



# IMPACT STORIES

## of the I Am European Project

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# HOSPITALITY OVERCOMES ADVERSITY

**Organisation:** Civic Resilience Initiative (CRI)

**Monika Sadauskaitė Pocė** is a young business owner who runs her countryside tourism villa together with her family. Her business is well known for preserving Lithuanian cultural heritage traditions and is favoured by both locals and people beyond Lithuanian borders.

Monika is an active member of her local community, who never shies away from lending a helping hand. Therefore, **when war broke out in Ukraine in February 2022, Monika instantly offered her accommodation facilities to refugee Ukrainian families.** Without any hesitation, Monika welcomed 39 Ukrainian women and children, covering all their living expenses and losing her business profits.

Monika's generosity did not end with providing accommodation and food as she put all her efforts into creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for her guests. **She organised fundraising events and helped her guests to find jobs**



**and continue their education in Lithuania.** The Ukrainian families had the opportunity to emerge into the activities of the local community as well as to strengthen their bonds with each other during numerous activities which Monika had planned in her facilities.

Monika also made sure to share the families' experiences on social media to raise awareness and that is how **the I Am European (IAE) project representatives in Lithuania came to find her.** Instantly, an idea of a joint event emerged on both sides of the laptop screen.

A decision was made to **organise an intercultural trivia night to encourage Ukrainian families to feel more at home.** While Monika took care of the venue and gathered her guests for the event, the IAE project team prepared an interactive trivia game and hosted the evening. During the event, the Ukrainian families had the opportunity to learn more about European values and culture while enjoying each other's company.

The goals and topics of the IAE project indeed aligned well with Monika's mission as **she strived to show that any European country can become either a temporary or permanent home for each Ukrainian fleeing from the cruelties of war.**

Likewise, the material presented during the event helped the Ukrainian families to learn more about each European country and feel more accustomed to the local life.

**The participant's response was highly positive also because the activity was well suited for guests of all ages** – from school students to middle-aged adults.

Since the I Am European project event, some of the families have already returned to their homes in Ukraine. Even though the war continues to take place on Ukrainian soil, Monika hopes that the experience these families had received in Lithuania will assure them that they can find support and shelter in any EU country.





# FROM LEARNING THE PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICING THE VALUES

**Organisation:** The Finnish Foundation for Media and Development (Vikes)

**Maria** has been an active member of the Tampere Youth Council as well as other youth organisations for a few years now. She is **passionate about changing the world** and making it a better and more inclusive place for everyone. She thinks that it is equally important to be able to voice her own opinion and also to listen carefully to other people's thoughts.

Maria participated in Vikes' Mun huominen, meidän tulevaisuus (My tomorrow, our future) **workshop** in October 2021. The event was organised within the I Am European (IAE) project.



The workshop format aims **to encourage young people to explore questions related to migration, equality and discrimination** in a way that promotes constructive discussion and empathy. The workshop also focuses on the importance of reliable information, journalism, and the role of the media in immigration discussions.

As its methods, the workshop utilizes **video clips of short plays on the** themes as conversation starters. There are also one or two **expert guests** attending each workshop as well as a journalist from a local media outlet. The guests provide unique insights and participants can ask them questions on the themes.

The workshop that Maria attended was held in Tampere for Youth Council representatives in the Pirkanmaa region. In Finland, each municipality must have a Youth Council or a similar participation organ for young people. Politically non-committed Youth Councils represent the youth's voice in municipal decision-making.

Maria was pleased with the way the workshop was organized: **it was easier to discuss complex issues** in a well-planned event where there were experts present and **attention was paid to creating a safe atmosphere**. Maria gained a lot of insight from expert guest Brigita Krasniqi, a Tampere City Councillor who provided insight on what it is like to be a politician who is part of an ethnic minority in Finland.

Maria was impressed by how well the conversation flowed. **"Everyone was given a chance to speak**. Even though people had different and even conflicting opinions and political viewpoints, we respectfully discussed them", she told. She attributes this to the way the discussion was organized. She compares the workshop discussion to social media debates: while the issues may be similar, people tend to be more contentious and less open to constructive dialogue online.

The workshop made **an impact on the way Maria thinks and talks about minority-majority questions and migration as well as stereotypes and media representations**. Through the workshop discussion, she gained a better understanding of what it is like to be a minority member in contemporary Finland. "When we have a chance to ask questions and discuss in a safe environment, we learn to put ourselves in others' shoes", Maria commented.

The workshop **impacted the way Maria thinks about some particular issues**. For example, can you ask a person where they are from? And if so, how to do it respectfully? "We should wait for a person to tell us about themselves on their own terms. **Talking about one's origin can be a difficult thing to do**, and we should not pry for information", she explained.

Maria **has utilized the new insights she gained from the workshop in her work as a Youth Council representative**. She tries to advance a conversational culture that builds understanding and empathy. "Confrontation is easy to avoid when everyone wants to keep the conversation respectful", she says. This she realized in the workshop when talking with people from all sides of the political spectrum. She believes that **an empathic conversational culture** could help in situations where people have strong opposing opinions. Instead of increasing polarization, being able to consider other people's points of view can help reach a solution that is satisfying to all sides of the debate.

***In the workshop, the Youth Council representatives composed a list of tips for discussing identity, diversity, and the media. The list is based on some key points that emerged during the discussions. The list is shown on the next page.***

# **A**list of tips

## **for discussing identity, diversity and the media**

**by Youth Council representatives in  
Pirkanmaa, Finland**

- 1. Have an open mind towards everyone. Strive to understand others and their points of view.**
- 2. Identity is a person's own experience of themselves. It cannot be defined from outside.**
- 3. People always make assumptions. If you assume wrong, apologize and learn from your mistakes.**
- 4. Make an effort to acquire information about other cultures. Follow the media in different countries and diverse people in social media.**
- 5. Let people tell you about their background in their own terms instead of asking them where they are from. Everyone has the right to choose what they tell others about themselves.**
- 6. Remember source criticism in social and traditional media: who has published the content, where and why?**
- 7. Immigrants are often represented in a stereotypical way in the media. Learn to recognize stereotypes and think about other ways to talk about issues.**
- 8. Recognize your own prejudices, that way you can overcome them. You cannot avoid forming prejudices. What matters is the way you act.**



**\*vikes**

# SHARING ONE'S OWN STORY, SPREADING UNIVERSAL VALUES

**Organisation:** People in Need Slovakia (PIN SK)

**Mahmed**<sup>1</sup> is one of the very few refugees living in Slovakia. The dramatic part of his life story began at the university in his home country where he studied law. He decided to be part of the Erasmus+ program and came to Bratislava for a semester. During that semester, his life changed upside down. His father was arrested based on false allegations, his brother had to go into hiding, his mother was kicked out of work and he was stranded in a foreign country. Eventually, **he applied for asylum protection in Slovakia.** His application was refused several times by

the Migration office, so he decided to sue them. Finally, Mahmed won. He was granted asylum, after two years in the courts.

*"I believe in Democracy, I believe in rule of law. So when I know I'm right, I can plead my cause. So I did. And I won. Perhaps you don't trust your courts, in democracy, but I do. This would not be possible in my home country,"* told Mahmed to a group of young people at a summer school organised by People in Need Slovakia (PIN SK).



<sup>1</sup> The name and country of origin have been changed for security reasons.



The court case was such huge news that a young student of documentary movies at the Faculty of performing arts asked Mahmed **to be the main protagonist in the upcoming documentary movie**, which was produced by People in Need Slovakia and UNHCR as a part of the I Am European (IAE) project. The 40 minutes long documentary follows Mahmed on a way across Slovakia, challenging stereotypes about refugees, Muslims and foreigners. This documentary movie was part of a special selection of Movies without borders at the One World Festival in Bratislava in 2021, organised by PIN SK.

Mahmed was not only starring in the movie but **was asked to be one of the three members of the international jury** in the main festival prize award, Slovakia and Czechia for human rights. He met with a lot of renowned filmmakers, experts, human rights defenders and charge de affairs of the kingdom of Netherlands in Slovakia. As a result, Mahmed created networks and stayed in touch with all of the people he met, including people from PIN SK.

The involvement of Mahmed in the jury made much sense for PIN SK. It was relevant to its team's values, to the way how they think about

**the involvement of people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds**. The whole ceremony was performed by "Theatre without a home", a group of homeless, marginalised people in Slovakia. No red carpets, no champagne, but people, their stories and inclusivity were the message PIN SK wanted to send to the world.

Since that, **Mahmed has become active as a co-founder of an NGO in Slovakia**. He has also become part of the international network called A World of Neighbours. He has acted as a guest with a refugee background at the Summer school 2022 and in the screenings and debates for young people with hearing, listening and mental conditions at the programme called One world under the palm for schools. He is one of the very few refugees in Slovakia who is **actively sharing his story as a refugee**. Meanwhile, he finished his bachelor's degree at Comenius university where he studied Slovak language and history.

All of Mahmed's activities have one common goal: **to create a world in which people can live together, respect each other** and look for ways to be a part of an inclusive, tolerant and open-minded society.



# INSPIRATION AND EDUCATION FOR ETHICAL REPORTING

**Organisation:** Migration Matters

For four days in early spring 2021, a **group of young journalists and media professionals** from Poland and Germany met in Berlin. The individuals were predominantly from a journalism background, either working professionally already or still in training, while others worked in communications or had ambitions to progress into media work.

The group gathered to attend a **training workshop on the ethical reporting of migration and diversity**. Many of the young journalists reported that they were motivated to join the activity because they had some experience in reporting on migration and wanted to improve their skills, or they wanted to break into this field and saw the training as a first step.



The event was **co-organised** within the I Am European (IAE) project **by Migration Matters** (MM), based in Germany, and the **Center for Citizenship Education** (CCE), based in Poland.

Co-organising the activity provided **a unique educational opportunity** as it meant that the organisations could include an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and networking for the participants.

Within the programme, the **expert speakers** shared their experiences and insights in workshops and presentations. The programme included **workshops on shaping narratives** through journalism, **countering hate speech** in the media, and **diversity and representation** in the industry. For example, in one session, the young journalists had the opportunity to pitch stories and receive feedback from an expert in migration reporting. They were also able to speak to migrant journalists about their experiences in the German media industry. The young journalists actively participated in each session and seemed to be engaged with the content and speakers.

This activity received **largely positive feedback** from the participants who stated that they had gained a new understanding of the challenges of reporting on migration and had acquired new skills to take back into their work in this field and

beyond. However, some commented that more emphasis could have been placed on introducing the specific context of the German media at the start of the training to set the scene. Some also mentioned that the exchange of ideas amongst participants would have been more valuable had there been more participants from Germany.

The training was **an excellent opportunity to share the aims of the IAE project with multipliers** who then took action to spread the word. Several of the participants joined other IAE activities about migration. They showed interest in the project and its aims and as such, shared information about IAE activities with friends and on social media. Many of the young journalists committed themselves to nurture their new connections with peers and collaborating on future journalistic endeavours.

The training event for young journalists was **a collaboration** between two IAE partners in Germany and Poland which enabled exchange and learning between young people in those countries. The topic of the training – ethical journalism on migration and diversity – is a crucial focus of the IAE project, while the element of **cross-cultural exchange** combined to make **unique learning and networking opportunities** for young professionals.



# BECOMING A MASTER OF A VERY SPECIAL ESCAPE GAME

**Organisation:** Shokkin Group Estonia

**Carina** is a young girl from Lasnamäe, an apartment block district in the Estonian capital city Tallinn.

For as long as she can remember, she has been hearing exciting stories about projects and activities done by **Shokkin Group**, a small organisation created years ago by her uncle and cousin when she was just a baby. Many of the stories are about **cool events like camps, dance battles and graffiti workshops**, and almost always involve travelling and meeting **people from different countries** in Europe.

Turning 13 was an important milestone for Carina, because according to her uncle, from that moment she could **officially take part in**

**international projects** and, perhaps, become part of the organisation. However, things take time, and even if many activities were happening, she could never participate in anything because most of the opportunities were for people over 18.

**The pandemic years** took away many experiences and learning opportunities normal in the life of a 14 and 15-year-old girl. However, in the summer of 2021, she finally got the chance to participate in an international youth exchange for minors in Estonia, after which she realised that she would love to be involved in other similar experiences.

Only a couple of months after, she got to know that two of the girls who had been with her in the





youth exchange, would be participating **in a local project that would last for a full year: "Critical Escape"**. Carina wanted to participate in more events based on non-formal education methods, she wanted to continue practising her English and being with different people with whom to share memories and emotions, so she signed up as a young escape room developer in the project.

The first stage of the project consisted of **weekly training sessions** in the office of Shokkin Group, where she first got to know the group of 10 people that had signed up as young escape developers. It was interesting to get to know other **youngsters with different backgrounds** and start creating trust bonds while sharing experiences and learning a lot about different types of migration and the specific reality of migrants in Estonia and Europe.

The main objective of the project was to develop from **scratch an escape game that would be educational about a specific area related to migration**, so other young people could reflect on it and learn something new after having played the game. At first, Carina felt rather lost, since she was not very confident in either of the topics, but week after week, with the help of the leaders and

the step-by-step approach of the programme, she grew more confident and more excited about creating her own game together with her team.

When the time came to start creating a room, she chose **the topic of stereotypes**, because it is something that she had observed often in real life, and which created unfair impressions and judgements of other people, especially of migrants.

Together with her team (three more girls and Anna, their leader), they created a story of Farida, a young girl who moved recently to Estonia from Iran together with her family who is wrongly accused of stealing her friend's ring because of stereotypes towards her culture and values.

While creating the story and the escape room puzzles, they learnt a lot of things, like the fact that **very often the media is biased** in the way incidents are presented (specifying the nationality of criminals only when these are foreigners) or for instance the fact that migrants do not receive unlimited social wages from the government, despite of what many people think, but that **the migrants put a lot of effort to find a job in a country with a different language** and culture so they can sustain themselves (like anyone else trying to make a living).

The creation process, with meetings week after week, internal tests and adaptations to the game gave her a lot of confidence, but there was still something that seemed challenging: running the game in the role of "Game Master" for other young people in Estonia.

When the moment came in early March, **Carina was nervous**. She had never facilitated anything for other young people, and much less in English or Estonian. During the first game sessions, she was shy to present herself, unsure of how to tell the story or how to intervene when players were stuck and avoided as much as possible keeping players for long after the game was over ("maybe I will dare do the debriefing next time", she thought).



However, session after session, **she started to feel more confident in her role as a game master**. In between games, the leaders would reflect with them on how to “build up” a game master’s “persona”, and every time she was in front of a group of people of her same age, she progressively took more pride in presenting the story, the project logic and to support players attentively and professionally.

During the next few months, when other team members were busy, **she would still volunteer to run the games by herself**, every time being more skilful and less nervous about managing the game and the debriefing. After each game session, it was very encouraging to read comments in the feedback form saying “it was very fun”, “I am happy I participated”, “the team is cool”, and “please come to our school again!”.

Since she became part of the Critical Escape project, Carina started to be more in contact with

other activities organised by Shokkin Group, where she got to make **even more friends, practise more English and learn a lot** more about different topics like teamwork, communication, mental health, self-expression, creativity and more!

From the perspective of the organisation, **Carina's example is a reflection of the empowerment, capacity building and confidence boost** that our young multipliers had access to thanks to Critical Escape. Carina's story could be also Arina's, Sofia's, Laura's or Nicole's. All of them were under 18 when they first joined the project, all of them encountered non-formal education through Critical Escape for the first time, and all of them grew to be confident, independent game masters and youth leaders ready to explore more layers of participation in the life of the organisation and their communities, and and Shokkin Group cannot wait to support their next idea!

# FOOD ENTERTAINS, EDUCATES AND BRINGS US TOGETHER

Organisation: NESEHNUTÍ

**NESEHNUTÍ** is a socio-environmental non-governmental organisation focused on social and environmental issues, based in Brno, Czechia. They support communities, groups and individuals striving for creating a fair world. In the field of migration, NESEHNUTÍ has **over 15 years of experience working with migrant and refugee communities as well as local communities** in Brno, creating opportunities for mutual understanding.

Within the I Am European (IAE) project, the NESEHNUTÍ team designed an initiative **to empower young migrants**, bolster their skills and bring different perspectives on migration. To achieve this, they planned to create **a space where migrants and locals can spend meaningful time together while enjoying good food and pleasant company**.

The initial steps of the project planning process were driven by a (Czech-born) employee of NESEHNUTÍ and a (foreign-born) volunteer. While the two of them created the general framework of the project, they started searching for the core group to implement the project. By **reaching out to participants** of previous food-related and other community events, NESEHNUTÍ volunteers, and the closest community, they were able to build a **small but strong team of women** who then gave a final form to the different project activities.

The specific subject of the project was **food and traditional cuisine**, which served as a connecting topic throughout all the activities. Not only do the NESEHNUTÍ team deem food as a human universal that is relatable for everyone; **but the food is also very tangible evidence of how**



**human's migration shaped and affected the world.** Food and recipes were naturally migrating with people and some traditions became an inherent part of the other cultures without the local community even noticing. It is important to be mindful of these aspects of migration.

**The group members were women aged between 22–35.** Their profiles were very diverse, ranging from enthusiastic students of humanities, young professionals with experience in public relations, event planning and project management, to those working within unrelated fields (tech, finances) whose interest was mainly about cooking, photography and getting to know new people.

**One-half of the members were born in Czechia while others were migrants** who came to pursue their education or careers. The group was also diverse when it comes to personalities – there were very shy types who felt comfortable doing all the preparation and planning, and those who were very outgoing, extraverted, and who enjoyed engaging directly with people (hosting the events, giving workshops, doing the interviews etc.)

It was necessary **to find a common ground** on which the project can be built with respect to everyone's capacity, skills and time. It was very helpful to have regular meetings (in person) so the group could connect and discuss freely.

**Sometimes it was hard to get together**, with everyone being busy with their everyday life, work and duties and sometimes covid affected the meetings. Also, sometimes they discussed topics where their opinions and **intercultural sensitivity** differed (as several times they stumbled on the thin line between cultural appropriation and appreciation). Always, **in the end, they found understanding for each other.**

The overall aim of the campaign organised by the women was **to raise awareness on migration and change the narrative around it** by creating space for young people with migration backgrounds living in Brno. Within the Instagram campaign, young migrants shared their favourite (or otherwise important) place in Brno, their version of **“chlebiček” (open-faced sandwich)** and they also had space to voice anything they wanted to share in relation to migration, integration, or communities. The





idea behind including **international versions of chlebiček was that chlebiček is considered to be a very specific** and traditional part of Czech cuisine and the campaign leaders wanted to show how this traditional snack can look when given a “multicultural twist”.

The group members also created **a cookbook** that presented the stories and recipes of people living in Brno. It aimed to inspire, bring a deeper perspective or challenge the narratives about migrants and also **show the colourfulness of the food and the people from all around the globe who had to find a home in Brno**. Each participant talked about themselves in their own words and they also introduced typically 2–3 recipes that were somehow important for them.

A special layer of the project was its **environmental part** as all the events carried out and all the recipes prepared within the project were **plant-based**. From the beginning, it was an important aspect of the whole initiative as it was one of the shared values of the project's community. The women inspired each other in plant-based cuisine, explored new ingredients,

learned where to go in Brno for veggies shopping and shared their tips and hacks.

During the capacity-building workshops, the migrant participants were truly excited for having learned more practical tips and tricks for **efficient community engagement** in their circles and communities. All participants of the community events were equally excited about meeting new faces and experiencing something new and having the possibility to taste new dishes and recipes (besides, free food is always a good reason to come). **Food is a natural ice-breaker** so it made it easier for everyone to engage in conversation without having awkward small talk (especially the shy types appreciated).

As for the core group, the women were happy to develop their skills (be it connecting people, photography, creative writing or cooking – **everyone had a chance to contribute**). The core group members are **still connected** and they are looking forward to other events and actions that will keep the spirit of the community while enjoying good food.

# FROM AN ARTICLE TO LEGISLATION CHANGE

Organisation: NGO Mondo

**Eliisa Matsalu** has been a **journalist** for almost 10 years now. She started working in a local newspaper in her small hometown. Then Eliisa proceeded to work as a news reporter in the Estonian business daily Äripäev. Now, she has been part of Äripäev's investigative team for about 5 years.

Her newspaper **focuses mainly on business and the economy**, so most of her stories are always connected to these fields. Often she writes about some kind of injustice someone has experienced, like a fraud. Eliisa also often covers political issues, and human rights too.

One day, her editor told her about **the scholarship regarding covering migration topics** that was offered by NGO Mondo thanks to the I Am European (IAE) project.

At that time, she was working on a project about **the mistreatment of foreign workers within some posted worker schemes**<sup>2</sup> with several journalists from other countries. The scholarship sounded like something that could help her widen her research opportunities.

Before Eliisa got the news she had received the Mondo scholarship, the international investigative journalists' group had actually broken up as it's always hard to work on a cross-border story. But since Eliisa got the scholarship, it gave her **a new boost and a fresh opportunity** to still work on the topic.

Her goal was to **write an extensive article** and also do **a podcast episode** about how a lot of foreign workers are mistreated in Estonia (and in fact all over the world). Eliisa knew the problem

2 A "posted worker" is an employee who is sent by his employer to carry out a service in another country temporarily.



Photo: Gregor Alaküla

was large, but nobody seemed to care about it, and she wanted to change that.

She did a lot of research and interviews with different organisations that deal with foreign workers. The hardest part was getting in touch with people who were mistreated in Estonia. The majority of them had left the country already and most of the time they don't really want to talk about it in the media as they were scared.

Eliisa worked a lot with labour dispute commissions documents and tried to find out what kind of cases there have been in Estonia. It turned out the situation was way worse than she thought.

One aspect she wrote about was the weird situation regarding **the limited rights of the police**. It turned out that because of one court case police were not allowed to catch employers for almost two years who had used

illegal workforce. It sounded unbelievable to her! Meanwhile, the statistics showed that every three days at least one illegal workforce case was found. After the story was published, **the Estonian interior minister Kristian Jaani promised to change the law so police could punish the "bad guys" again**. The law was changed a couple of months after the story was published.

She got an **award for the Best Podcast in 2021**. It was said her podcast pointed out an important problem and the mistreating cases she talked about were touching.

Eliisa learned that there's so much injustice in the world and it's hard to help everyone, but if she doesn't try, she doesn't help anyone at all. **She wants to continue reporting about human rights** and make the world at least a little bit better place. Eliisa has also continued reporting about workforce mistreatment cases.

# A TRIP OF EMOTIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Organisation:** People in Need Czech Republic (PIN CZ)

**Lukáš Cigánek** is a first-year student for a bachelor's degree in journalism at the Charles University Faculty of Social Sciences. He hasn't produced many texts in his studies as he has been focused more on theoretical preparation. In the future, Lukáš would like to focus on foreign journalism, specializing in Eastern Europe.

Lukáš has had a **bit of experience working with refugees**, as he's a volunteer with the Scout Institute. He has also been involved in helping Ukrainians fleeing war, including at an assistance centre for refugees from Ukraine. He perceives that the topic of migration and integration is an important social issue and therefore considers it important to be oriented in this regard and to convey accurate and, as far as possible, undistorted information.

Lukáš did not focus on the topic of migration in any depth at the beginning of his studies. This changed with **the People in Need CZ migration-related course** at the university, which he originally

enrolled in just to fill a time gap between other compulsory courses, and today he smiles at this first random impulse. He was very surprised that it turned out to be **his favourite subject, opening up completely new horizons for him**. Lukáš started to pay more attention to how the topic of migration was treated by the Czech media, how inappropriate wording is commonly used across Czech society, etc.

The course deals with **the issue of international migration as a topic of domestic and foreign media**. It aims to provide students with an insight into the issue of migration, to analyse its current treatment by mainly domestic media and create an environment for the search for new perspectives on how to approach the topic of migration.

The course consists of three parts: an introduction to migration studies; a theoretical-analytical part on media framing of the topic of migration; and a practical component – the content of the course





is partly contributed by external guests from the field: professional journalists and experts (working with migrants, key stakeholders, academics).

The course has already become **a fixed part of the university's curriculum** and students can choose it as an elective subject. The I Am European (IAE) project helped PIN CZ to **offer students participation in a field trip**, which was an extremely valuable opportunity for students to experience fieldwork that the university does not otherwise offer.

Based on Lukáš's excellent experience in the course, he too signed up for **a migration-related study trip organised by People in Need**. In the end, he learned a lot about himself as well, as he stepped completely out of his comfort zone thanks to the trip. Lukáš is an introvert who had never tried fieldwork before. During the trip, he had the opportunity to conduct interviews with representatives of local authorities, people from NGOs and, above all, the refugees themselves. At first, he was afraid to talk to people who were in a very difficult situation, but after the first few days of the intensive program, he overcame his initial embarrassment and it seemed quite natural to him.

Lukáš was also inspired by more experienced colleagues and the supportive accompanying team. In his final evaluation, he said that **this study trip had perhaps given him more than the whole year at university**, especially because he had the opportunity to experience the work of

a journalist in the field for the first time. He also understood that it is often the chance encounters that can then bring the most interesting topic to be handled.

Within the study trip participants' group, they appreciated that they had the opportunity to compare work in three different countries thanks to **the international cooperation of the participating organisers**. Lukáš took away a lot of really good ideas for his future work – like keeping a diary when he travels and how to go about it, or where to find the right sources. It was also important for him to make new contacts, he's still in touch with some of his colleagues.

Thanks to the combined effect of the university course and the field trip, Lukáš knows that **he will most likely continue to work on the topic of migration professionally**. The university course gave him a lot of important theoretical knowledge and thanks to the course Lukáš was able to take part in an unforgettable study trip that still resonated positively with him months after his return. He expected the trip to be emotionally difficult a few weeks after the invasion of Ukraine and it really hit him hard. Workwise, only in the positive sense. **His mindset changed**. Lukáš used to have trouble reaching out to strangers for an interview. It wasn't until he got the courage to do it there that he realised he could do it and people usually don't mind sharing their stories with someone who listens to them sensitively.



Both photos: Lukáš Cigánek

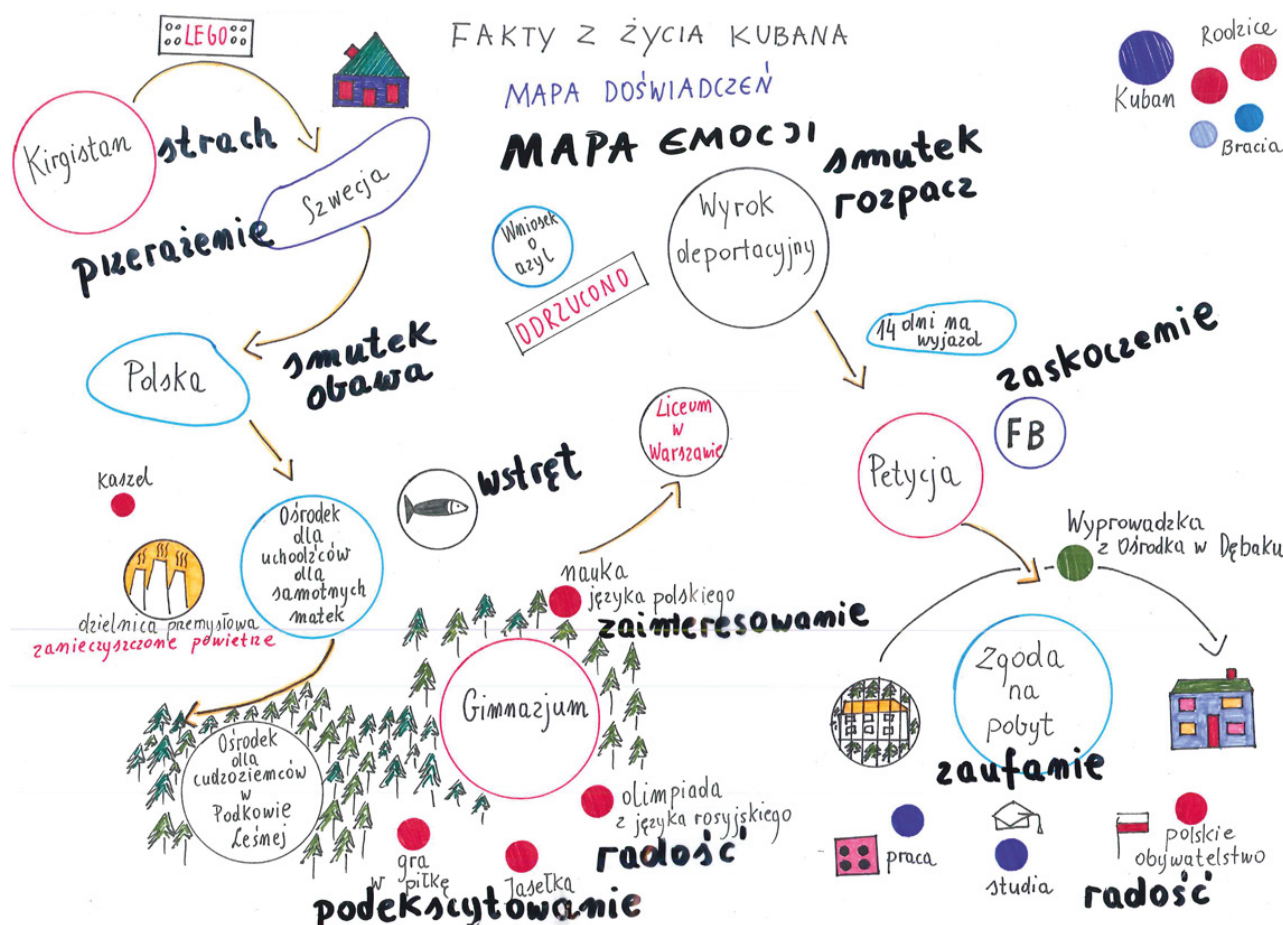
# TEACHING MIGRATION MEANS TEACHING HUMANISM

**Organisation:** Centre for Citizenship Education (CCE)

**Barbara Głąb** has been working as a teacher since 2018. She's a graduate of Cultural Studies (University of Wrocław) and Philosophy (University of Warsaw). The university courses she completed inspired her to seek answers to philosophical questions: "Who am I? What is important in life? What do I bear responsibility for?" Moreover, the studies sensitized Barbara to the problems of otherness and exclusion as well as led her to consider herself as an Other.

As a teacher, Barbara taught culture, philosophy and ethics in high school for the first three years. Currently, **she works for a primary school where she teaches ethics classes**. Barbara believes that the most important facet of a teacher's work is humility. Children and teenagers teach her how to be courageous and motivate her to work on herself more intensively.





In 2020, **Barbara took part in the course “I Am European: stories and facts about migrations”** organized by the Centre for Citizenship Education (CCE). As a result, she understood that until that point, all her reflections on migration and refugeeism had been a mere fantasy. Instead of brooding, she decided to act. **She initiated the Good Conversation Club (GCC) in high school.** It included six wise and brave students – Julia, Kasia, Oliwia, Natalia, Nicole, and Julia. Each GCC meeting was about having conversations about migration based on materials developed by educators from the CCE. Together, they learned how to react to manifestations of discrimination, gained knowledge about the causes and effects of migration and developed the ability to conduct a conversation grounded in mutual respect and understanding.

The course also made **a longer-term impact on Barbara’s personal and professional development.**

The experience encouraged her to intensify her **work for an inclusive culture**, helped to **improve her teaching skills** and inspired her to **employ didactic methods** that keep students engaged, such as storytelling. The course has helped Barbara understand how important it is **to create space for pupils** to reflect on themselves and the surrounding world. Now she aims to help pupils develop reflection skills with regard to their role not only as citizens but as human beings concerning others through mutual respect and regard.

Participation in the course taught Barbara **how to address the issue of migration and refugees with children and teenagers**, and how to react to strong emotions, reluctance or discriminatory behaviour during a session. Barbara grew to appreciate the importance of emotions in the process of teaching about migration, she understood that emotions are important and necessary and one must neither suppress nor



evaluate them, but rather try to understand and accept them.

Barbara is convinced that the knowledge that her students gain during the classes devoted to migration and refugeeism will prove useful in everyday life, **encourage them to participate in public life and inspire them to act for the benefit of others**. She notes that students are eager to take part in projects concerning migration – it is often the only opportunity for them to speak their mind referring to their experiences, get to know other people's perspectives as well as get to know themselves, their attitudes and behaviours better.

**Barbara has systematically run school workshops on migration and refugees** for children and teenagers within the IAE project. She has also acted as **a mentor** for the successive editions of courses "Let's talk about migrations"

and "Global school. Together on migrations".

Barbara also **writes workshop plans** aimed at broadening children's and teenagers' knowledge on migration and refugees as well as developing their intercultural skills, thus contributing as an author of materials for the IAE project.

By now, Barbara has familiarized herself with **effective strategies for overcoming prejudice and stereotypes** thanks to her participation in training programmes, workshops and lectures run by experts specializing in migration and refugees. She considers storytelling to be the most graceful and useful working method, because it calls into existence a tender listener, one who stands in solidarity with the one who tells the story, concerned about their plight while being full of sympathy towards them. According to her students, getting to know people from other cultures by listening to their stories is an important and horizon-expanding experience.





# A NEW COUNTRY, A SECOND CHANCE

**Organisation:** Club “The House”

**Alexander William Blomqvist Eliassen** is a youngster from Denmark who moved to Latvia in August 2020. Before coming to Latvia, Alexander was in a place in his life where he didn't really know what to do. He had just finished a three-episode-long documentary about himself for the Danish national broadcasting corporation, and he needed a break mentally.

Alexander felt that Danish society demanded he go through university, get a higher degree and work hard from there. He had also felt, however, that unless you had a wealthy family to support you, it would have been hard to get by without a university degree in Denmark without being struck by luck. Alexander had tried: he had attempted studying to become a primary school teacher and



pilot, but he never really felt confident enough to go through it. He had heard a lot of great stuff about Latvia from a friend who used to live here and decided to take the jump and try it out.

**As a European Solidarity Corps volunteer at the AFS Intercultural Programs**, Alexander's day-to-day task was to help out with volunteer engagement. He also participated in classroom talks with Latvian primary school classes, telling them about the European Union, the history of the organisation, and the impact it has on Latvia as a country and answered questions from the students about the union. A notable event was International Dialogue Day, in which Alexander and the volunteers took to the streets of Old Town, asking people the question "What would you do, to make the world a better place". The primary goal was to get people thinking of their own contribution to the world, and not rely too much on governmental systems to make the changes for them.

The team of the Club "The House" met Alexander when he had been living in Latvia for 9 months.

**Alexander became one of the ambassadors of the I Am European (IAE) project in Latvia**, participating in a video story that aimed to share migrant experiences when moving and living in another country. Alexander also attended an episode of Club "The House" podcast "Contrast" and wrote two opinion articles. His main messages included expressing his love for living in Latvia and being positively surprised by the culture and patriotism of the citizens. He even mentioned that he is tired of people asking him – why Latvia? because his answer always is – why not? It's so obvious!

After participating in these activities, Alexander had only 3 months left in Latvia. As the project progressed and he fell more in love with the

country, its culture and people as well as its capital Riga, he decided to stay even after his contract and duties with AFS were over.

Now Alexander is working in Latvia as a Team Manager for a financial institution, has his own apartment and daily routine as well as many dreams and ambitions for the future. It is everything that he always wanted but couldn't achieve in his home country.

**Alexander feels that getting a job in Latvia has been the best thing that could have happened, as he is now living a life that makes sense to him** and where he feels he can make a difference, without Danish society "watching over his shoulders", demanding him to take a university degree.

**The possibilities of migration can be almost endless.** Alexander's story shows that migrating to another country and participating in different activities can become one of the most life-changing and impactful things in one's life.

**Alexander continues to share his ongoing experience via his blog and social media.** The feedback on the activities Alex has participated in was very positive. People even reached out to him on Instagram to give him great feedback about the podcast.

Alexander's plans for his future in Latvia include settling even more down in the country and dreams about being engaged in Latvian European politics as a politician. He wants to continue working hard to make his mark on the country, and do whatever he can to be a model citizen of the country that took him in when he most needed it. Alexander's ultimate dream would be to one day represent Latvia in the European Parliament.