

Refugee paralegals

By Christian Musenga

Refugees in Kenya face multiple challenges. In addition to the long process of recognition or rejection of refugee status, these challenges include lack of access to documentation and services – including refugee registration processes, business and work permits, student pass, bank accounts, social security numbers, travel documentation and mobile communication. Refugees also experience difficulties relating to police harassment, a general lack of knowledge of refugee issues, negative and discriminatory attitudes from local populations and barriers to foreign qualifications recognition.

In order to address this, some refugees in Nairobi have been trained by the nongovernmental organisation (NGO) Kituo Cha Sheria, supported by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the UN Migration Agency (IOM), as paralegals to support fellow refugees. A paralegal is someone who has either a basic legal training or more extensive practical legal experience, who provides legal assistance to facilitate access to rights and justice. Their work is generally supervised by a lawyer, law office or any legal institution.

Refugee paralegals sensitise refugee groups and public authorities on refugee rights through forums, workshops, training and conferences and also contribute to the capacity building programme of authorities to appropriately handle refugee cases, including how they conduct, stop, arrest and detain forced migrants and on how refugee documents should be issued and verified. They also contribute to awareness-raising activities for government representatives to improve their knowledge of refugee issues.

Refugee paralegals also work to empower the refugee community by providing guidance on their rights and obligations, including how to react when stopped, arrested or detained and how to approach authorities on matters of documentation. They provide refugees and asylum seekers with information

regarding their asylum application and their refugee status, offering advice on their cases, making referrals and following up on cases. They advocate for the release of arrested refugees, asylum seekers and other forced migrants at police stations, prisons and places of detention, and accompany refugees on visits to organisations and institutions to seek assistance on various social issues (for example, to police stations in order to report crimes).

As a lawyer, I have a legal background and therefore have an obligation to help my community, so I became a refugee paralegal. Refugee paralegals are able to undertake work that large international NGOs have difficulty with or do not undertake due to their budget limitations and the scope of their work. For example, I am able to intervene in refugee cases (especially arrest and harassment cases) at any time of the day or night, including on weekends and holidays; large organisations only intervene during their hours and days of work. We also advise, refer and follow up on cases, giving feedback to refugees, which means they do not have to pay the costs of transportation to these NGOs, whose offices are all far from where refugees live. Importantly, refugee paralegals are based where refugees live. We deal with refugees on a daily basis as the majority of us are also refugees and live as part of the refugee community. In the community where I live and work we have established a forum where refugees can share their own ideas on legal and livelihoods issues.

In the course of my work as a refugee paralegal I have assisted many refugees. One Congolese refugee, who was conducting business without a business permit, was arrested for being in Nairobi unlawfully. He had previously been refused a business permit by the local authorities because they felt he lacked adequate identification. I advocated for his release by proving that his registration papers (from both the government and UNHCR) were issued to him in Nairobi, thereby giving him the right to live there. Following his release I also assisted him to obtain a business permit so that he could continue to do business lawfully in Nairobi.

I also helped a Somali refugee who was living in Dadaab refugee camp by advocating on her behalf with the Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS) in

Nairobi when she was dealing with logistically complex demands for paperwork during the process of preparing to join her mother, who had been resettled in the United States. My intervention on her behalf, which included accompanying her to the RAS office, helped to avoid a delay in the process.

There are still important steps that need to be taken to make life legally secure for refugees in Nairobi. Refugee paralegals are currently lobbying the Government of Kenya to apply all the provisions of the Refugee Act 2006 to ensure refugees receive full protection in Kenya. We must also advocate for the government to facilitate local integration, opening doors to make refugees feel welcomed and safe, since many cannot return to their countries and their chances of resettlement are low. One way of doing this would be by establishing a permanent awareness-raising programme for police and other public administration officers in order to build their capacity to handle refugee cases. Both refugees and government authorities must know refugees' rights and have the power and knowledge to advocate for them. Refugee paralegals in Nairobi are working to make sure this happens.

My experience at CIFE Summer Programme

I was invited for the second time as a speaker at the "*Summer University Programme*", the 15th edition organized by CIFE (which is a private institution of higher education and research, founded in 1945, having its head office in Nice and branch offices in Istanbul, Brussels and Berlin).

This programme was focused on migration and refugees across Europe and was taught in French.

One of the organizers of this programme is Laura Spătaru Negura who is also one of the founding members of Issues Without Borders and a teacher at Nicolae Titulescu University, which is one of the organising partners.

The summer school took place in several places: 29 July- 31 July 2018 in Bucharest (Romania), 31 July-2 August in Slobozia (Romania) and 2 August-5

August 2018 in Silistra (Bulgaria).

The programme gathered students from different countries such as France, Bulgaria, Italy, Netherlands, Ecuador. The participants got the chance to discover parts of Romania and Bulgaria, visit the surroundings, discover the culture and create great memories.

The programme included interesting lectures among which I can mention "*Security in its many facets*" (held by Raluca Miga Bestelciu, professor at Nicolae Titulescu University), "*The Impact of Civil Aviation on migration and its consequences on migration*" (held by Sorana Paun-Pop, Politehnica University in Bucharest), "*Islamic Terrorism, weapon in the psychological war*" (held by Rosemarie Olanescu, specialist in security and islam), "*Terrorism: definition, movement, coverage* " (held by Francois Dieu, Sociology Professor at Toulouse University and Director of the Study and Research Police Center), "*Security and the fight against terrorism in Europe* (held by Laura Laura Negură Spătaru, lawyer and Teaching Assistant at Nicolae Titulescu University).

My presentation was on: "*IWB (Issues Without Borders) for refugees: actions to raise awareness.* "

During my lecture I presented IWB actions to raise awareness on the refugee issue, thus presenting all the conferences that I have attended on behalf of IWB (in Cyprus, Georgia, Belgium, Romania)

I also presented our first promotional clip, from the first international conference on human rights that we organized in Timisoara in November 2017 .

Furthermore I presented *Refuge D' Amour*, a short film about a syrian women who obtained the refugee status in France. This short movie is meant to depict a different side of the refugee issue and it aimed at sensitize people.

After my presentation I engaged with students in a Q & A, trying to see what they think about migrants and refugees, what was their opinion about our actions to raise awareness and how they see the future of Europe in terms of

migration.

I was happy to see that the students shared their thoughts during the discussion and they also gave me many ideas for our future petitions.

I had a great time, not only during my presentation but also after it, when I joined the group and explored Bucharest together, visiting the House of the People and other important places .

I hope I will be invited next year as well!

Congratulations to all the organizers, especially to Marie France Perdigon and to Laura Negura Spătaru!





Let's talk about short films focused on refugees!

Together with 4everfilmsproductions (Oana Merdariu – president & Daniel Pop – artistic director) we organized a conference on refugee integration at Unirea High School in Targu Mures, Romania. Unirea High School is our former high school.

There were around 120 participants at this conference, between the age of 16 and 18 years old, all students at this high school, as well as some of our former high school teachers, the principal and other teachers who found out about this event and wanted to attend.

We were offered the opportunity to present our short film *Refuge D'Amour*, a short film meant to depict a different side of the refugee crisis. This short film was filmed in Paris and it presents the story of a Syrian woman called Waed who lives there as a refugee. In this short film we are presenting the idea of freedom, of being home sick, of being in love. It is a story meant to sensitize people and show a different face of the refugee issue.

After presenting the short film we discussed it with the students present. We wanted to know their opinion about the short film; what freedom means for them. We also wanted to know what they think about the media's role in

presenting refugee stories and their integration. Furthermore, we talked about ways of producing short films related to this topic. They were very engaged in this discussion and shared some of their personal experiences with us.

We also presented a trailer about our first international human rights conference; a conference that we organized on the 10/11th November 2017 in Timisoara, Romania. This promotional short film presents moments from our conference, from our presentations and also explains some of our future plans which are all related to our current project *IWB for Refugees*. *IWB for Refugees* is a project aimed at mapping a new European legislation on migration through national and international petitions where we will offer our recommendations for the member states of the European Union

Sharing our future projects with the students was a good opportunity to get to know them better, hearing their thoughts on these topics and stimulating their curiosity.

We also spoke about our idea of creating a cultural youth centre in Targu Mures, a centre aimed at organizing various events, from theater shows to dance lessons, concerts, art expositions, etc.

After our presentations we had a Q&A session with the participants where we asked them several questions; if they had ever volunteered, if they would volunteer for an NGO and about the importance of volunteering.

We were very surprised to see that most of them had volunteering experience, they were volunteering for different NGOs/student unions; they were also curious about our projects, about the youth centre and they wanted to know more about refugee integration and how we can better integrate refugees in our society.

We were very happy to be back in our former high school; it brought back a lot of good memories. All in all it was a lovely experience and we will go back for more interactive sessions where we can raise awareness and discuss about important topics!

Thank you to Unirea High School for believing in us, we were honored to be there!



My experience at CIFE Summer Programme

On the 1st of August 2017 I've attended as a speaker the international summer school Romania/Bulgaria organized by CIFE, programme focused on migration and refugee rights across Europe, taught in French. CIFE is a private institution of higher education and research, founded in 1954 with its head office in Nice and branch offices in Berlin, Brussels and Istanbul.

I was invited at this summer school by Laura Spataru-Negura, one of the founding members of Issues Without Borders, who is teaching at Nicolae Titulescu University (the university where I am currently enrolled in a PHD programme). Nicolae Titulescu University is one of the organizing partners of the summer school, besides CIFE, and the European Law Institute of Sofia.

Due to this partnership, the summer school took place in several locations: July 31 – August 1st in Bucharest (Romania), August 1st – 3rd in Slobozia (Romania) and August 3rd – 6th in Silistra (Bulgaria). The programme gathered students from different countries, such as Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Turkey, and it was held in French. The participants had the chance to discover all the cities where they attended lectures, discover the culture of the area and exchange ideas thus creating lasting memories.

The programme included interesting lectures among which I mention (in a chronological order): *"The inviolability of human rights in migration. Different types of rights in favour of migrants"* (held by Laura Spataru-Negura, University of Nicolae Titulescu), *"The contribution of civil aviation in the migration process and the protection of the right to life"* (held by Sorana Paun-Pop, Politehnica University), *"The Route to the Balkans. Geographic aspects concerning the history of migrants in the Balkans"* (held by professor Michael Hermans, HEC Liege in Belgium), *"Migrations, law and barriers: two-speed Europe or two-truths Europe?"* (held by professor Atanas Semov, University of Sofia, Director of the European Law Institute of Sofia), *"Human Rights in Europe"* (held by professor Evgeni Tanchev, University of

Sofia, Attorney General at the European Union's Court of Justice).

My lecture's topic was on "*Debates on migration management. The role of NGOs*". Because I wanted my presentation to be more interesting for students, I've presented my experience at Brussels in the European Parliament, where I've attended a conference on migration management as the president of the NGO Issues Without Borders.

In addition to the Power Point presentation I also initiated a debate with the students, a long Q&A session and I was very happy to see a lot of positive feedback.

The programme was very well-organized, I was given the opportunity to attend a lovely dinner at Caru' cu Bere in Bucharest (the most iconic restaurant in Bucharest, in my opinion), one evening before my lecture.

I must confess that I felt very good in this program and that I will attend it next year for sure, if I will be invite it. I highly recommend it!

Congratulations to all the organizers, especially to Marie France Perdigon (director of CIFE's summer programmes –

http://www.cife.eu/en/4/summer-university-programmes_6-1) and to Laura – thank you for inviting me!





Borders

A poem about the ability for European people with passports to cross a border with no trouble whatsoever, while people who seek refuge experience borders as an obstacle and is the cause for serious hardship. It was inspired by walking from Greece to Macedonia as a person from a foreign land.

cross lines without meaning

just one look

ahead without dreaming

that's all it took

i get a pass

while others not so fast

we all foreigners to this land

to us all it is foreign, land

stressed they will tress

it's such a mess around me

i am free because of what's in my hand

they are trapped as it's lost from their hands

walls put up, imaginary

fences and barbed wire

find a place for the dead to be buried

hopes crushed, barely living tired

borders taking shape

an unwelcoming sign

people following orders

media frenzy turns them blind

eyes opened to reality

difference between love and hate

accepting inhumane casualties

divided yet the same fate

all part of one kind or so I thought

your birth place identifies who you are

word association what we are taught

reached for non-existing stars

seek refuge in world you don't know

not allowed to stay

get refused for what you can and cannot show

please go back the same way

while i freely travel

whole lives get unraveled

if only we would break down the borders

that we created to separate and keep order

**by Jelle Wassenaar- Issues Without Borders member, former volunteer in a
refugee camp**

a Number, a Name

A poem from two different perspectives about refugees who are lost in the numbers, currently living in a camp where they are usually asked for their tent / isobox number when on the receiving end of food, hygiene items and such. I've tried to paint the picture from a camp resident and a volunteer (who are wearing name tags).

a number, I have a name
reduced to ones and zero
because of where I came from
so much I lost in the stats
I am a number, I had a house
now I have a number
isolated in a box
boxed in between isos
so many strangers, in this place
for 12 months, I am going crazy
plucking my beard
lining up twice a day, used to be three
they recognise my face, do not ask my name
I am not myself, say the number
been doing this for ages

not much to do beside sleep and eat

a community that's gated

changes made

how many adults, children & babies

how can they get it wrong

guess this one is new

frustrated but still say thank you

sit at a table, ask the number

daily routine, bring the key

not that important, part of our duty

food is not that good

still try to sell it to everyone

waste, too and so much, too less

our list a mess

organisations don't share

people lie and take

faced with so many

we should recognise faces

more difficult than it sounds

fool me once, I get it

fool me twice, I should know better

sorry it was picked up

sorry no more juice, bad luck

a community yet not one

people the victims

we apologise when we see that look in their eyes

I know the number of a few, pick up together too

most know my name, can't say the same

I smile, but feel like I've treated you inhumane

by Jelle Wassenaar- Issues Without Borders member, former volunteer in a refugee camp

Complicated

A poem about the complicated world of helping people (as a volunteer) and how one can struggle with emotions as you enjoy your time, but also questioning whether you came with the right intentions and or if your actions do more harm than good. I also touch on the constant depression (trauma) and hopelessness that is present underneath the surface for the people you are working with, even if they seem content or happy.

One of the best times of my life

and the worst of theirs
the time not in their possession even
lost in the wind that blew
turned everything upside down
they smiled while I shed tears
orange vests in numbers
some sought that thrill
an adventure or a trip
how lucky we are
just purchase your wings
ability to fly
identity unknown
fill in some papers to prove you are alive
do they not exist?
behind the label there is nothing of the sort
came along for the ride
said goodbye, but not really
stuck between worlds
I do not understand
stuck between words
nothing I can say
yet there we all are

speaking a language we know
is it enough?
the future tells a story of the past
good intentions do not predict
a positive outcome for you perhaps
who did you come here for? photographs
you go home richer questioning why
there is power in gratitude
some of the best times of whose lives
mine, ours, yours, theirs,
some of the worst
or is it? selfishly partly
mind yourself
happiness in misery
depression in laughter
there are so many sides
yin yang plus minus
try to keep a balance
life, the best or the worst
still undecided

By Jelle Wassenaar, Issues Without Borders Members, volunteer in a refugee

camp

Darkness

A poem I wrote while in Greece about the trip people make from Turkey via Farmakonisi – a military island – to Leros.

Black sea, black ocean

mind racing, wheels in motion

a screeching voice of the blowing wind

it's loud and scary

beginning till the end

darkness surrounds me

am I blind, I cannot see

feel the drops of rain

so cold together

sharing the pain

the uncertainty, the fear

what is coming

mind numbing

it will all disappear

the cold is now wet

the screams coming from man

are we there yet

no answer on demand

survive, swim

looking at others

the outlook is bleak

alive, but grim

stumble upon rocks

found a treasure

what happens next

beyond our measure

flashlights, barks

code words cannot be cracked

a shot, light sparks

we all move back

women, children

saw them before

where are they now

see them no more?

rest on spikes

but feel numb

so cold, waiting

twisting my thumbs

salt water for days, drinking

time passing by pray, thinking

another boat crosses, sinking

chances of survival, shrinking

a sudden order after waiting

get on the big ship

where are we going, it's dark

another scary long trip

Finally reach land

greeted by man

a new beginning

where does it end?

by Jelle Wassenaar- Issues Without Borders member, former volunteer in a
refugee camp

Life in the jungle

*A poem about life in Calais and how it must've felt like before it got
dismantled earlier this year and people were transferred to camps / centres
in France.*

A point near the sea

not where oceans but two countries meet

thousands stranded

human beings, they are just like us

politics inter fear, abandoned thus

where to go? this place is new

a jungle created right out of the blue

are we monkeys, trapped in a zoo?

I don't see any forest around

so many people in tents on the ground

everybody's up and have created a small town

try to stay sane as we are EU bound

kitchens, book clubs, our own economy

from Africa to Asia to the Middle-East

we have to survive together same ancestry

sure there's some squabbles and fights

but we all under the same roof come midnight

there's very little hope but we still have the light

darkness rules when nobody cares

we just trying to create a better life ain't fair

maybe big expectations, but for this you cannot prepare

so close to my family, this I cannot bear

years of oppression, war and poverty in a state

I was born in, did not choose, but chose to escape

Did I have a choice, silenced when raising my voice

can you imagine it, can you relate?

go to Europe everyone said

no option to stay here, where you will end up dead

that's what kept me going even in a sea of red

but this hole is what I found instead

there is water but it's not running properly

an open sewer so you can just pee

showers forget about it

feces all around, inhumane basically

in amidst all of this, children get lost

yet people in power worry about costs

police arrives when it burns but will they learn

we only try to get warm coming frost

some even attack us, where is the protection

luckily we have volunteers who show affection

help us so much, there's an instant connection

we are lost but we get some direction

after so much waiting you start to explore alternatives

cannot just stay here, something's gotta give

should I get on the lorry or stay positive

many have tried but came back

some were less fortunate, lost track

how can we stay sane when we supposed to crack?

every now and then the media comes impressed

and while most carry on, some protest

it's like talking to a wall, a fence at best

a life ended but the loss of revenue makes the press

together we made it work somehow

through all the grief, we laugh and dance now

because we are in a centre and made it out

where to go? we have to get on a bus

many are left behind, it's created a fuss

sadly caught in between, staying a must

the jungle is still there, you see

we are stranded where two countries meet

trying to get to the UK

but we aren't seen as equals unfortunately

politics interfered, stay in France, me?

by Jelle Wassenaar- Issues Without Borders member, former volunteer in a refugee camp

Borderless Europe- Blessen or Burden?



I was invited as a speaker and as a participant at the conference „*Borderless Europe- Blessen or Burden*” in Cluj Napoca-Romania from the 6th to the 9th of May 2016. This conference was organized by AEGEE antenna-AEGEE Cluj with the support of the Association des Amis de Franck Biancheri (AAFB).

During the conference there were panel discussions, workshops, Q&A sessions connected to the following subjects: „*Borderless Europe vs borders in Europe*”; „*Europe in crisis- Schengen in suspension*”; „*Our image of refugees: change of perspective*”; „*Socio-cultural borders in Europe: the borders that define us*”.

We also watched a movie called : „*The Great Disaster Europe*”.

We also discussed topics such as: „*Socio-Economic Borders in Europe and the idea of a Universal Basic Income*”; „*A leap of faith-utopian thinking and acting in the 21 century Europe; Towards a Borderless Europe-what`s next?*”

I was invited to offer my expertise on the migration crisis which is affecting Europe, representing thus the international human rights NGO Issues Without Borders, Issues Without Borders being one of AEGEEs partners since the beginning of 2016. My workshop was intitlled: „*Issues Without Borders petition: IWB for Refugees! Europe needs new legislation on migration*”

I presented our current project „IWB for Refugees” explaining participants that based on the same set of guidelines our team of researchers is conducting research on the member states of the European Union (analyzing the national legislation on refugees and the way the current EU legislation is transposed in the national system, conducting interviews with refugees, showing how media is depicting the issue, presenting also their social life, cultural life, access to education in these EU countries. After briefly presenting the research I also emphasized the use of the research, sending our research in 3 different directions:

1. at a national level in every single member state
2. directly as a petition to the EU Parliament
3. raise 1 000 000 signatures needed for the Citizens Initiative, pass it through the EU Commission which will implement a new EU directive, our researchers are also going to be part of the implementation process in the member states.

I really liked the fact that the participants coming from different EU countries seemed very interested in our project, they asked several questions, started telling stories from their own countries about the refugees issue, even offered recommendations for our petition and some are interested in joining our platform.

It was a great experience because we also got the chance to know each other

better, we had social and cultural events in the evenings, even a farewell dinner during the last evening, celebrating 25 years of the AEGEE local antenna- in Cluj Napoca. The organizers were very supportive through out the entire event so thank you AEGEE Cluj for everything, thank you AEGEE, Vision for Europe and last but not least the Association des Amis de Franck Biancheri (Aafb).

