

# RESILAND

PARTICIPATION, CAPACITIES AND RESILIENCE OF CHILDREN  
ON THE MOVE AGAINST TRAFFICKING & EXPLOITATION



## RESIL'S STORY



Co-funded by the Prevention  
of and Fight against Crime  
Programme of the European Union



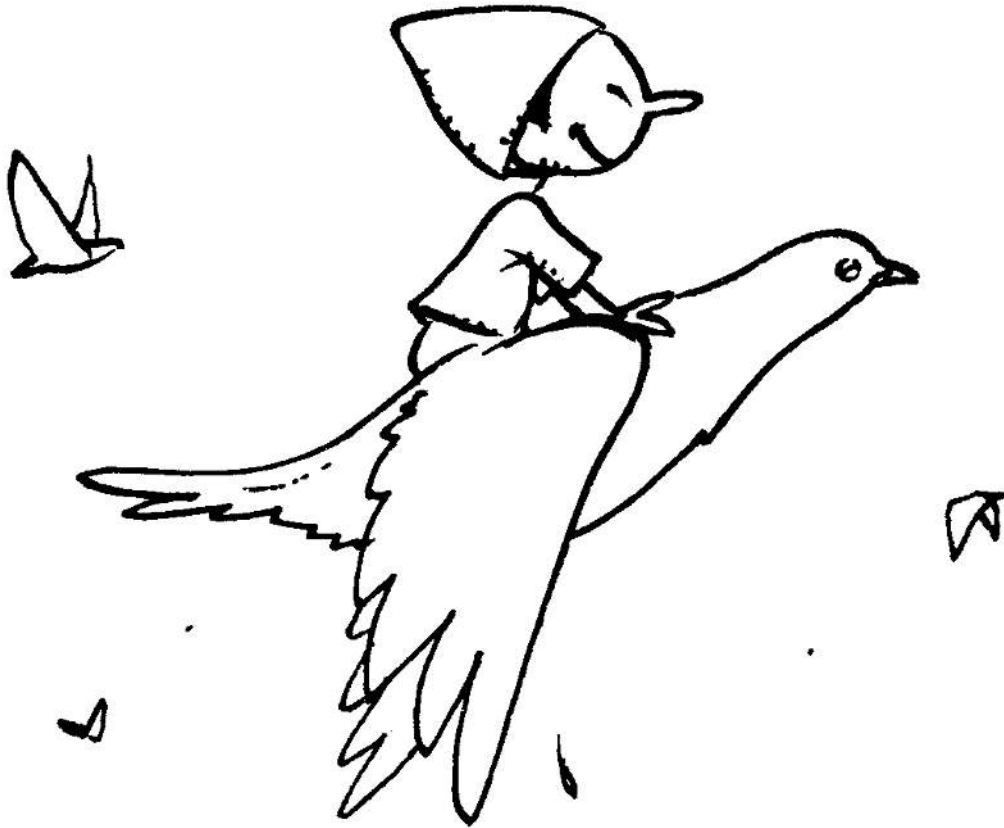
# RESIL'S STORY

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## INTRODUCTION



*My name is Resil and I'm eighteen years old now. I come from a country very far from where I'm living now. Here you will find my story together with some reflections, thoughts and things that I realized have been important along my travel.*

*I know that every person is different and every story is not the same. Nevertheless I tried with my narration to propose some advices and hints that I think could be important to face the adversities and the problems that every traveller encounters along the way.*

*Every story is like a tree with leaves, branches and colours that are always unique and different. Despite this, I hope that sharing my story could be of some help and encouragement for persons like me who left home and travelled to a new world and a new life facing difficulties, challenges, opportunities and adversities.*

*I hope you will enjoy my story and I wish you the best for your precious one.*

## HOME

I come from a country very far from here where I lived with my family in a large community with lots of friends. I went to school, I enjoyed playing football but I also worked to provide some support to my parents: I used to spend the afternoon helping my father with his activity. We had a small field where we used to grow up vegetables. My mom is very good at cooking them with rice and, sometimes, chicken. The moment I liked most in my home was the time to go to bed; I had my own room. It was small but it was my own place. There I was free to think and dream about my future...



## **MAPPING THE NEW CONTEXT**

At home I had well-known points of reference: I knew where to go, what to do and I was familiar with many people. This gave me a sense of security and belonging. When I left, I lost that. I sometimes had the impression to have less control over my situation. I felt a little bit lost because at the beginning all the places and people were new to me. Little by little I gained confidence and orientation again: I became familiar with the places, the persons around me, the customs and the rules in the new place, what made me feel more secure and oriented me in building my life in a new place.

Reconstruct your map of the new place that responds to your different needs.

## **EXPANDING FRIENDSHIPS AND RELATIONS**

I lived within a community where my personal bonds with different people such as my family and my friends were very important because I could trust them and share my worries and feelings. When I first arrived in the new country, people's faces were strange and unknown to me and I missed the sense of security that my family and friends provided. Even if it was not always easy and I had to choose well my real new friends, I started establishing new relations with different people, which was very important because now I have expanded my social network and this has brought me closer to the host country.

Make new friends whom you feel can trust and rely on and be open to engage in new positive relations with other people.

## **VALUING PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND SKILLS**

At home, I helped my family by working with my father as a carpenter. When I arrived in the new place, my role within my family didn't have the same importance. I decided to tell people about my skills as a carpenter, which gave me extra opportunities for my future that otherwise would not have been considered. Remembering what I am good at helped me feel important as a person in the new place where no-one knew me. I also tried to make people understand who I am and what I am good at. I noted that this helped people to look at me with different eyes and to value me as a member of the community. Being confident about what I can do and what I would like to achieve has opened new opportunities for me.

Value and share your personal experiences, skills, priorities and aspirations to open greater opportunities in the new country.

## **EXPLAINING SCHOOL EXPERIENCE**

I enjoyed very much studying when I was living in my village. When I arrived in the new country, the people around me proposed me to attend school and study in order also to learn the language, which was very important for me at the beginning. The school subjects, mates, teachers as well as the way to learn were different from the ones in my place. Despite the difficulties with the new language, I explained the things I already learned to my new teachers and to the people supporting me, which was helpful for my learning in the new country. It was also important to ask for certificates of each course or school year completed because they are usually requested for future learning opportunities such as university or work interviews.

Explain your past experience and education at school to the new teachers and persons that support you in the host country and talk to them about your educational goals.

## **ENJOYING FREE TIME**

When I was at home, I spent my free time in different ways and with many people: I used to play football with my friends or to listen to music with Mohammed, my closest friend. When I arrived in the new place, I didn't know what to do in my free time and with whom because the spaces were different as well as the customs and the people. I then started asking about the possibility to play and telling the new acquaintances the things I used to do to have fun. So we shared our ideas on how we could spend the leisure time and we started organizing different fun things. At the same time, I also tried to understand the different options offered by the context of arrival.

Enjoy your free time with hobbies, sports and activities that you like.

## **FULFILLING SPIRITUAL NEEDS**

In my country, the invisible and spiritual dimensions were very present. Religion and other traditional customs such as gathering every evening under the centenary tree were part of our daily community life. However, this aspect was not that recognized or present in the host society. Nevertheless, I wanted to continue practicing my religion and to find moments of connection with this invisible part. I realized that I could ask for a space to pray in the facility where I was living. You don't need to stop practising your religion and spiritual believes simply because it is uncommon for the people in the new place.

If it is important for you, find time and space for the spiritual dimension or religion.

### **CHERISHING GOOD MEMORIES**

I have many memories about my home, the people I spent time with, the things I did when I was little and when I became older. Some of them are sad but others make me feel stronger. I have always tried to cherish these memories, which helped me when I felt lonely or I missed my home. Even if I have forgotten some things, I still remember many others that are very important since they remind me who I am and where I come from, and this helps me to give meaning to the current situation.

Cherish good memories as precious for your life.

### **KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH DEAR ONES**

At home, I felt especially close to my dad, my mum and my best friend Mohammed. When I left, I promised them that we would have been always in touch. Even if sometimes it was difficult to get in contact with them, I have always tried not to lose our relationship. To hear from them and talk about our things used to give me strength for the future with the hope to meet them soon again.

Keep in touch, when you are able, with your loved ones and with other people from your country who are important to you.

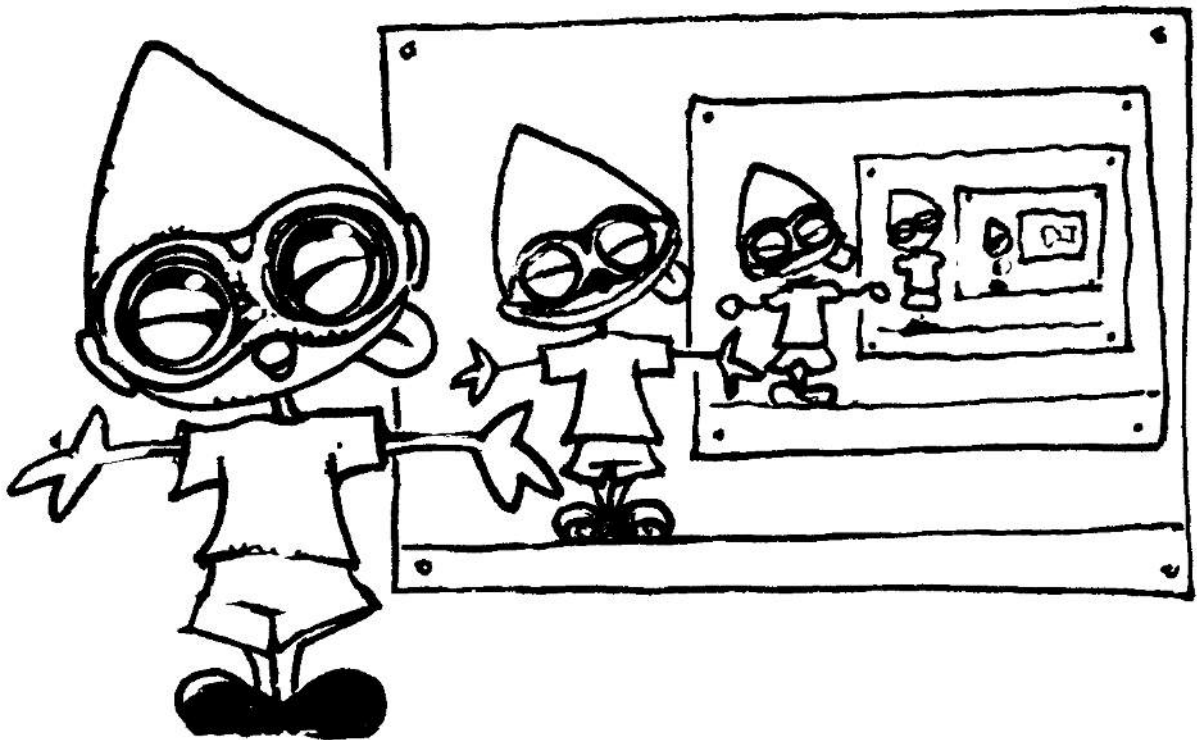
### **EXPLAINING CULTURE AND THE HOME COMMUNITY**

Explaining to the people around me where I came from, my culture and the customs in my home community was a good way for them to better know and understand me. It took me a bit because I didn't feel like explaining my origins to everyone. But when I found persons with whom I felt comfortable, I talked about it and it was useful also to remind me of my roots and to better understand my own story. I also wanted to know more about the place I arrived at, so I asked a lot of questions about it. In this way I realized that there are not only differences but also similarities between people, cultures and traditions.

Explain about your roots, culture and context of origin to the trusted persons around you in the new place.

## DECISION TO LEAVE

At one point, the situation in my country became difficult for different reasons. After some discussions at home, we decided that the best thing to do was for me to leave the country in order to find better opportunities, earn some money and help them from distance. I could have come back once the situation had improved. It was a very hard decision to take, my mother was really sad and from my side I had conflicting feelings: I felt excited and curious but I was also afraid because this meant to leave my dear ones and walk alone in unknown territories.





## **ASSESSING & LIMITING RISKS**

I decided to leave because it was difficult for my family to earn enough money for all and I wanted to help them as soon as possible. I know some other guys who had to escape from their village due to violent conflicts. Most of us left for necessity but with specific objectives to achieve in a new place. However when I arrived I realized that things were not that easy in the new country and it took me some time to adapt. But after a while it got a bit easier. During all these experiences, from my departure until my arrival, I met good and bad people and had to live through many dangerous and risky situations. Some friends were even forced to do things that they didn't want to do. When I saw all the bad things that can happen, I tried to understand how to solve difficulties, grasp opportunities and find solutions that were the least risky for me.

Think and reflect carefully about every decision since it could expose you to risks or dependency from other persons.

## **EXPLAINING INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

I left my country to help my family; in fact, my parents asked me to send them some money because they were in difficulty. However, in many instances it was not easy to make the people in the new place of arrival understand this responsibility. Actually often their proposals didn't correspond to my expectations. I thus decided to tell the people I met how important it was for me to help my family and not to let them down so as to receive proposals appropriate to my needs and familiar exigencies. After that, I listened and thought about what they proposed and at the same time I expressed my own ideas and opinions to them.

Communicate your needs in relation with the responsibilities you have and your family situation in order to have access to appropriate responses and opportunities.

## **DISCUSSING DECISIONS**

My decision to leave was a decision shared and discussed with my family. Some of my friends, instead, took the decision to leave by their own. After my arrival, I tried to get in touch with my family because I wanted to tell them about the situation here and share my plans and talk about future decisions with them. I also tried to share this with the trusted people around me in the new place, especially with those involved in decisions concerning my situation and plans, such as a very nice social worker of the residential care facility where I live. My friends who don't share their experiences with the family, also found available persons to discuss things in order to take the best possible other decisions. Most likely, all of us will have to take many decisions in the future. Talking to others about the decisions can help to hear different views and to take good decisions.

Make your decisions after having exchanged and discussed them with trusted people at home but also in the new context of arrival.

### **GETTING RELIABLE INFORMATION**

When I decided to leave, I had some information according to which I imagined my future possibilities. I received this information mainly from other people, from the TV and through internet. But the reality that I found on my arrival was different, which may mean that my information was insufficient or even mistaken. I have learnt that it is very important to make sure that the information I receive from others is truthful, since most of my decisions depend on how much I know.

Before you make a decision or plan your future use different sources to check and verify the information you get is reliable.

### **REVIEWING THE PERSONAL PROJECT**

When I knew that I was leaving my village I did not plan or think much about my daily life in the new country. I rather had a clear but more general idea about my personal life project. Once arrived, little by little, I reviewed my project based on my original expectations but trying to adapt it to my present situation. So I tried to think about what I had learnt during my experience to adapt myself to the new conditions. Following my personal project with flexibility helped me to face unexpected and new situations, achieve my objectives and feel satisfied.

Review regularly your personal project by including new knowledge and abilities that result from your experiences.

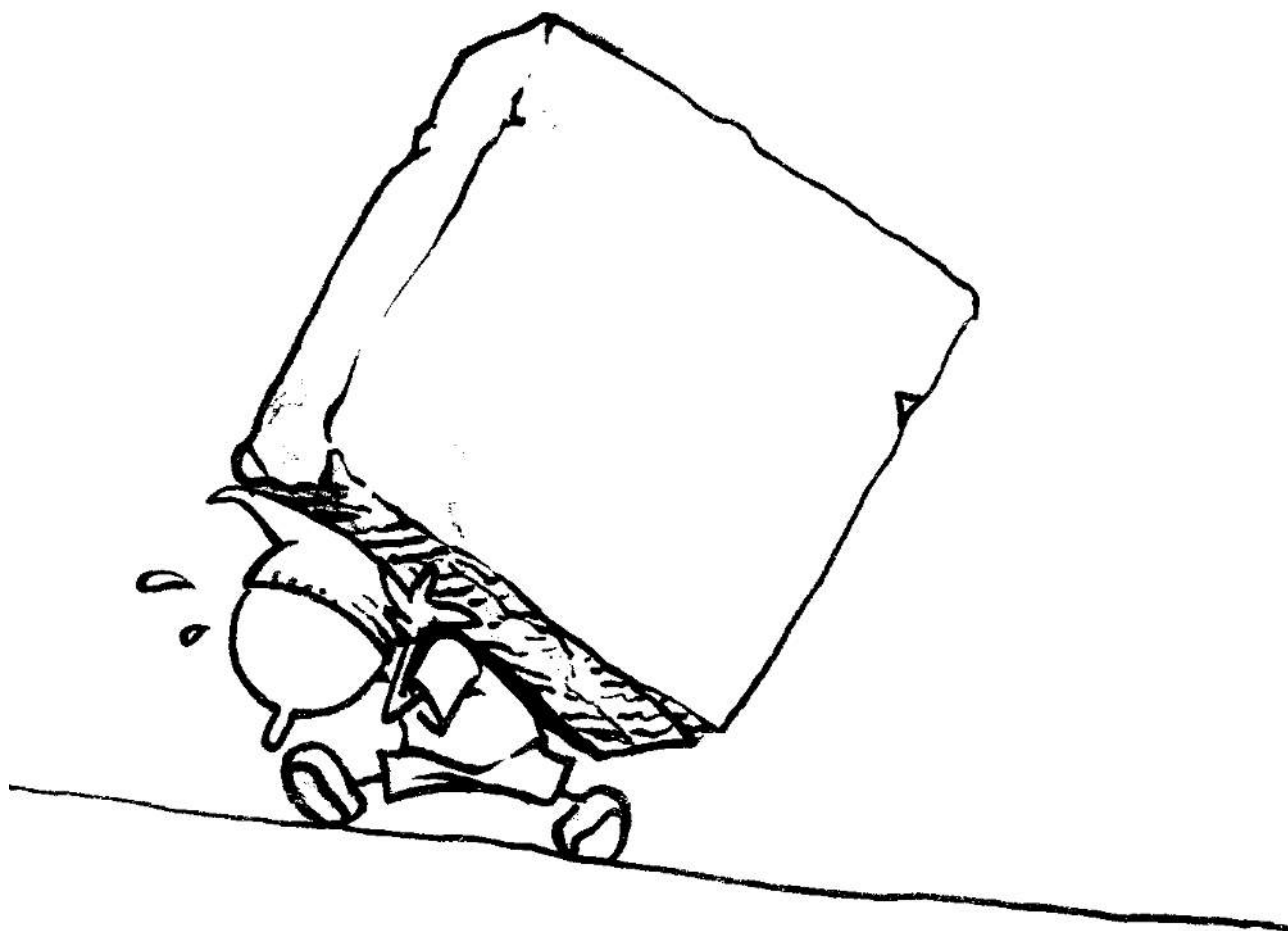
### **PRESERVING SYMBOLS**

An old necklace that belonged to my ancestors has a very special and symbolic meaning for me. I have kept it with me until now because the symbol that represents is valid also in the new place. Keeping it close to me, above all when I feel down, helps me in getting oriented at any point of my life and in connecting with my inner world.

Keep close to you the visible or invisible things that are very valuable and meaningful to you in whatever situation.

## DEPARTURE

Arranging the departure was not easy, my family had to collect some money for my travel. They had to sell a small field where we used to cultivate some vegetables and they borrowed some money from a relative. My father got in touch with someone who organized the journey. I had to join a group of persons who were leaving the country like me. I knew that it would have been a hard journey, full of difficulties because I heard some stories of persons who left and never sent back any news to their family or other whose travel lasted years and at the end they were sent back to the village with nothing but their desire to leave again. But I had also heard of some positive stories of friends who had left and were living in comfortable houses with water, electricity and a big television. They were able to send every month something at home.



## **PREPARING FOR CHANGES**

Just when I left home, I suddenly became worried about the decision to leave and its consequences. I then felt anxious and a little bit confused because I wasn't completely prepared. Probably if I had reflected in advance about all the implications I would have been more ready and confident during this particular moment of the departure.

Get prepared in advance when facing life changes: reflect, get informed and establish useful contacts to better adapt to new situations.

## **STRENGTHENING PERSONAL RESOURCES**

After departure I started facing unexpected situations that did not correspond to my initial plans and this made me feel insecure and afraid. However my strength to overcome difficulties surprised me. From then on I realized that considering and believing in my personal resources and capacities makes me see how strong I am and helps me at having more confidence with myself, above all to deal with changes in plans. In many occasions, the exchanges and relations that I established with other people further helped me at understanding and valuing these resources.

Value and use your personal resources and capacities, you can do it even in the most difficult moments.

## **RELATING WITH UNKNOWN PEOPLE**

During the organisation of the travel and the journey, I had to deal with some people that I didn't know well and couldn't trust because it seemed to me that they wanted to take advantage of my weaknesses and lack of options. To protect myself in such cases, I tried to understand their intentions while having my objectives clear. I have learnt that it is important to assess all the possibilities and alternatives before accepting proposals coming from others, even if it seems to be a unique opportunity or the best solution to my needs.

Try to understand the real intentions and reliability of unknown persons before trusting them, keeping in mind your wellbeing.

## **AVOIDING TO BREAK THE LAW**

When I left home I knew that I was likely to go through illegal situations without intending do bad things but just because I would not have had other alternatives. I understood that when I could not see any other alternatives, sometimes a solution that

was illegal appeared nonetheless to be “good” or “right” to me. Yet, I realised that my choices were very limited. However, I have experienced that it is better not to break the law in order to avoid further troubles and also to protect myself. This is why I always asked for information in this regard if there was something I was unclear about.

Avoid situations that may lead you to break the law since, even unintentionally, this could endanger you, cause you further problems and threaten your future.

### **GIVING THE RIGHT WEIGHT TO MONEY**

I remember that when I left I was very determined not to lose the money I brought with me and also to start earning to support my family as soon as possible. I had never been so concerned about money until then. Indeed, in some occasions the desperate need for money put me in situations of danger. However, throughout my experience, I realized about the importance of considering money in relation with many other aspects of my project in order to protect myself and my future plans. This helped me at avoiding disappointments and managing better my resources, experiences and exigencies according to my personal project.

Consider the need for money together with other elements that are important for your personal project.

### **OVERCOMING BAD TIMES**

When fear and despair gripped me, not losing hope was the thing that helped me best at fighting these negative feelings and seeing beyond. Good memories, talking with nice people, praying or recognizing my strengths were good ways for me to nourish hope. I have learnt to consider discouraging times as a passing moment. When I now think about these bad times, I see them differently. In fact, I made it!

Do not lose hope even in the most difficult and discouraging moments and think that they are temporary so they don't last forever.

## TRAVEL

My travel was long and tiring and I had to face a lot of challenges I did not expect. I found myself in very dangerous situations and I lost my ID document. Sometimes I was afraid to die and my faith and memories were the only relief. Fortunately I was able to let my family know that I was ok. I did not tell them everything in order not to worry them. But I missed a lot their presence and their support.



## **KEEPING CONTROL**

The travel I had in mind was very different from the real one: the conditions were discouraging. Sometimes I was afraid because I thought that my future was not in my hands and there was no alternative. These situations that escaped from my control were those that I feared most and that made me feel very vulnerable, also because unknown people could take advantage of my situation. In such moments, when I did not have the possibility to control or choose, I tried to keep calm and maintain at least my self-control, even if in some instances it was very difficult. Thinking positive and remembering the advices that my family and friends had given me upon departure were good ways to reconnect with my inner strength. I have learnt that it is very important to try to concentrate on the parts of my life where I feel I am in control.

Keeping confident about yourself and your future is very important, including in situations where you feel that you have little control over what is happening to you.

## **KNOWING WHERE YOU ARE**

Once I had embarked on the journey, I realized that I was little informed about the travel and the place I wanted to reach. It would have helped me a lot to know more about that place and about how to reach it. During the travel I asked different people and I tried to find out where I was. During the journey, I realised that I felt better when I told someone I trusted where I was. This helped me to feel a little safer.

Obtain continuous and updated information from reliable sources to always know where you are during your journey and try to notify this to trusted people.

## **GETTING ACCESS TO CHILD PROTECTION**

Even if in my village it made no difference, being recognized as a minor (person under 18 years old) in Europe implies to receive special protection since the rights and rules for children are different from those for adults according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. I was not sure if I wanted to declare that I was under 18. But even if sometimes I was treated as a migrant by the police and other authorities, I understood that demonstrating that I was under 18 years old could be convenient for me to be more protected and to have access to the rights I was entitled to.

If you are under 18 years old, you are entitled to receive greater protection than adults in Europe.



## **HAVING ID DOCUMENTS**

The passport, a document that I almost had never seen before, came to be vitally important during the travel. Luckily, I had a passport with me to show who I am and that I was under 18 years old in order to have access to different forms of support and to my rights as a child, so I made sure not to lose it. Unfortunately, at one point of the travel I couldn't find it anymore. I then felt really unprotected and anxious, and I had to face very difficult situations. From my experience, I understood that it is important to have a document to get support but also to have my existence recognized by others.

Be careful not to lose your passport or any other document useful to proof your identity and age. Keep It safe, these document belong to you. No one should ask you for your documents other than child protective authorities or the police. If you don't have one apply for it as soon as possible.

## **GETTING SUPPORT FROM NEW FRIENDS**

When I left it was the first time that I separated from my community and therefore I felt a little bit alone and unprotected. Fortunately, the mates I met during the travel became like my new family during some time. I talked with them about a lot of things; we shared information and explained our plans. Of course it was very important to understand who was a real friend and who had instead other intentions and was badly advising me. Knowing and sharing this experience with these good friends helped me to gain the courage to face the situation of uncertainty in which I found myself. It also helped giving a meaning to the difficult situation I was in.

Try to become friends with young people that may be in your same situation but trying to understand well who they are, this could orient, reassure and help you.

## **VALUING YOUR EXPERIENCE**

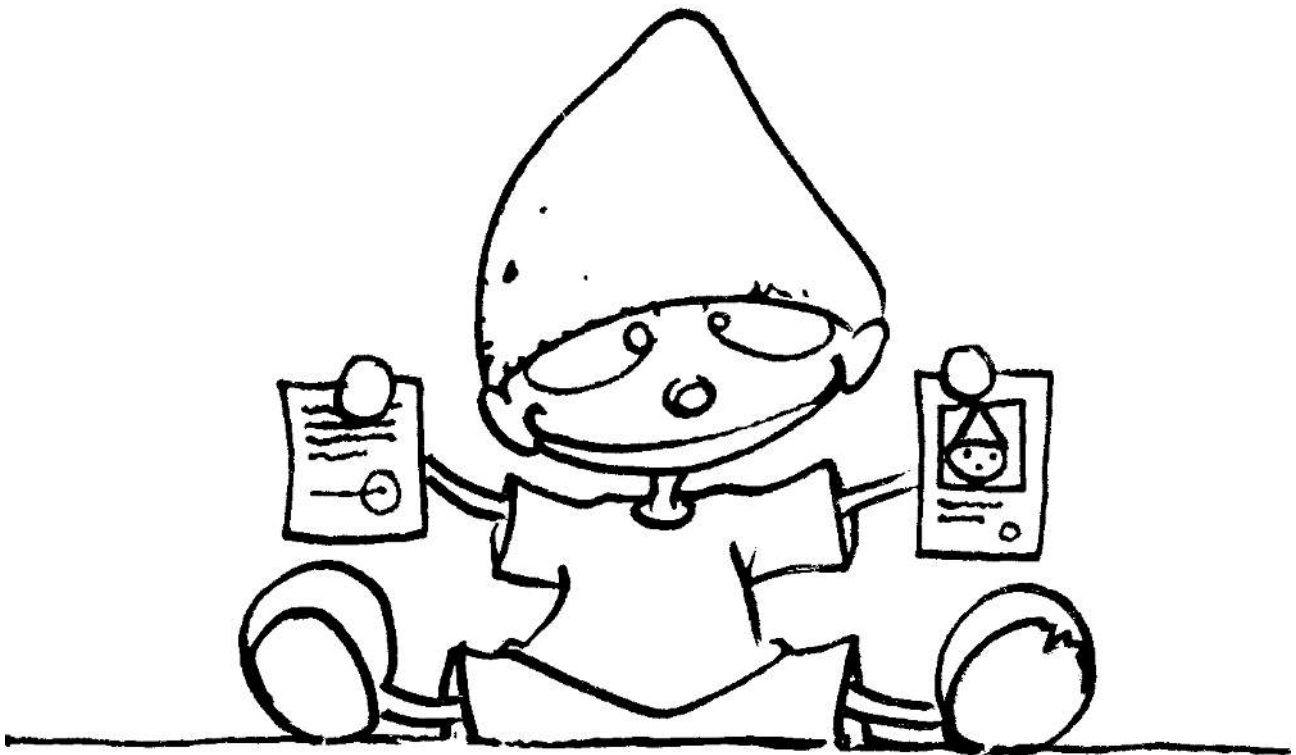
During the travel I realized for the first time that the main responsibility for myself and my life was with me and that my future depended a lot on my own capacity and confidence. I have learnt from all that I have been through during those days, from the good situations but also from the most difficult ones. Now I know myself better, my limitations and my capacities, which is important to reorganize my own project. I realized that my experience is a precious background that will constantly expand and grow, so it should be developed with care and valued. Communicating and talking about my experience to others is actually a good way to value it.

Consider the journey like an experience that shows your capacities, so try to value and share it with others.



## ARRIVAL

When I arrived in the new land, I felt disoriented and lost. Everything was so different and strange. But I made it! A lot of persons asked me questions, I did not understand them quite easily at the beginning but then it became better with the help of a guy who help me with the translation. I was scared to talk to people because often I did not feel welcomed. Moreover I couldn't demonstrate my age, because I had lost my documents during the trip. Luckily I was recognized as a minor with medical tests and I got some food and a place to sleep. I met some guys coming from my country who had faced the same travel experience and we stayed united in order to support and encourage each other.



## **GETTING ORIENTED**

When I first arrived at the destination, I felt disoriented and I didn't know precisely where I was and where to go. On the one hand, I had to fulfil my primary needs such as finding a place to stay or getting some food. On the other, I wanted to understand where I was and which were the rules of my new reality that may be different from my culture of origin. I therefore tried to rebuild a map to get oriented in my new situation and be able to give the best response to my first exigencies.

Rebuild a map of your new situation in order to get oriented by keeping in mind that the rules in the new cultural reality may be different from your country.

## **LEARNING THE LANGUAGE**

Some people received me when I arrived but I didn't know the language and it was difficult for me to communicate with them. Not being able to understand others and to express myself made me feel weak. Fortunately, there was a man from my country who was a cultural mediator and spoke my language; talking with him helped me to receive basic information to fulfil my primary needs and also to learn the essential words of the new language. I also attended language courses and the certificates that I received at the end were very useful when I was looking for a job.

Try to learn the new language as soon as possible, also by asking for linguistic mediation, because it is a very important tool to communicate, get oriented, expand opportunities and be more protected.

## **GETTING SPECIAL PROTECTION**

I was told by the professionals from the residential care facility that in some specific cases children have the right to special protection. For example, some of my friends were refugees and according with the Geneva Convention they were entitled to special protection measures. Some other youngsters who have experienced very bad things at home or on their way told about what they have been through and got special protection. Knowing this and accessing special protection was very important for them to have their rights recognized and to be more protected from any form of violence, abuse or trafficking.

Get informed and explain properly your situation because you can obtain special protection as a refugee and also in other cases such as violence, abuse or exploitation.

## **TELLING YOUR STORY**

Since my arrival I have been asked several times to tell my own story and experience during application procedures and bureaucracy-related issues in order to obtain documents such as a residence permit and health card or special protection. In such circumstances I often didn't feel well because I had to go through difficult and sad memories that made me suffer, and in some occasions I didn't feel like telling personal things to strangers. However, I was aware that explaining properly my story would be useful to receive protection, that's why I asked a trusted person among my acquaintances to help me with the description of my story.

When telling your story for practical purposes, try to be as detailed as you can in order to make understand who you are and to activate protective measures accordingly, and check that your details are properly written in any procedure.

## **CONTACTING HOME**

I felt from the beginning the necessity to talk with my family, to tell them that I had arrived safely and sound, and explain my new situation in order to get their advice and also some indications. I therefore asked the social workers from the residential facility where I was hosted if I could get in contact with my parents through phone or Skype. Talking with them reassured me a lot and represented also a very important step for being able to begin a new phase of my adventure. From then on, I often speak with my family and sometimes even my favourite social worker joints the call and talks to my parents.

Ask the persons of reference if they can help you to contact and communicate with your family or your loved ones in your country.

## **UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE'S ROLES**

When I arrived, many different persons introduced to me to deal with my situation: social workers, lawyers, police officers, psychologists immigration official, guardian, the caretakers in the house where I lived, the teacher, doctor. I knew that all of them could play a role in relation to my new situation but I didn't get precisely how they could help and which were their functions. When I finally understood their specific role it became much easier to relate with them in a useful way. They helped me in particular at resolving practical issues for example with regard to the acquisition of documents. With some of them, I established trustworthy and protective relationships. I have seen the importance of having relationships with different people who could support me in case someone tries to take advantage of me.

Try to understand the role of the different persons that come in contact to you in order to establish relations useful and protective for your situation.

### **THE GUARDIAN**

I arrived in the new country alone, without my parents and my family. In the residential care facility where I was living they told me about someone called “the guardian”, a person who helps children who arrive alone as long as they are under 18 years old. At the beginning I didn’t understand well who this person was but, despite the fact that it took some time, I finally got a guardian. I then understood that he would have helped me at defending my rights and my interests. Actually this person became my first referent. We became friends, sometimes we ate together and visited the city. Instead, it took very long for some of my friends to get a guardian and some others didn’t even know about the existence of such a figure. This lack of support brought them some disadvantages.

Ask to see your guardian and to know how he is wherever you may arrive and try to establish a close relationship since the guardian can support and help you in defending your interests and your rights.

### **CONNECTING WITH THE NEW REALITY**

At the beginning I felt confused because I knew little about the culture surrounding me since I rarely visited other places than the residential care facility where I was living. Little by little I started relating with different people and with different places, which helped me at perceiving different faces of the new place. Like this I understood how things work in the new country and I became familiar with the new culture, customs and rules. Establishing these new and different relations was of particular importance for my protection in that moment of discoveries; this is why I paid attention in choosing appropriate and safe relationships.

Establish new relations with different persons and places of your surrounding reality by being aware while at the same time open minded about the cultural diversities you may encounter.

### **CONSTRUCTING YOUR PROJECT**

The people from the residential care facility where I was staying proposed me a project for the period of time I would have spent there. While some of the things they proposed me were helpful, some others did not respond to my personal plans and my immediate needs. After a while I decided to be sincere and to tell them what I liked and disliked. I also told them about my own plans and what I would like to do and achieve. In this way

I came closer with them because they listened to me, I started to gain more trust in them and we tried to find a solution that suited me better.

Try to find a balance between the project that may be proposed to you, your needs and your expectations by making sure that your opinions are listened in the place you are staying.

### **ASSESSING WORK OR ECONOMIC PROPOSALS**

When I arrived, I immediately needed some money so I was looking for work opportunities. I realized that it wasn't easy to find job offers. I soon met some people who offered me small jobs without telling me the details or explaining the working conditions. Even if sometimes they seemed good opportunities to earn money, I was not convinced I could trust them. In some occasions I asked my social worker his opinion and advices and this helped me at knowing how to differentiate between reliable and non-reliable proposals. In fact, I have friends who accepted proposals that resulted to be dangerous since they were exploited by other persons, who took advantage of their situation.

Be careful about accepting work or economic proposals coming from people you do not know. Try to understand the working conditions and to assess the risks and benefits in order to avoid situations of crime and exploitation.

### **KEEPING CONNECTED WITH YOUR ORIGINS**

When I arrived I missed many things from my land such as the food, the smells, the language and the way of talking to each other. Fortunately, I found an association of people from my country and I became a member. I made new friends there but always having in mind that not all the relationships were useful and safe. We tried to meet regularly to talk and to eat together, which was a very good way to be connected with our origins.

Try to be open to learn new things and new life experiences while at the same time get in touch with members of your community settled in the host country as a way to be connected with your origins.

## SETTLEMENT

Being here in this new country is not easy. I took some time to orient myself, learn the new language and understand the rules. But my most urgent need was to find a job to send money back to my family because I know that my father has to pay back some money he borrowed to pay for my trip. But I was aware that to find a good job I had to study and learn to communicate better in the new language. And to leave a good life I had to make new friends and avoid dangerous situations. Once I got into some trouble with the police although, at the end, everything settled down. In many occasions I thought to go back to my country but I'm trying to earn enough money to allow my brother to reach me and maybe also my parents.



## **MAKING GOOD USE OF TIME**

Even if after some time from my arrival I felt ready to work because I learnt the language and I had become familiar with the new context, I faced some obstacles related with bureaucracy and the fact of being a minor. In the country where I arrived, children are not allowed to work by law and most of them study until they are 18. I thus tried not to waste time during this period by engaging in initiatives useful for my future including training courses. I have seen a lot of youngsters that got very stressed over these waiting periods; they needed to send money home but the pocket money they received was insufficient. This uncertainty made them feel demotivated. Hence the importance of keeping busy with things that are useful for the personal wellbeing.

Take advantage of waiting periods by engaging in activities useful for your present and your future.

## **TURNING 18**

When I was about to turn 18 years I realised that it would have brought me great consequences affecting many elements of my life. For example, I would have had to leave the residential care facility and find another place to live. I understood that it was important to keep this in mind and to try to be prepared for this change in advance. I did it with my guardian and other reference persons; we defined a plan together that could continue over time so as to be ready and well organized in order to avoid emergency situations.

Take into consideration that the shift towards adulthood may be different in Europe. Try your best to ensure that you will be able to continue your personal project even when you turn 18 by talking about that before you turn 18 and asking about the support that is available and how to get it.

## **PRESERVING DIGNITY**

I have always tried, even in the most difficult circumstances, to protect myself and my dignity by taking care of my body and of the environment where I was hosted. I used to go for a run to stay healthy and I always tried to avoid dirt. I have realized that living in a pleasant and healthy environment helps to lift the spirit and be in a better mood, and shows respect for oneself.

Always take care of your health, your body and of the environment where you live despite the difficulties you may encounter.



## **ESTABLISHING MEANINGFUL RELATIONS**

When I arrived in the new country it took me a while to open myself to unfamiliar people, in particular adults, also because sometimes they did not seem to have a real interest in me. Having a guardian helped me to enter into relationship with older people. However, when I turned 18 the guardianship finished and I decided to fill this vacuum in order to be further supported. In particular I established a very close relationship with a person that became a support person for me. With her I could talk about my present and future situation, spend my free time doing different things, improve my knowledge about the new place, etc. I am very grateful to this person who accompanied and guided me during a very crucial moment for my future.

Establishing a relationship with a trustful and well-intentioned person may result in developing a good point of reference for guidance and support.

## **FEELING LIKE AT HOME**

Little by little different people that I have come to know since my arrival became real friends and are now like a new community for me, like a second family. Above all at the beginning I felt alone and having new friends helped me at getting over this sad feeling. It was not easy because in some occasions I found racist and discriminatory attitudes towards foreigners, but I also meet very good people. With them I felt accompanied and happy, which was key to start to feel like at home in the new country. This new community made me feel protected because I knew I could count on them in case of necessity. At the same time, I became a reference for other people.

Creating new social relationships and friendships allow reconstructing points of references and a social network that make you feel at ease.

## **CONTRIBUTING TO THE NEW SOCIETY**

Some time after my arrival, I realized that there were several organisations and groups of people that voluntarily do things for the city and contribute to the society through their activities. Even if in some cases I was not sure if it would be good for me, I decided to collaborate with the ones that seemed more positive and constructive. The first was a football team and the other was a group of volunteers that organised activities to improve the city. Thanks to this I discovered people with my same interests; with them I have a lot of fun. But it also gave further sense to my presence in this place, because I felt part of a community.

Participate in activities or associations that may interest you; it can be a way to help others, to have an active role in the new society and to be recognized for it.



## **EXPLAINING YOUR REAL SITUATION**

I always wanted to maintain contacts with home. At the beginning I felt a little bit afraid of explaining my real situation in the new country to my family and my friends because I was facing some difficulties and I didn't want to disappoint them. Then I realised that it was better to explain the truth even if it may not be what they expected. Being sincere with the people that stayed in my land was also important to orient and inform others who, like me, were planning to leave; and of course, being sincere with myself was important too in order to take control of my life.

Try to tell the truth to your loved ones at home and your friends when explaining the situation in the new country; it can be important also for other people who are planning to leave.

## **CONSIDERING RETURN**

I have been thinking about my return since I left home. The possibility to go back to my country has been always in my mind. I often thought of the moment in which I would have been able to visit my village again, even if I still don't know for how much time I will be living in the new country. In any case, I know that the possibility to go back will never disappear and this thought reassures me because it makes me see that alternatives do exist.

Don't avoid thoughts about return; it will probably be always present in your life even if only in your mind.

## **VALUING YOUR UNIQUE STORY**

I sometimes was not very clear about who I was because my experience made me different from what I was before leaving, but at the same time I wasn't like my peers from the country of arrival. I after understood that my story, with its problems and results, is unique and important regardless of where I come from and where I go. I realized that not recognizing my own story could confuse me. Although it may be very hard, experience always creates the opportunity to learn.

Value your story because it is unique and important and take into consideration that it is constantly changing and enriching with new elements.

## CLOSURE

*This is my story and some of the learning that I gained from it.*

*At the moment I'm working during the night in a bakery store and continue to study during the day, in the afternoon when I wake up. I have many good friends, I am in contact with home, I can send them some money from time to time. Sometimes I give a hand to children and adults arriving here from different countries around the world.*

*I hope that you enjoyed my story, telling it has been very important for me. Perhaps my thoughts and reflections will be useful also for you, to understand and guide your own story as well as to draw a map for your safety and success in order to grow at best the unique tree of your life.*

