

THE STORIES: FELIX



First name: **FELIX**

Last name: **MAFUTA AGANZE**

Age: **30**

Country of origin: **DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

Living in **Portugal** since: **2015**

SHORT SUMMARY

Felix Mafuta Aganze, Congolese, transport manager, 30 years old, married with two children, defector of the rebel forces, escapes from DRC to survive. Arrives in Portugal in 2015, after a long journey that went through Rwanda, Russia and Finland. Fears for the lives of his two children who remain in DRC and does not know where his wife is, who has been kidnapped. Tries to forget his pain, with intense activity in Portugal, which integrates, besides providing customer service in French in a company, the study of the Portuguese language, the theatrical activity and responsibility for the library of the CPR. He prepares to take a new course in social sciences, learns to live alone and do housework and aspires to share his history and experiences, believing it can be helpful for others. Hopefully, these second steps will be good.

“ WHO LIVED HIS EARLY STEPS AND IT WAS BAD, LIKE ME, CAN LIVE THE SECOND STEPS AND BE GOOD”

CONFLICT

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been living a bloody civil war for over 20 years. A struggle between rebel groups and forces loyal to the government, in a tangle of ethnicities and ethnic groups. It has killed more than 6 million people. Attacks on the civilian population with executions, rape and kidnapping are frequent.

Felix lived in a small village in northern Congo. One day his village was attacked by a rebel group. Almost all the inhabitants of the village were killed or kidnapped. Felix was one of the men kidnapped. In order not to be executed, he was forced to fight alongside the rebels for 18 months. “One day, when attacking a village, the forces loyal to the government were waiting for us”. The attack was strongly repelled. Felix and his comrades had to retreat. Felix took advantage of the retreat and escaped towards Rwanda. His wife was also kidnapped. To this day he does not know of her whereabouts. The two children of Felix stayed with his mother.

I escaped and walked until I crossed the border, to survive.

ESCAPE AND ARRIVAL IN PORTUGAL

As soon as he had escaped, Felix began a walk toward the Rwandan border. He crossed the border and found an institution of Russian Priests. At first, the priests were suspicious about him. They knew he had fought for the rebels, but they were not sure of his story. The Priests contacted another religious institution in the Congo to make sure that Felix was reliable.

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Through the Congo priests, Felix also had confirmation that his children were alive and safe with his mother. He knew then that a couple from Finland sent some money to his mother so she could escape with the children to the capital, Kinshasa. They live there today, but Felix fears for the safety of his family. *"The war continues!"*

Accompanied by a Russian priest and through the Russian institution to which the priest belonged, Felix then went to Russia. When he arrived in Russia, the priests of this Catholic institution advised him to apply for refugee status. With the help of these priests, he made the request, but the Russian government rejected it and recommended him to apply for a temporary visa in Finland. His application has been submitted and accepted by the Finnish embassy.

He arrived in Finland, with a temporary visa, but was not granted refugee status in the country. He was advised to apply for asylum at the Portuguese embassy. The Portuguese government accepted his request granting him refugee status. At the end of 2015 Felix moved to Portugal.

I had to open to the host society and had to have a desire to integrate.

NEW BELONGING AND LIFE IN LISBON

He arrived in Lisbon without knowing much about Portugal. The little he knew had learned in geography classes, nothing more. At the beginning it was very difficult. *"I was alone and could not communicate in Portuguese"*. He went to the Portuguese Council for Refugees¹ (CPR), where he began the study of Portuguese. He started making friends and always insisted on speaking Portuguese with them.

He discovered in the CPR a library where he could read books of Portuguese literature. He spent many hours inside the library and after a while was invited to be responsible for the CPR library. One day he was invited to participate also in

¹ <http://www.cpr.pt>

² <http://refugiados.net/1cpr/www/refugiacto10anos.php>

³ <http://www.fcsh.unl.pt/formacao-ao-longo-da-vida/cursos-de-linguas>

the theater of the CPR, activity that maintains until today. *"I had never thought of being an actor, much less to play theater!"* It was a great way to learn Portuguese and also to stop thinking about his past life. *"In the theater I can laugh, talk, chat with other. I can communicate who I was and who I am now"*.

"My story can help a lot of people. When I arrived I thought that I could never live as I do today. I managed to integrate myself and I think I have a great future". He currently works at a customer support company (Mac Call Center). Gives information on mobile phones, tablets and computers. He makes customer service in French.

He also discovered another environment. He realized that here, women, unlike in his country, share the work at home. *"So I had to learn how to take care of the house, cooking, things a man from my country would not do. Women get tired the same way men do, so we have to share work at home."*

He tries always to be busy so *"I do not have time to think hard about my pains"*. He lives alone and during his free time reads, studies and walks. Is ending the Portuguese level 2 in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the New University of Lisboa³, allowing him to enter a university course in social sciences of the University.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

In addition to the theater and the social science course, *"I would like to participate in a group where .I could tell my experiences and make people see the refugees with different eyes..."*

Who lived his early steps and it was bad, like me, can live the second steps and be good".

By sharing common interest I created bonds.