2017 he moved to a house funded by an American organization for refugees. A month later he found a job as a cultural mediator with a big organization for refugees in Thessaloniki which makes him feel better. In March 2017 he received his relocation decision for France. He expresses a desire “to move forward in his life, to rent a good house, to feel creative, useful and alive. “ He is also dreaming to start his own business.

Of course those who arrive also find things that they do not like about their host cities. Angela misses the colour and optimism that she found at home. If she could change her host city then it would be about changing “The attitude of people, who do not smile a lot. We arrived in autumn and the city looked gloomy and grey for us. We think that Riga should have more colourful buildings. In South Africa we have a lot of colourful buildings. Now we hope that the spring will bring more optimism into our lives.

Likewise for Harry he would like to change the way that people complain too much.

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