

# THE STORIES: REZA



First name: **REZA**

Last name: **GHOLAMI**

Age: **29**

Country of origin: **AFGHANISTAN**

Living in **Greece** since: **2006**

## SHORT SUMMARY

Reza was born in Afghanistan but had to leave his country twice before coming to Greece as a refugee. During the civil war and the US invasion in Afghanistan (2001-2002) he moved to Pakistan where he stayed for three years before returning home. He left his country once more for Iran and finally came to Greece through Turkey in 2006, where he settled down and has integrated to a great extent.

## “SETTING UP THE AFGHAN COMMUNITY IN ATHENS”

### REZA’S STORY

Reza was born in Kabul, Afghanistan and worked there since he was 12, as a tailors assistant. In the civil war, witnessing the Taliban destroying the schools in the country, he moved to Pakistan where he stayed for three years working and attending school. He briefly returned to Afghanistan before leaving for Iran when he was 17 years old. He arrived in Greece through Turkey in 2006. After arriving in Lesbos in a dinghy, along with four other people he met in

Turkey, he was held on the island for ten days and then released with a one-month permit. He arrived in Athens where, with the help of some fellow Afghans, he found a place to stay and got a job. He worked in many jobs, as construction worker, as electrician and plumber assistant etc. before finding steadier work as a carpenter, which he kept for three and a half years. His first appeal to be granted refugee status was rejected in 2006. In 2007 he started taking Greek courses at a center for refugees and in a special program hosted by the Greek university. While his Greek improved, he started realizing that he needed to reach out to people and explain the situation of refugees in a better and clear way. In 2010, he resumed high school while still working as a carpenter. That same year, he organizing a protest along with 100 other people at the Athens center, demanding that their asylum requests were re-examined; he passed an interview before a newly set-up committee and was finally recognized as a refugee in 2011. He subsequently changed jobs and became an interpreter until 2015.

In 2015 Reza started his own business, a restaurant, together with other people. Meanwhile, he had helped organize one of the major Afghan communities in Greece, active since 2011-12, which now numbers at least 360 members.

He is currently trying to help others integrate through the Afghan community, giving advice to newcomers and trying to encourage them to improve their lives. Among other things, the community organizes events and holds meetings to help people get together but also to inform the public on refugee issues. He has personally collaborated with the UNHCR and UNICEF in an effort to educate people in schools regarding the situation and needs of refugees.

**Reza had to leave Afghanistan twice.**

# THE STORIES: REZA

## CONFLICT

Reza had to leave Afghanistan twice: the first time because of the civil strife and the Taliban violence that ensued and the second because of his persecution by fanatical religious leaders who accused him of not fulfilling his religious duties as a Muslim.

## ESCAPE

Reza first left Afghanistan for Pakistan for three years. Upon his return, and when he realized that he could not stay in Afghanistan, he went to Iran and from there to Turkey where he crossed over to Greece in 2006 (island of Lesbos).

## BELONGING

A real important aspect in Reza's integration strategy was maintaining his job status, first through the help of other members of the Afghan community and then on his own, as his Greek language skills improved. He acknowledged that his basic tool for achieving smooth integration was learning Greek, which he focused on since the beginning and through this he managed not only to finish high school but also to pass the exams to get into Greek university (he succeeded in getting into university but since he had to go outside Athens, which he couldn't afford, he didn't attend). Finally, his excellent newly acquired Greek language skills were crucial in facilitating his integration and setting up his business.

**He  
worked with  
the UNHCR  
and UNICEF.**