

Aziz, from Guinea

My name is Aziz, I am 20 year old, I come from Guinea and I am a refugee in Italy.

I am very glad to be here to celebrate the refugees of all the world.

It is very meaningful to me that Pope Francis has decided to dedicate this day to refugee children. When I arrived in Pozzallo, Sicily, I was 17. I started travelling when I was 16.

I could not live in my country because my family was persecuted for political reasons. From Guinea I travelled to Mali, then Niger, Lybia and finally Italy.

As many other migrants, my travel was organised by smugglers. My mother followed all my travel from home: she was calling by telephone to the smugglers, arranging any stage of my travel, which costed us a lot of money. She never let me alone.

In Lybia my mother had paid for a travel by ship, but when we arrived by the shore there was only a little rubber boat. I did not want to travel like this, I was too scared. But the smugglers forced my to board, I had no choice. We were 80 people. After 3 days in the sea in terrible conditions, a ship rescued us. When we arrived in Sicily I understood I was really safe. Now I live in Rome, it was not easy to live in a foreign country. I study and I play football. I am completing a vocational course as pastry chef. I like it and I am good at that. I have Italian friends and Centro Astalli makes me feel like at home. I miss very much whom I left in Guinea. My mother calls me often to know if I behave: she is always there for me.

Dhurata, from Albania

My name is Dhurata, I am 26 and I was born in Albania. I live in Italy with my mother and my two brothers. I was 7 when we had to run away. We took a rubber boat from Valona. All the passengers were men, a part my mother and me. I remember the armed smugglers who told us what we had to do.

For us children it looked like a game. It was the first time that we saw the sea and that was our adventure.

We were sitting next to the engine and the waves made us jump. We were very excited, we laughed and shouted: the smugglers kept telling us to be quiet.

Whene Italian coast appeared in the distance, the smugglers stopped the rubber boat and told us to swim. They were afraid to be stopped by Italian authorities. My parents protested: we could not swim, we could not make it to the coast. The smugglers began to hit them, my father first and then my mother. Since they kept insisting they threw us into the water, so they had to jump too to rescue us.

We are alive only because of the generosity of the others, who helped the 5 of us in the water and brought us to the dry land. We were all wet, it was January and we were freezing. We arrived in Lecce, we stayed only the time to get some more money and we moved to Rome.

The first months were tough. We lived hidden, in a barrack near Rome. I started immediately to go to school, we learnt the language, I started my life again. This was made possible by my mom's grit: she made anything she couldn't give us back our normal life as children. We lived 6 year undocumented.

Now I have a university degree in education and I am a teacher in a nursery school.

I am here today to represent the experience of all the children who live migration together with their parents. Thanks God we are never alone and often we are not even aware of the dangers because we are with the ones who love us most. But growing up in a foreign country is a challenge we have to face every day, and the challenge is much harder for our parents, who have to overcome so many difficulties to build a future for us.

Morteza, from Afghanistan

My name is Morteza, I am 22 and I arrived to Italy when I was 17. I left when I was 15. My family is from Afghanistan, but I was born in Iran, where my parents had to flee before I was born. We were part of the 2 million Afghans who live in Iran with no documents nor perspectives.

In Iran children start working as soon as they are able to walk. Their exploitation is considered normal, they have no rights at all. I was a worker since I can remember.

One day, when I was 15, some policemen stopped me and other Afghani boys in the street. They arrested us, we kept us in a detention centre for a week without food and without water. Then they put us on a bus to send us "back" in Afghanistan, a country where I had never been and where I knew nobody.

For 2 weeks my mother did not know if I was dead or alive. Then the boys who were with me managed to contact her and some smugglers brought us back to Iran. But it was impossible for me to stay there anymore, so I start a long travel through Turkey, Greece and then the Balcanic route. I wandered in Central Europe and finally I was arrested in Austria. They sent me back to Hungary, where I was in prison for 8 months: a terrible experience I will never forget.

When they released me I travelled to Italy, where a new story started. After sleeping one week at the train station, I was given a place in a reception centre. Today I am a refugee and I am doing the National Civil Service. Cinema is my passion. I study in a cinema school, but the time for my passion is limited: I still have to figure how my future will be and this question occupies most of my thoughts.

Mirvat, from Syria

My name is Mirvat, I am 23 and I am Syrian. I was born and I grew up in Aleppo, my wonderful hometown.

Today my home, the streets, the parks where I used to play, my school, my university are just a meaningless heap of ruins. Who destroyed Aleppo has destroyed also the dreams, the memories, the plans and the future of a whole generation of young people and children, who will always remember the sound, the smell and the horror of the war.

War took everything from me and I am alive just by chance, where many others like me are dead. We run away with my family because we had no choice. The bombs were closer and closer, their noise every day louder, our fear bigger. So we left to Lebanon with my mother, my father, my sister with her husband and her children.

Today we are refugees in Italy. I started to study again at the university, language and literature. I make my best every day to find a motivation, make friends, build again a sense of family and home. Every refugee has to build again every day a little piece of what was lost. It is not easy when all your dreams have been broken without any possibility to fulfill or change them. My father in Aleppo was a wood carver, he was able to make wonderful object from any shapeless piece of wood. His job was to give shape to ideas. Today we are like pieces of wood to reshape. It is not an easy task.

Edelawit, from Ethiopia

I became a refugee in Italy when I was 8. Today I am 21.

One of the few things I remember of Ethiopia is the fear of the war that could burst from one day to the next. We could not travel all together. First my mother left with my older sister. Two years later I reached her with my two brothers. Here in Italy I lived in two reception centres and in a fostering house run by Centro Astalli.

I am Ethiopian but I lived longer in Rome than in Addis Abeba. I am still waiting, with my brothers, to be granted Italian citizenship. We want to succeed, to spend our energies and our motivation to find our way. The only things that matters is that our future is one of peace and freedom, because our past was marked with war and violence.

I know that the situation in Ethiopia now is much worse. People is afraid and they are not safe. Human rights violations are more common. I am here today to ask you not to forget Ethiopia and to welcome the young people who come to Europe looking for protection.