

Ajmal's Story - General assistant at the Red Cross reception center of Jette, Belgium

When I was 18 years old, I moved to India on a university scholarship of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations to follow a Bachelor in Economics, Political Science and Sociology. I wanted to prepare myself to have a positive political influence in Afghanistan, I wanted to be catalyst for change. However, upon my return to Afghanistan, due to the ongoing security issues that the country was facing, I decided to leave. It took me about two months to get to Belgium where I finally arrived in the summer of 2012.



Upon arrival in Belgium, over a period of seven months I stayed in four different reception centers. This is how I became so familiar with the system and various organisations involved in the refugee reception process. During these months, I really set out to make the most out of my time and started following French language classes. I also completed the compulsory integration courses offered by the Brussels' Integration Agency BON during that time. My social welfare counsellor at the local social welfare center knew that I wanted to practice my French and that I was quite isolated geographically, so she introduced me to an NGO called Citizen Service - where I volunteered for six months. One of the biggest assets of

volunteering experience at Citizen Service was the ability to use and practice French. It gave me the confidence to communicate freely without fear of making mistakes. Once you learn to speak the language, you start to understand how the locals think about life, and how their perspectives differed or related to mine. I also learned that Belgians are curious about other cultures and that is why I made sure to always attend activities, parties and events; even though sometimes I could not communicate properly with them but to get used to the language and culture and to integrate faster.

Through the platform for the Citizen Service network I was introduced to the Deputy Director of a local Red Cross center. He offered me a six month traineeship to gain work experience. After this apprenticeship, I was employed for three months as an interim general-purpose employee. During that time I was searching for a permanent contract. Through the internal Red Cross intranet, I saw a vacancy for a general-purpose employee for the night shift at a different Red Cross reception center. The job interview was done entirely in French and very pragmatic questions arose as I was asked about how I would react in hypothetical situations. I was really happy when I got the job. Until this day, I am still working at the Red Cross center. I enjoy working and having contact with other refugees. I feel I can really help them through my own experiences.

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My advice for refugees who come to Belgium would be to prepare yourself at best for what you want to do in the future. When I was a resident at the Red Cross center, I dreamt of working there one day, so I started to prepare myself to achieve this goal by learning the language, building my network, treating everyone with respect, getting a valid driver's license and making sure that when I would leave the center as a resident I would leave a good impression. In my view, one should never stop pursuing one's dreams and aspirations and prepare accordingly as there is always hope to move ahead in life. It is not because I have a permanent contract that I will relax. I want to move ahead. I would also like to pursue my education at the Free University of Brussels (ULB), where I have been accepted to study a Master in International Relations.

Although I adore my current job, especially my lovely colleagues, I am still looking forward to a job opportunity at the Red Cross Head Quarters and at its global branches. I will always be grateful to Belgium, which provided me with living, study, and work opportunities. Afghanistan is my one eye and Belgium is the other. Both of my eyes are precious to me. As long as I live, I would like to serve both countries.

Ajmal participated in a radio interview along with other volunteers of the Citizen Service. Listen to the interview [here](#).

Farid and Chloé's Story - Director of the Red Cross reception centers of Jette and Uccle, Belgium and Deputy Director at the Red Cross reception center in Uccle, Belgium

The Belgian Red Cross works according to seven fundamental principles: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Volunteering, Unit and Universality. All staff recruitment follows these same principles, with a specific focus on impartiality. Consequently, we never look at the name on a job application - nor at religious beliefs, race, sex, social status or political affiliation. We only focus on competences.

In my opinion, migrants are an asset to any organization or company. At our Red Cross center, we have a long history of hiring staff with a migrant background. We are convinced of the opportunities that this approach brings to our organization. Our residents often do not speak English, French or Dutch. They come from different countries, different cultures and have



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whether or not the new contract will benefit both parties. Good profiling for the general-purpose position consists of conducting a personal interview to identify which qualities the candidate has that are necessary to perform the job, identifying what his/her motivation is, and conducting a scenario test to examine how the candidate would react in different situations. It is important to discuss and explain in advance what is expected from the employee, what the rules are and to identify where possible issues could occur. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of going through all these aspects with a future employee during the job interview, as communication is key.

With Ajmal, we liked his résumé, his knowledge of languages, and his responses to the scenario tests. He had previous experience as a volunteer in humanitarian work which prepared him for this position. Ajmal was a resident of the center and his volunteer experience with 'Citizen Service' and work experience with the WTC Red Cross center were seen as great assets. But the most compelling reason we chose to hire Ajmal was his level of humanity and motivation! He was really inspired to work here and I will never forget the pride on his face, wearing a big smile, when arriving on his first day in his Red Cross uniform.

Migrants bring new ideas and expertise, they expand the network of the company and provide employers with an enlarged recruitment pool. We have come across magnificent résumés of engineers, doctors, PhD holders with impressive academic and professional trajectories who apply for jobs at the center and who have difficulties finding a job in other sectors. One piece of advice for other employers would be to rise above names and nationalities we should be able to introduce anonymous job applications and focus on the candidate's intelligence and capacities. I really hope that the shift in mentality among Belgian employers can be continued and that they realize the potential in newcomers with foreign backgrounds.

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experienced different journeys. Having an employee who has knowledge of the residents' languages, of their culture and experiences, is a big asset for us. Successfully hiring a new employee always depends on two things: a good profiling of the candidate, and some good luck,

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