



Article

“Even if You Don’t Arrive, You’re Already a Winner”: Stories by Refugees in Europe

January 12, 2024

A web portal dedicated to capturing the refugee experience firsthand

On this journey you never lose,

even if one does not arrive,

you are already a winner

because you learn crazy things,

how you live, how you see people,

you meet people you can’t imagine,

who are abandoned to live in a world

in which they are not recognized.

—Ahmed, *Human Lines Portal*



Source: Julie Ricard via Unsplash

Ahmed's story is like many others featured on the [Human Lines](#) web platform, created by researchers at Notre Dame University. As indicated by their data, more and more people have been forced to relocate from African and Middle Eastern countries in the past decade. Yet "fewer and fewer feel welcomed into their new countries." Between November 2017 and January 2019, the Italian Bishops' Conference joined Caritas Italy to form the Humanitarian Corridors project, which made it possible for 500 Eritrean, Somali, and South Sudanese refugees to leave Ethiopia and enter Italy via a legal and safe route. In 2019 the project provided for the entry of another 600 people from various countries, including Ethiopia, Niger, and Jordan. In 2018 professors Ilaria Schnyder von Wartensee and Clemens Sedmak began working on a longitudinal academic research project on Humanitarian Corridors aimed at monitoring and evaluating the various dynamics at work in such a new and unprecedented approach to immigration and reception.

Von Wartensee also conceived of the need for a digital platform experience connecting the public with the refugees and local welcoming communities. *Human Lines* aims to understand and narrate stories, dynamics, experiences, and difficulties between the refugees and the communities they joined and constitutes an inspiring pedagogical tool for the general public, schools, students, and so on.

Human Factor: A Self-Narration Workshop

While studying the Human Corridors project, the Notre Dame research team felt that the point of view, or perspective from which one observes refugees is an important factor to take into consideration:

We asked ourselves: what point of view is missing from the usual narrative of migration?

People who immigrate or emigrate are usually told about the stories of migration by those who do not experience migration, or at least not the sort of migration which is highlighted throughout this process.

They felt that it was particularly important to showcase the unique perspectives of the young people who were already in Europe or on their way, allowing them to tell their stories with complete freedom of expression. Correspondingly, a workshop was held that was structured as a theoretical and practical course of self-narration and storytelling techniques. The output of this was a dedicated and collective blog in which each participant or author would be able to develop and publish their own story with accompaniment and suggestions of the *Human Lines* team. Significantly, this was not envisioned as a blog on migration (even if the participants individually chose to speak of that theme). The focus was on any subject or angle that helped “convey perspectives, experiences and visions of the protagonists, through which identities and specificities emerge, usually hidden behind the label “migrant”—as if the identity and essence of a person coincide or even are exhausted in

having lived the migratory experience.”

[Click here to view the Human Factor blog](#)

Stories

The *Human Lines* team put together a set of multimedia stories based on the narratives, artwork and recordings provided by participants in the Human Factor workshop as well as the Human Corridors project as a whole.

Watch Ahmed’s story of his journey from Al-Mukalla (Yemen), to Rome, passing through Egypt and Libya over a span of more than two years. Or listen to Danait, a young Eritrean talk about the challenges of finding herself intellectually and physically stranded in Trivento. Witness as Mohammed, a young Somalian boy, journeys to Ragusa, Italy. Many more such voices wait to be heard in *Human Lines*.

[Click here to view all the stories](#)

