

THE STORIES: NOUR



First name: **NOUR**

Last name: **MACHLAH**

Age: **27**

Country of origin: **SYRIA**

Living in **Portugal** since: **2014**

SHORT SUMMARY

Nour Machlah (Syrian), a 27-year-old architecture master student, fled Syria and the armed conflict and arrived in Portugal in 2014, after a visit to Lebanon and Turkey, where he failed to realize his dream of continuing to study architecture. As he has been the target of people's ignorance, he begins making various speeches in Portugal and Europe relating to integration process of immigrants and refugees, Human Rights, peace and war, cross culture and religious dialogue and life and happiness. He was invited to speak in the European Parliament. He contributed ideas regarding the new asylum law and migration and integration processes in Europe. He is Member of the European Migrant Advisory Board (Representing Portugal) as an advisor on the European and local level.

He managed to bring his mother and brother to Portugal, where he is creating his future and want to be happy .

“I WANT TO BE THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS!”

THE CONFLICT

The war began and the first bombings took place in Aleppo when Nour, still with his family, was studying architecture. *“I was in the middle of the war! I fled because I did not want to fight, I did not want to die, and I did not want to kill anyone. Everything was very confusing”.*

He then interrupted his architectural studies and with the support of his father, who has been living in England since 1998, decided to leave the country.

THE ESCAPE

Nour left Aleppo in 2012. He escape to Lebanon, Beirut, and a place where he could get a visa for England. He went alone, staying the rest of the family in Aleppo.

The early days were very hard for Nour. He had no work and felt some animosity on the part of the Lebanese against him. *“There was a part of the Lebanese who did not like us”.* A month later the younger brother joined him. At first he did not work. His father told him that *“it was a temporary place”.* He tried 2 times a visa to England and was rejected in both. *“Although my father has lived in England since 1998, I was simply a Syrian to them”.* He spent 7 months in Lebanon, and disillusioned went to Ankara, Turkey.

In Ankara, he started looking for a solution. He realised that people didn't trust him, but he was lucky because got a job on the third day in Ankara. But his salary was too low and he could not study. He realised that he had to leave Turkey. In the meantime, he met the ambassador from Brazil, who wanted to help him. *“I give you a visa for Brazil,*

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for you and for your brother”.

Before taking the visa, he found on the internet a platform to help Syrian students who wanted to continue their studies in Portugal. He applied for the scholarship programme, he and his brother.

He lost hope when he realised that many other people has equally applied. He accepted the visa to Brazil, but the day before the purchase of the ticket to Brazil, he received an email from Lisbon, informing that they had been accepted to study in Portugal, through the platform created by the former President of the Portuguese Republic, Jorge Sampaio¹. On February 28th, 2014, he arrived in Portugal.

NEW BELONGINGS AND INCLUSION

He recommenced his studies in architecture, practically from scratch. He was well received at the university, although in the early days he felt very much the cultural differences. *“Portuguese language is not hard, a very romantic language, but my problem with it was always the grammar, and because of the busy schedule of architecture classes I really couldn’t find much time for Portuguese classes (even if I study in Portuguese) but for me the language here can tell you a lot about this country culture in two different sides, the Arabic touch in the Portuguese language and also the Portuguese way of talking, for me the language is a very important part of the culture. Many things are similar to my culture and many things are different as well”.*

He realised that people do not know much about Syria and the Syrians. He heard joke about him and his people *“Do you have a bomb with you? It’s a joke, but it’s painful. Why did I have to hear that? Just because I was born in another part of the world? But on the other hand, I had found the place in the world where I could find answers! It is always hard to be judged by people, especially*

in the wrong way. But I have to give an answer, so people would change the way they think about me! I began to talk more with the small community where I lived, who got to know more about me, more about my country”.

Following these conversations, Nour began receiving invitations to speak at conferences and universities. *“I am invited to talk about war, peace, terrorism, being a Muslim, and other issues. It was very funny sometimes. I never wanted to talk about human rights, I wanted to talk about motivation”.*

One day he received an email from the European Parliament inviting him to make a speech in the tribune of this Parliament.

PUBLIC FIGURE

He made a forceful **speech in the European Parliament** giving a greater visibility for the work he had been doing in Portugal.

Nour met personally Dr. Pedro Calado, High Commissioner for Migration/ACM, with whom he collaborates in favour of the refugees in Portugal. Contacts and working together with other European institutions are intensified. After his second speech to the European Parliament, invitations to speak and visit other countries increased even more. He is TEDx speaker as well, had given a **TEDx** talk during TEDx Porto event, addressing the topic of Stereotype. He becomes a well-known figure in the European and Portuguese media and institutions working with refugees.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Recently Nour was able to bring his mother and young brother to live with him in Portugal. The rest of the family is already living safely in other countries. His concerns are now focused on helping others: *“I want to be the voice of the voiceless!”*

¹ <http://jorgesampaio.pt/jorgesampaio/pt/>

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Currently he feels really Portuguese. And to complete this feeling of belonging, he hopes that soon his request will be positively deferred and his Portuguese citizenship recognised.

Nour intends now, in partnership with Dr. Pedro Calado (ACM), to deepen his work in Portugal and to finish his studies briefly and come to work as an Architect.

"I realized that I want to contribute more to Portugal".

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