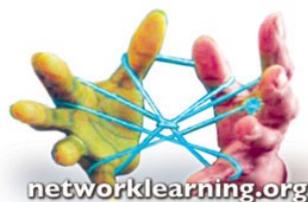


# Refugees from MENA to Northern Europe: Pressures & Solutions



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## Section 1: Introduction

### **About the Author**

*Mubarak was born in Sudan but had to leave suddenly for political reasons at the age of 33. He lived in Egypt as a refugee, then came to the Netherlands, spending four months in an Asylum Center. He has been a Dutch Citizen for 14 years.*

### **The intended Reader**

*This manual is written for Asylum Seekers in Northern Europe, especially recent arrivals and those living in Asylum Centers. The manual lays out their legal Rights and Obligations. And it gives practical and mental approaches that will assist them in surviving and adapting, in the short and long term. While some of the advice is based on personal experience in the Netherlands, the author has sought to expand this knowledge to other countries*

## **1. Introduction**

You lived in Africa or the Arab world; there you heard stories about friends, acquaintances and relatives who crossed the sea to Europe. The stories were rosy and you thought that once there, things would be easy – easy living, easy finding work, earning a lot of money and making a real advance in your life. But such stories are not always true.

And your story is different. You were forced to leave your country with no chance to think about possible alternatives. You had no idea what might be waiting for you and were afraid that there might be no safe arrival anywhere. You took a journey to Europe at great risk, traveling through many countries illegally. You may have crossed the sea in a boat likely to break up at any time with loss of life. You are still thinking about the money you borrowed to finance your journey and pay the smugglers who handled you. If you return, you risk prison and perhaps death.

Still, like many refugees you are young and full of life. You want to do things, build a new livelihood. The family back in your homeland is waiting to hear from you and get the money you earn, so that they too have a chance of education.

In reality, living in Europe is easy *only* if you do what you must do. This manual is written to make people aware of some of the problems they may face, their rights and obligations, and how integration in these societies will make things easier. The manual is drawn from the experience of thousands of refugees, from statistics, from government reports and from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in areas related to migration, human rights, law and services.

### **Our aims are:**

1. To fill gaps in the knowledge of asylum seekers who arrive in Northern Europe with little idea of their rights and obligations
2. To give clear definitions of concepts associated with refugees
3. To outline some cultural differences that refugees encounter
4. To help refugees integrate in North Europe

## Section 2: The Rights & Obligations of a new refugee

When someone is forced to leave their homeland, they do not think about the next step. Speed takes over because there is a real danger to life, family and friends. What puts them within the definition of a refugee?

In African countries people move from one country to another and, most of the time, are easily accepted in the receiving society. Often they can enter the labor market and start to lead a normal life, especially when they come from the same ethnic group or tribe which crosses the border. But not everyone has this experience. Today, more and more African countries are regulating the entrance and residence of refugees.

If you are reading this before you enter Europe and apply for asylum, remember that your asylum application is your passport to refugee status and residence in the country you wish to enter. You are expected to apply for asylum as soon as you arrive, asking the Customs Official or Policeman at the border or airport. So,

- ⤴ Think deeply over what you are going to say to the interviewer
- ⤴ Ask for and use the assistance of an interpreter, lawyer and NGOs.
- ⤴ If you have time, listen to any failed asylum seekers you encounter and learn from their stories.

**Note:** This chapter draws on the international human rights instruments, in particular the international Bill of Human Rights, the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees 1951 and its 1967 Protocol (New York Protocol), the European Union Charter of Human Rights, the EU [Asylum Procedures Directive](#) of 2005, and other EU relevant instruments.

### 2.1 What is Asylum Seeking?

A person is said to be an asylum seeker when, to paraphrase, “he puts himself under the authority of a Receiving Country and requests international protection under the 1951 Refugees Convention, its Protocol or any other form of complementary protection”. Asylum seeking is an application submitted to the authority of the country whose territory you have entered. The application means that you request the protection of this country in line with international and regional (in this case European) human rights instruments.

By this application, the person enters the stage of undergoing procedures to gain international protection. During this phase you are still outside this protection – and still unrecognized as a refugee. But you still have many rights, which you need to know.

So asylum seeking is an action over time, and is a crucial period for any refugee as they wait for a decision by the receiving country. The decision may take a few weeks or it may take years. How long depends on the strength of your application, and its ability to convince the officer that you have a serious case. And it also may depend upon the political sphere in the receiving country.

### 2.2 Being defined as a “Refugee”:

According to the 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 Protocol, a refugee is, to paraphrase, “a person who is forced to flee his country of origin, with a well-founded fear of

being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Such a person is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of the country of origin, or to return there, for fear of persecution.” (See Article 1. A (2) and Article 14 of the Universal Declaration).

The authorities need to determine whether you have a genuine story and whether your application should be accepted. Usually the authority will process the application in two stages.

First, they will hear the asylum seeker's story and look at the information provided in the application and interview. The authority must check this information, to see whether it is true or false.

If accepted as true, the information is now seen as facts and is in your file. The facts are then screened against the definitions of refugees in the 1951 Convention and its Protocol and any other applicable instruments.<sup>1</sup>

A person fulfilling the following criteria is considered legally a refugee:

1. They were forced to leave their country
2. There is a well-founded fear of persecution due to any of the elements in the Refugee Convention
3. They are unwilling to return to their country
4. They are seeking international protection

Central to the refugee question is the international protection they are seeking from the community of states – that is, the 'international community'. However, individual countries' definitions are not consistent: they may include or exclude a certain type of asylum seeker. This is mainly because the new country defines whether the country of origin is safe, or safe for some.

You may think at this stage that you are alone, isolated and with no-one who cares about your situation. This is not true. Firstly, your family and friends in your country care about your destiny. In addition, the international community, represented by 144 states, have agreed to do their utmost to help you as a refugee. These states are willing to extend their help to you. Further, there are hundreds of NGOs across Europe who devote time, energy and resources to helping refugees.

An extra encouraging element, in Western Europe, is the willingness of communities to accept and help genuine refugees. The volunteers, who help you in your first months, and maybe for some years to come, are all working without being paid; some of them even share their food with you. So learn to be positive.

## **2.3 When Does Your Refugee Status Cease?<sup>2</sup>**

International protection should be granted wherever it is needed or justified. If politics change and the negative situation ceases to exist, then protection should stop. This is called the cessation clause. There are two sorts of situations where this can happen: the first is when a

<sup>1</sup> See for more explanation the UNHCR, “Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees”, HCR/IP/4/Eng/Rev. 1 Reedited, Geneva, January 1992, the Introduction and Part One.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit, Chapter III - Title “Cessation Clause”

refugee voluntarily returns to their country because the situation there makes it possible – his refugee status thus ends. It is a pre-requisite that he returns willingly to his homeland.

The other sort of situation that ends your status as a refugee is when you integrate into the new society – when you are naturalized, obtain the nationality of the host country and remain there permanently. Now you are a citizen of the new society and no longer belong to a refugee group.

There are in total six situations when a refugee status ceases to apply:

1. You voluntarily re-avail yourself of the protection of the country of your nationality
2. You lose your nationality after voluntarily re-acquiring it
3. You acquire a new nationality, and enjoy the protection of the new country
4. You have voluntarily re-established yourself in the country which you left
5. There is a change in the circumstances and in your willingness to avail yourself of the protection of the country of your nationality
6. You have no nationality and are willing to return to a country of former habitual residence

## 2.4 Groups excluded from International Protection:

Not everyone that arrives Europe is given a refugee status. There are many categories of people arriving on the territories of European countries. Some of these people are excluded from the protection provided by the 1951 Convention.<sup>3</sup> These are:

1. Any person who is already receiving the United Nations protection
2. Any person who is considered not to be in need of international protection
3. Any person who is considered not to be deserving of international protection

Distinction should be made between the first two categories and the third. The third group includes persons suspected of:

- ⤴ having committed a crime against the peace, a war crime, a crime against humanity or a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge; or
- ⤴ being guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

## 2.5 Definition of MENA (the Middle East & North Africa):

North Africa includes the countries along the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, from Morocco in the West to Egypt in the East; Mauritania and Sudan are added by some authors including the author of this manual. In addition to North Africa, the Middle East includes the West Bank, Gaza strip, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, and Yemen. The richer countries such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait and Israel are excluded for the purposes of this manual.

The characteristic features of MENA:

- Having one dominant language, Arabic, with different dialects
- Some of these countries have minority groups; some, for example Libya, are tribal societies
- Islam is the dominant religion; Christianity and Judaism have their followers
- Until recently, authoritarian regimes were dominant
- Their economic development is very low

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR Handbook, Chapter IV, Exclusion Clauses.

- They have poor Human Rights records although some change has resulted from the Arab Spring

Unique to this geographical area is the existence of the three great religions of the World: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The area has decades of protracted conflicts.

## 2.6 Definitions of Integration & Assimilation:

**Integration** refers to the process by which a person, meaning here a refugee, settles into a new society, learning a new culture and language, becoming part of the new society. He is “naturalized”. When you integrate and are naturalized, you lose your refugee status and become a citizen. Since the country will provide you with documentation, such as a passport, and identity card, you have greater freedom of movement.

Integration is a two-sided process, involving both the refugee and the society. With integration, newcomers preserve their culture and language; their individuality does not disappear. Most people wish to have a society that is a “salad” not a “soup”, with each element distinct.

The concept of **assimilation** goes further. It means total incorporation into the new society. Usually this process takes years and several generations. Children or grandchildren might experience it. This concept of assimilation is being used by some politicians more and more, but actually has no implications for you as a first-generation refugee. When assimilation occurs, the new generation is completely absorbed.

## 2.7 Fact you need to remember:

In Europe there are some issues you need to keep in mind. These include the following:

- ❖ All people are equal before the law
- ❖ Law is enforced upon all without discrimination
- ❖ Women and men have equal rights and freedoms
- ❖ Women, children the disabled and the elderly receive a preferential treatment as vulnerable groups and may be protected by law
- ❖ People with special needs are treated differently according to their situation
- ❖ Use of violence is socially unacceptable and punishable by law
- ❖ People treat each other as adults
- ❖ People treat each other with respect and do not discriminate against each other, at least not openly, on any ground
- ❖ Discrimination is punishable by law
- ❖ Basic education is compulsory. Learning the language is the mean to communicate with the new society and so it is essential.

## 2.8 Recap:

- “Asylum seeking” is an application you submit to the authority, requesting international protection from persecution by the country of your origin
- A “refugee” is a person forced to leave his country with a reasonable fear for his life
- Your refugee status will cease when you get a passport from the country of refuge or when you voluntarily return to your homeland
- Some people are excluded from obtaining refugee status
- In addition to the UNHCR and other UN bodies, there are many NGOs in Europe who support refugees

## Section 3: The Rights & Obligations of a Refugee in an Asylum Center

When you enter the territory of a state and apply for asylum, you will be held by the authority. Countries differ in how they do this. Some countries have reception camps, others depend upon NGOs such as the Red Cross or Refugee Organizations, while a third group let the refugee seek his own place of residence.

### 3.1 Living in a Camp:

The camp is a facility where asylum seekers and entrants to the territory of the state are held. The nature of this housing facility differs between states and also within each state. In some countries, they are graded: the first kind is the Registration Camp or Center. Then, after being reviewed, you may be transferred to an Asylum Seekers Center.

Not every country or camp treats asylum seekers acceptably. Some refugee stories are negative and deplorable. In such a case you were unlucky; you need to know your rights and seek help.

### 3.2 Asylum seekers' rights:

Asylum seeking is not easy, so you have to be alert. Your application and the interviews with the authority will determine whether your request will be handled quickly and you will be granted refugee status. During this phase, remember that you can request help – from an interpreter or a lawyer, for example. Both of these can help you in this first phase. The interpreter will be your assistant in getting past the problem of language. The lawyer will help you with the legal process and can give you advice.

Furthermore, you may also seek the help of NGOs that work closely with asylum seekers and defend their rights; these are available in all countries. In many countries, you can enjoy various rights while your application is being reviewed by the authority.

An asylum seeker is supposed to enjoy the following rights:

1. Right to a fair and efficient asylum procedure
2. Right to a legal counselor
3. Right to an interpreter
4. Right to health care
5. Right to information
6. Right to legal advice
7. Right to practice their religion
8. Freedom of movement
9. Freedom from detention
10. Right of victims of torture to immediate medical or psychological assistance;

See in this respect: the European Union Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003, "Laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers", The Official Journal of the European Union

### 3.3 Your Rights in the Constitution:

All the European constitutions mention the rights of persons on their territories. Refugees' rights are regulated by different laws in different countries. However, the EU has special regulations and conventions that are supposed to harmonize the procedure in all European countries. Further, in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR-EU), Article 18 ensures the right to asylum and Article 19 grants protection in case of removal, expulsion or extradition.

([http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf) )

*Aziz and his wife were in an Asylum Center. They knew nothing of the procedure to follow but they contacted an NGO and the representative gave them guidance and told them what they needed to know. The husband had a real problem with paper forms. He felt they put him in a box and stuck a label on him. Somehow three vital forms went missing. At one point they were in real trouble. But he then found another refugee to talk to. Going through memories of his history was really difficult. Sometimes it got unbearable. But the two continued talking. Now he is a bit more organized and the procedure for Asylum is going through – with no more lost papers.*

### 3.4 What are your Rights as Refugee?

When talking to people who are undergoing the procedures of obtaining a refugee status, it becomes clear that many of them do not have any information concerning their rights. Even if they have such information, usually given to them by the authority, they dare not invoke any of them for fear that the authority might expel them to a country where they had been persecuted.

During the first period of seeking asylum, many live with stress, anxiety, fear and concern. For some this situation continues, even when they get Asylum status. This can result in psychological and physical health problems. Some continue to carry these problems for years. As an asylum seeker, you need to know that you have some rights while waiting for a decision. The legal texts of the 1951 Refugees Convention, and other regional and international instruments, grant you rights from the time you arrive in a country and apply for international protection.

These rights include:

- The right not to be discriminated against (Universal Declaration, Article 2 / also CFR-EU)
- The right not to be expelled, except under certain strictly defined conditions (Geneva Convention, Article 32 / also International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Article 13)
- The right not to be punished for illegal entry into the territory of a contracting State (Geneva Convention, Article 31)
- The right to work (Geneva Convention, Articles 17 to 19)
- The right to housing (Geneva Convention, Article 21)
- The right to education (Geneva Convention, Article 22)
- The right to public relief and assistance (Geneva Convention, Article 23)
- The right to freedom of religion (Geneva Convention, Article 4)
- The right to access the courts (Geneva Convention, Article 16)
- The right to freedom of movement within the territory (Geneva Convention, Article 26)

- The right to be issued identity and travel documents (Geneva Convention, Articles 27 and 28)

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/default_en.htm)

[http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/asylum/asylum\\_intro\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/asylum/asylum_intro_en.htm)

**Freedom from discrimination** (“the right not to be discriminated against”) is a universal human right and applicable to all persons at all times; it is not confined to asylum seekers and refugees. Concerning a refugee, this right means that the authority of the receiving country is obliged not to discriminate against an asylum seeker for any reason related to his origin, religion, social background, color or race, etc.

The **right not to be expelled** is very clear – an asylum seeker who seeks international protection should not be deported or expelled from the receiving country. There are some exceptions to this rule under certain conditions, such as national security or public order. These two concepts have a restrictive interpretation – in other words, a refugee should only be expelled as a last resort and as the only practicable way to protect the interests of the State. The **right not to be punished** for an illegal entry into the territory of the contracting state is clear.

Among the economic and social rights of a refugee are the **right to work** and the **right to be housed**. Both rights guarantee to a refugee a stable settlement in the new society, while the right to work opens to them the way to build a future. The right to housing is inalienable to any human being. Without having a suitable place to live in, the refugee may have difficulties integrating into the new society. Also in this category is the **right to education**, which is considered very important. A refugee should be given the chance to get educated, for themselves and family members.

Any asylum seeker will need at first some **public relief and assistance**. This is one of the rights that keep a person alive and denial of such right will impair the right to life and dignity.

Other important rights are those related to the civil situation of a person such as the **right to freedom of religion, movement and having an identity document**. These rights are deemed necessary to an asylum seeker.

Another important right is having **access to a court** that will review a case and a claim. This procedure is very important, guaranteeing the person a review by a competent authority and giving them the right of defense.

### 3.5 Procedures to obtain status:

Be aware that in the European Union there are differences between countries in their treatment of asylum applications and claims. Some countries have tried to abide by international norms and in practice offer good service. Others are reluctant, offering excuses such as a lack of trained employees in the field. Currently, different international and domestic organizations are exerting pressure for improvement.

[http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/asylum/asylum\\_common\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/asylum/asylum_common_en.htm)

### 3.6 Standards applicable to the Asylum Seeking phase:

During the phase that you are seeking asylum, certain standards are supposed to be applied to your reception. They are recommended by UNHCR in an earlier study to harmonize the EU procedures. (This section draws heavily from a UNHCR study, 'Reception Standards for Asylum Seekers', Geneva, July 2000 and <http://www.ecre.org/>)

#### i) Reception on arrival

NB: UNHCR recommends that reception standards should always be separated from the determination of the status of the refugee.

Asylum seekers may encounter difficulties at the early stage of the asylum process, particularly in the following cases:

- a. Many asylum seekers, with genuine cases, may fail to state their asylum claims formally. They need the assistance of a legal counselor or an interpreter.
- b. Victims of torture, or people who have suffered traumatizing experience, who usually require immediate medical or psychological assistance.
- c. People with no official identity or travel documentation who may have fled their countries without any time to plan.
- d. No understanding of the language. When you begin your asylum procedure, make sure you request a translator and legal assistance. There are many organizations that provide such help.

#### ii) Information and legal advice

In addition, try to know a little about the administrative procedures of the country where you are seeking asylum. Lack of information has led some people to apply incorrectly for asylum. Seek access to basic information, including the services of an interpreter and legal counseling. This is crucial whether you apply at the airport or border. You are expected to apply at the first opportunity which offers. The first interview is carried in these locations and you may have to wait for a decision of the authority to admit you.

#### iii) Freedom of movement and detention

Many European countries resort to the detention of asylum seekers under certain circumstances. Various grounds for detention include "pre-admission detention", "pre-deportation detention", "detention for the purposes of transfer to a safe third country", "detention for the purposes of transfer to the responsible state under the Dublin Convention" and "criminal detention linked to illegal entry/exit or fraudulent documentation".

References:

[http://detention-in-europe.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=97&Itemid=129](http://detention-in-europe.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=97&Itemid=129)

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<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:031:0018:0025:EN:PDF>

### 3.7 Recap:

- Living in a camp is only easy if you have the basic package of necessities needed for subsistence
- As an asylum seeker know your rights and ask for a legal counselor and an interpreter;
- According to the international conventions, you have a right to appeal any decision from the authority; talk to your lawyer;
- Procedures differ from one country to another - obtain information about that and ask for help;
- There are standards applicable to the asylum phase - get to know them very well, form a group of asylum seekers to discuss them and press for any changes needed and get help from NGOs in with this.

## Section 4: Managing life in an Asylum Center

### 4.1 Living in a Camp:

The camp is a facility where asylum seekers and entrants to the territory of the state are held. The nature of this housing facility differs between states and also within each state. In some countries, they are graded: the first kind is the Registration Camp or Center. Then, after being reviewed, you may be transferred to an Asylum Seekers Center.

Accommodation: if your family is with you may have a family room with a private bathroom. But some people will have to share a room with others, often with common bathrooms and toilets down the corridor. Singles are usually given shared facilities. Women asylum seekers are separated from men. However, usually the laundry, common room, cafeteria, clinic and phones are shared. Single women need to ask about the safety of such facilities late at night and be active in keeping themselves safe. Sometimes, there are regulations concerning leaving and returning to the camp. That means the doors may open and close at certain hours every day. Sometimes cooking is central and meals are served at certain times in a dining room. Muslims and Jews have the right to food that does not contain pork.

What follows is advice gathered from refugees in various countries. Respect for others' values, customs and backgrounds – treating others with respect – is an underlying principle. Appropriate behavior will have a lasting effect upon your health, your network and your future integration.

### 4.2 Using your time well:

It might take some time before you are granted the right to refuge. It may be only a few months but for many it will be two or three years. This is a long time and it is hoped that you leave faster. But if you plan for two years and get out early, there is no loss. If you think that you will be out tomorrow and so make no plans for using your time well, you will have wasted months.

You will use most of these skills once you get out of the camp:

- a. Check your environment and discover the surroundings; learn to use a map and a bicycle. Bicycles provide free transport and are good for your health.
- b. Join a walking group. If you are still worried about getting lost, write your address on an envelope and put paper money in it. Carry it around and, if you do get lost, you can stop a taxi and show the driver your address.
- c. You can learn to cook, to cut hair, to write letters and fill in forms for others or to play a musical instrument. Perhaps you may end up with a skill that can be turned into a career; perhaps you must handle objects or learn activities that you used to think were harmful but if the purpose is good, keep trying.
- d. Get familiar with European time.
- e. Think of using your skills for a good purpose, by volunteering. If you speak English or French as well as your first language you may be useful as an interpreter or translator. This will give you contact with citizens outside the camp and you will learn a lot about the country.

- f. Think about forming a support group. Whether you are a single woman trying to keep safe or a father wondering about his children, there are other people with common problems and language. You can help each other. You will feel less lonely and it may be the start of life-long friendships. Learn to use letters, emails and Skype (phone for free) to keep in touch once people start leaving the camp.

### 4.3 Learn The Language:

The local language is your passport to integration into the new society, and communicating with people can even help you find a suitable job. According to language teachers – and the experience of thousands of refugees now in Western Europe – it is **practice** which is the best way to learn the language quickly and well. So:

- a. Speak with people, including your neighbors, regularly. Most people appreciate hearing you speaking their language
- b. Do not feel embarrassed if you make mistakes; people know that you are learning
- c. Ask people to correct you if you make a mistake
- d. Listen to the news on the television or radio
- e. Listen to children's songs
- f. Follow a course
- g. Learn via your children. If you have young children who go to school, then you are lucky because children learn the language quickly – and you learn from them.

### 4.4 Control the interaction when you meet people:

Everybody has different ways of behaving when they meet different kinds of people. Think of the following: a) meeting a police chief when you have been driving a car too fast, b) meeting a new doctor who could help your child, c) being introduced to a three-year-old niece. In each situation, our attitude, tone of voice and what we say is different. If we understand our own behavior, we can have some control over the way we appear to others – and the way they treat us. At the root of all behavior is the assumption that both people deserve to be treated with respect.

One way to understand all this is a psychological approach called **T. A.** (“**Transactional Analysis**”). This argues that we all have three main ways of behaving: as the Parent personality, as the Adult personality and as the Child.

To put it very simply:

**The Parent** is the part of you that says “you should...”, “you mustn't...”, “our ancestors always...”, “if your mother could see you...”

**The Adult** is in the present, getting on with life without emotion.

**The Child** is your creative – and naughty – side. It is also the part that says “Oh poor me, I am cold and hungry; rescue me”.

When you meet someone, your three personalities meet their three personalities – and you react in part to which is most dominant in the other. If your Adult meets their Adult, you should get on well; if your Child meets their Child, you should have a good time. And if one person is prepared to play the Parent and the other person the Child, that works too.

In many Developing Countries the players are not so much Parent and Child as **Patron** and **Client**. In most families, offices or departments, there is a 'Patron', responsible for getting

others a job, opportunities, training and/or promotion – while the 'Client' is under obligation to be submissive, non-critical and cooperative. A lot of meetings are between Patron and Client. But in Northern Europe it is not the same: most people are happy in the role of Adult and do not like to leave it while they are working.

**Meeting immigration officials, doctors, lawyers:**

If a refugee goes to a meeting and acts as Parent or Child, the European gets uncomfortable. Those roles do not match with the expectations of their Adult. Most meetings go better if you too act all the way through as an Adult – remembering to give and expect respect.

**Do not lose your temper** or even get angry. If you do, you have also “lost control” over the encounter and may fail in what you hope to achieve. Some African nationalities move to anger quickly in discussions – and in Europe they may not be forgiven easily.

**One exception:** sometimes a Refugee may be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. One symptom may be an uncontrollable temper. So get a letter, if possible signed by your doctor, explaining this. Bring it out as necessary.

**Meeting Acquaintances outside the camp or work:**

**Time:** Northern Europeans tend to be busy and manage this partly by following time and diary appointments exactly. If you arrange to meet people at a certain time, keep to it. If necessary, bring your phone or something to read and turn up early. It helps if you buy a diary so you can write down your appointments with other people. When you have a wide network of acquaintances, this will help you remember all the appointments.

Close Northern European friends will be pleased if you congratulate them on their birthday so these dates could be something else to note in your diary.

**Invitations and Offers:**

If people offer to help in some way, for example to pay for the books you need for a course, listen carefully and believe what they say. They are offering to pay for the books, nothing more – not to pay for the course. In some Asian and African cultures, people make huge offers so as to seem helpful, but do not mean to keep their promise. This is not OK in Northern Europe. If the offer is clear, realistic and intended, then you can accept it, knowing the other can afford it – and you need not feel guilty in accepting.

**Meeting the opposite sex:**

Men make problems for themselves if they meet North European women and judge them by the standards of another culture. So they dress or act in a way that back home is immodest? But the dress style of a woman reflects the cultural and social values of the country where you are a guest. Some newcomers commit grave mistakes when they judge a woman by her appearance. Any further action from their side might bring them in conflict with the laws against sexual harassment.

The way North European women talk is not reflective of immodesty. If a girl looks you straight in the eye it means that, by North European standards, she is listening to you with attention, is honest and not cheating. Maybe this is contrary to what you have learned in cultures where men and women are separated and a girl is not supposed to look you straight in the eye. If you are unsure about how to interpret a certain behavior, just talk to her, or to your friends and learn what she might mean.

## 4.5 Managing your health including your sex life:

The Camps have health facilities. This is a chance to sort out any problems you might be worrying about.

**Dental Care:** Parents need to ensure good tooth care for everyone, with regular brushing, new toothbrushes when necessary and visits to the dentist. Elderly people may need false teeth. In most of Northern Europe, this will be free in the camps; later some of the costs of dental care are covered by Health Insurance.

**Sexually transmitted disease:** For some individuals, a period of disruption is followed by a time of increased sexual activity. Was this true for you? Did you make sure that condoms were used, every time? Or did you run the risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease, perhaps HIV/AIDS? If so, your future partners, including your present or future husband or wife, could be at risk. So ask the Camp doctor or nurse to carry out the tests and follow any treatment prescribed. Remember that HIV/AIDS is no longer a death sentence but you have a future that will not be so easy. Find out if there is a support group you could join, or start one yourself.

**Planning the Family:** For couples, times of stress are also times when babies are started – even though it is not the best time. If you are half of a couple, think about the contraception you use. Is it a method that suits both of you and your sexual history? Maybe you need to have a long talk with your partner, because this issue is important for the whole relationship. Women seeking information can insist on seeing a woman health worker, if this is a concern. In the long term, sexual health care covers all kinds of issues about your own sexuality. Would you rather never have sex again? Perhaps you have issues around having babies. If you have a problem of infertility or if you have gone through FGM and want a reversal, you can be helped. (Later, when you are living independently, most Health Insurance policies will cover the cost). The internet will take you to information, chat rooms and other resources, for example Black Women's Health and Family Support <http://www.bwhafs.com>. If you are outside England and have problems with other languages, find the service you need in Britain and email them to find out what is available where you are. Then talk to the Camp nurses or doctors.

**Chronic nutritional shortages:** Refugees may have been under stress for a long time, eating poorly and sleeping badly. Or they may have been living for a long time with a chronic shortage of some essential part of a diet. Some women, for example, have anemia for years – a shortage of iron. So nothing may be working as well as it could, and they feel a bit slow and stupid the whole time.

## 4.6 Children:

Many refugee families arrive in Europe with their children. Depending upon their age, you have to arrange for them to go to a nursery or school. Education is a right for all children and elementary education is free. If your child is in nursery or school, you need to know the regulations. They will usually provide you with an annual calendar, where you find basic information on opening and close times, holidays, how to get permission for children to be absent for religious holidays and how to inform the school or nursery if a child is sick.

In all countries in Europe, basic education is compulsory. This means that children will be enrolled in school at an early age, from around 4-5 years to 7 years, depending on the country. This is regulated by law and parents are held legally responsible.

Children are quick to learn the language. They are at an age when the brain is busy learning; and they are in contact with other children using it as the only medium of communication. If you are open, you can learn from your children when they are home.

Children in school will be learning new values such as independence, critical thinking, and openness in expressing ideas – even with subjects that are not normally discussed. They may ask you about religion, sex, women's rights, discrimination, freedom, etc. These values may conflict with yours but it is a chance for both sides to learn.

**Helping your children with their past:** Generally, children are like adults: if bad things happen to them, they are affected. In fact, they may be more affected than adults because children do not have the experience that would help them make sense of it all. How can a four-year-old sort out in his mind why the family had to leave their country?

Like adults, children's problems may show up physically. They can lose their energy, or stop eating or playing. They may complain of a series of bellyaches, headaches etc. They may cling to a parent, seeking reassurance, or put their anger into being aggressive with their friends. But some cultures deny that children experience trauma, or suffer from it, or need help. More about children who are sad or angry can be found in "Finding Mental Health after Conflict" at [www.networklearning.org](http://www.networklearning.org).

Everyone, including your children, needs contact with adults of both sexes and all ages. If you have become a nuclear family, start widening your links with good people.

## 4.7 Returning to sleeping better:

Many people find it difficult to sleep well and this can go on for long periods. And as a result they can find it more difficult to cope with everything else. Some small changes in behavior may help:

- Make a resolution to improve things. Get ready in the evening to make it happen. Ignore any invitation by friends to go and join them. Turn off the radio or mobile phone.
- In the early evening it may help to take some exercise, like a walk. And chat with neighbors who are positive (no sad stories).
- Make the bedroom darker, more enclosed. To block out light, use some suitable cloth (sold cheaply in markets) or blankets. Swap that lumpy pillow for a better one.
- An hour before sleep, begin to slow down. Do not listen to, or discuss, bad news.
- Instead, relax on the bed, breathe slowly and concentrate on something you would enjoy doing that occupies the mind – perhaps the process of cooking a complicated dish, or taking a motorbike to pieces and cleaning the engine.
- A small helping of some food, such as a banana, can help the brain relax.
- If surroundings are noisy, buy earplugs at the pharmacy. And ask the family to be quiet at night.
- Certain smells help people relax. In Europe, lavender flowers are often used; or use the aromatic plants used when you were a child.
- Children are helped by a routine. A meal, a wash, quiet play, a story in bed, a prayer, a bit of time when a parent listens to them, a goodnight kiss – the same routine every evening at the same time.

- Use the relaxation exercise in the next section.

## 4.8 Using relaxation & mediation:

Some people clearly suffer from stress. Their bodies might be tight, stiff and hunched. Their hands shake. They jump at a sudden sound or touch. Others have physical symptoms that are stress-related – such as sleeplessness, headaches, stomach aches and feeling sick. Stress, which can be caused either by the mind or the body (most often by the mind) produces higher levels of adrenaline, which in turn creates ‘flight or fight’ behavior.

The quickest way of breaking down adrenaline and reducing feelings of stress is to **exercise** or do something physical – so go for a brisk walk, knead bread, cut a log up into firewood. And drink mint tea.

At the same time, the mind needs to be disciplined and switched to relax. A lot of stress comes from depressing thoughts that swirl in the mind. This is a habit which can be replaced by imprinting other habits – for example: quickly thinking about something else, reciting a poem (or even multiplication tables) or making pleasant plans.

You can also do a relaxation exercise. People can learn to relax their bodies, even young children. It helps to do this in a quiet place, of course. (If you wish to run this as a group exercise, you should practice amongst yourselves first).

### RELAXATION EXERCISE:

*Ask people to lie on the floor, except for one person who reads out the instructions. If you can, play some quiet music.*

*The reader should go slowly enough for everyone to follow the instructions:*

*“Close your eyes, relax your body into a comfortable position and start to breath deep and slow, in through your nose and out through your mouth.*

*Now think of your toes. Wriggle them. Can you feel them?*

*Then think of your feet. Relax and tighten the ankles.*

*Move up your body knees...*

*hips... waist... chest... arms.... hands... neck... head.*

*If negative thoughts come into your mind, ignore them and think of your body.*

*Feel each part of it; clench and unclench each muscle.*

*When you have reached your head, now think of the sun. It is pouring down its good golden light into your head and down through your body right to your belly button.*

*Then the light spreads up your body, and pushes ahead of itself all the bad thoughts and feelings of the day. It spreads into your head, arms and legs and the bad stuff oozes out of finger tips and toe tips.*

*Lie there a moment, and enjoy the golden light of the sun”.*

An on-line alternative is currently available (Jan.2012) – a ten-minute mindfulness meditation:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/12263893>

## 4.9 Stopping the overuse of alcohol, cigarettes, khat, prescription meds or street drugs:

Do you have a problem with something addictive? Or does someone in the family? Other people may not recognize that you do, since in many cultures it is normal to use these substances in moderation. But when you are in trouble, you may start using them as a way of avoiding your problems. They help you feel better for a while but the price may be high: if you use more than small amounts it will probably affect your health. Both cigarettes and alcohol increase the risk of some kinds of cancer, can damage the liver etc. There is more on fighting addictions in “Finding Mental Health after Conflict”, including self-assessment tests at: [http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=52](http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=52)

## 4.10 Mental Health for Refugees:

If you or a friend are ex-soldiers, and start acting really crazy, think about both the possibility of addiction but also the burden of memories underneath the behavior. Try to find a way for the individual to get assessed by a Mental Health professional. Start with the Center’s doctor or the family doctor. Some craziness can be helped by the right prescribed drugs.

The other psychological problem refugees may easily get is depression. This is not surprising if somebody gets stuck in an Asylum Center with no clear way out. Again, talk to the Camp doctor or the Family doctor because medication can help, especially if combined with talking therapy. Read more in “Finding Mental Health after Conflict”:

[http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=52](http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=52)

**Getting enough exercise:** Perhaps you are stuck in an Asylum Center with no job or you find one that does not involve much activity. Wives may become home-makers and do less. Children may get addicted to sweet stuff. In some countries the schools are not responsible for physical education. For all the family the risk of putting on too much weight may be higher than before. Parents need to find exercise for everyone – and bear in mind that children who succeed at school tend to be the ones who exercise more.

Some activities are free (walking, bicycling, football and, in winter, skating) and some cost money – swimming or classes in karate, judo, dance and yoga. Think about the cost of equipment or clothing; and decide whether you need to go with your children to encourage them. Joining a group that does the traditional dancing of your country of origin would be a good way of keeping your children in touch with part of their heritage.

**Rebuilding personal ties:** Are there family members and close friends with whom you have lost touch? Have you tried the obvious ways of getting an address, through mutual friends or family, your old mosque or church and the administrators in big refugee centers? If you have tried everything, there is still the Red Cross <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Finding-missing-family> and the Salvation Army <http://salvos.org.au/familytracing>. Both organizations specialize in reuniting people.

Everyone, including your children, needs contact with adults of both sexes and all ages. If you have become a nuclear family start widening your links with good people. Use contacts such as emails and Skype which enables you to phone for free.

### 4.11 Returning to the Homeland:

Some people, after a time attempting to get Refugee status in Europe, decide to go back to their homeland. Perhaps the politics have changed; perhaps any land seems better than a Camp. If that is your decision, Good Luck. Some exiles hesitate because they say they will only be welcome back if their hands are full of money and gifts. Any relative who thinks like that does not deserve you.

### 4.12 Recap:

- Living in asylum center gives you time to learn to think positively; try make use of time
- Learn the language and communicate with people
- You have the chance to manage your health, so make use of this chance
- Try the relaxation exercises with family and friends
- Help your children, build good relationship with them
- One step towards a better life is stopping the overuse of any addictive substance

## Section 5: Settling In - New Culture, Different Value Systems

The value systems in MENA are mostly quite different to those in Northern Europe, though some values are shared in both regions. Countries in Northern Europe have moved to a different place economically. Most Northern Europeans expect to keep warm in winter, eat three meals a day, make decisions for themselves and see their children get good schooling and health care. Think of the place where you were born and ask yourself if you could assume the same there.

Not every European likes the European system. Some people see it as over-dependent on money, taking too great a share of the world's resources, and producing a group at the bottom who are really poor, while the better-off can just play. Different groups respond to these views in different ways by, for example, giving to good causes, recycling etc.

*Freeganism is a lifestyle that challenges what we accept as normal. It is a lifestyle developed by a group that tries to reduce all its costs and consumption. Followers squat in empty houses. They gather food by foraging in the country or in supermarket bins (skipping). They still need a couple of thousand Euros a year for things such as mobile phones. But they are happy to pay a price for having a freedom of choice and to maneuver within the margins of society. (see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freeganism>;*

**What are the big areas of difference in values?**

### 5.1 The Family versus the individual:

Traditionally in MENA the family is wider than the nucleus of husband, wife and children. Older people are seen as wiser and are owed respect; they can decide issues such as the careers of children and who the boys and girls should marry. It is creditable in this society to follow the guidance of the older people. In return, the family is the safety net for its members and this never stops. *“Home is where when you go there, they have to take you in” (Robert Frost)*

It is different in Europe – where people value the individual, believing that each person is born with their own set of abilities; each is obligated to use their brains and schooling to work out what they are and use their abilities to the utmost. If the family of birth is oppressive or nasty, it is only right to move out and on. If things get tough, it is the state which should provide the basics of housing, heat and food. This makes for problems in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when many states are running out of money. And now there is an additional problem with a growing population of elderly who are no longer productive, who need care – but do not have families willing or able to provide that care.

### 5.2 Religion and/or Free Thinking:

Some of you readers will be strict followers of a religion, whether Christian, Moslem or any other. Nobody should tell you to how to worship. But it may help if you try to understand what it is like for the people who are not religious. Consider the European individual as described in the paragraph above. From such a perspective, religions can be seen as having the role of suggesting how to behave. Or as false tempters. For many people, organized religion seems responsible for wars, killing and misery.

In Northern European countries, about one third of the population follow an organized religion; more believe in God and an afterlife and even more give money to good causes. Religion is less likely to come up in conversation. Although in every group there are angry, prejudiced people, the good-hearted, intelligent Europeans do not see every Moslem as responsible for the New York attack of 9/11 – just as good-hearted, intelligent Moslems do not see every Jew as responsible for Israeli actions in Gaza. Such tolerance and respect is protected by the law; religion-driven crime in most North European countries is treated especially seriously.

### 5.3 The Position of women in the different cultures:

In Europe, women have equal rights to men before the law. They can enter into contracts and be economically independent. Both sexes need to respect this.

In families from traditional societies, where women's rights are governed by customs and traditions, the man had the upper hand in affairs outside the house. He and other elders decide everything concerning the family. However, even in traditional societies, changes are slowly happening. Arranged marriage is an example: in more and more MENA cultures, protests are growing against marriages arranged without the full cooperation of both parties or when either party is too young or needs to finish schooling.

Recently, despite their customs and traditions, women in MENA have steadily participated in the social and political movements against tyrannies in many countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain. The participation of women in these countries can be described as fundamental since without them these movements would not achieve their goals. They use internet and social media groups to discuss Human Rights in general and women's rights in particular.

Usually, European women can be economically independent if they want. They can make their own decisions and their families have no authority over them. According to both law and values, couples who enter marriage have equal rights and responsibilities. In theory, they care together for any children, share the household duties and have a balanced division of labor. They should both contribute to the family budget in terms of cash or services. So if the husband is the main child carer, then the wife earns the money – or vice versa. In practice, studies show that men do much less of the household tasks even with both parents working – and most families nowadays need both to work in order to make ends meet. Although in many European countries women remain subject to discrimination, in general the European woman has achieved some degree of economic independence and is slowly getting more.

In traditional societies, women are often completely economically dependent upon the man – father, brother or husband. Even when a woman has a job, her dependence is not completely lifted. There is a stricter division of labor between spouses, with the woman responsible for household functions including almost all the rearing and upbringing of the children.

*Amina grew up in a very traditional family and married into another. She is widowed and found a job keeping the books in a small business run by two brothers. They are very well behaved. But now her son, who is 18, is studying and reading the Koran. He demands that she acknowledges his authority and leave the job – as it is unsuitable. But where will she find another?*

An aspect of all of these differences, important for newcomers to appreciate, is the way men and women interact. In good marriages and good workplaces both sexes treat each other with respect, openness and understanding. The way a European woman dresses reflects the dominant culture, values and norms. If you judge the outside appearance of your female colleague by the standards of MENA it may bring you into conflict. If a male is “physically inappropriate” with her then he may be breaking the law.

A female newcomer may find a chance to free herself from dependence upon men. The European countries offer her the chance to be economically independent. The law protects her rights and offers her protection from violence.

***FGM:** In several European countries, young women can claim asylum if in their country of origin they face Female Genital Mutilation, which is illegal in the EU.*

Some refugees still put value in the concept of honor. They see their wives, daughters or sisters as belongings – so if they act in a way that brings shame, they must be controlled, stopped, and punished. But in Europe, women are protected against violence (as are men). Domestic violence could end your family, with a separation in which you can only see your children by special arrangement of the court. For women there are help centers available by telephone. The police can be at your door in minutes and there are places where women and their children can seek shelter from violent husbands.

***Imtaz** came with her mother to Europe when she was 9. At the age of 15 she found a boy she liked. Both families forbade the friendship because of their ages. Imtaz's parents threatened her with sending her back to North Africa. She ran away. The police became involved. The boy's family then said they would accept her as their son's wife – but he is 17, with no job. And neither of them are grown up enough in character for marriage. Everybody is praying that it does not go that far but nobody wants to be responsible for taking her to a Family Planning clinic.*

#### **5.4 Politeness versus honesty:**

In many developing countries, people are raised to be polite. In the West, people value honesty more than politeness. So suppose you are asked to go tomorrow to help someone move house; will you say 'Yes' just to keep the speaker happy, even if in fact you will not turn up? If so, you may lose potential friends. Children growing up in Europe learn to be honest and this can cause trouble at home.

**Form a group** to discuss values. You can read, consult websites, check the stories you hear.

***Hussein** had a daughter aged 13. A year before, she started wearing clothes that he thought provocative. On the bus going to school she would take off several layers of clothes and coming home she would put them on. He heard of this from one of the teaching assistants. At first he got angry and shouted, and she shouted back. There was no peace. One evening the mother of a local family came round and they talked. She confessed that she had done the same as a girl, and it was partly to make her father cross. They talked about how it had felt, being young. This helped. Gradually Hussein started to see his daughter without anger. He began to coach her in Science and liked her enthusiasm...things got better...*

## 5.5 Use your cultural heritage:

Your culture is an extra passport to integration into the new society. Your new neighbors will admire some of your values and customs, even the way you dress and eat – and find it 'exotic'. Tell people about your culture, customs and values so that it is never an issue of conflict.

## 5.6 Recap:

- Free thinking does not mean you abandon your belief. It is more a way of life.
- In most traditional societies people attach respect to elderly women and men and do not discriminate against either. However, this is not the case with younger women;
- The differences in value systems between cultures, European and MENA, do not mean necessarily a clash of values – instead it can lead to an area of interaction and integration - to the benefit of both societies.
- Use your customs, cultural heritage, even stories to integrate in your new society - you contribute to the enrichment of the human cultural heritage.

## Section 6: Settling In - Restoring Physical & Mental Health

By the time refugees finally get housed in a new country, they may have experienced years of being unable to control many aspects of their lives. During that time it was easy for some to be very passive, and allow decisions and situations to be decided by other people. Perhaps now is the time to improve things. What follows are suggestions which others have found useful.

Read over the Sections on 'Managing Life in an Asylum Center' and 'Value Systems': these overlap with this section.

### 6.1 Getting back to regular structure in life:

A normal family will know certain routines, for example:

- ⤴ that people get up at a set time
- ⤴ that people have to be at work or school at a certain time
- ⤴ that at a certain time in the evening the water runs dry
- ⤴ that they have to start cooking the pulses at a certain time because the wage-owner will be home in two hours and will be hungry.

This kind of framework is needed in a new country as well, especially if people go to work or school. Strict time keeping may annoy rebellious teenagers but it gives a feeling of security to everyone. Dislocated families may need to improve their timetables so that, for example, a teenage son is not disrupting everyone by sleeping late and demanding personalized meals.

It might take some time before you are granted the right to refuge. As soon as the authority makes that decision, you enter a new phase. You have to leave the camp and seek a permanent home to live in. You may have to find a house, furnish it, prepare to move, and then move in. The authority will help you find a house or you may yourself seek one. This may take some time.

### 6.2 Getting your first House:

It might take some time before you are granted the right to refuge. As soon as the authority makes that decision, you enter a new phase. You have to leave the camp and seek a permanent home to live in. You may have to find a house, furnish it, prepare to move, and then move in. The authority will help you find a house or you may yourself seek one. This may take some time.

#### Your House:

You may get a house, flat or an apartment, in a village or a city, depending on your situation. The type of house you rent will determine your budget for other items and the extent of your contact with the locals.

A major variable is whether there is a choice between **urban and rural** housing. This depends on the structure of the public housing market. In Britain, rural housing is highly valued and even local young farm workers have difficulties getting a house – so there is little to spare for refugees and almost all of them are housed in cities. Find out about the different cities in advance. If you would much prefer a smaller town or want to keep out of Glasgow because the winters are worse, get your argument ready.

If you receive a notice that there is a house available, go and check it. You have to see if everything is okay. If there is anything that is not in order, tells the landlord, the company or the authority about what you have just observed, or what you think is not good enough. They will make repairs. When you sign the contract, it is binding.

When you receive the house keys, you may need to make changes such as painting the walls, putting vinyl or carpets on the ground, making small repairs – and then you have to move your furniture in. In some countries, for example the Netherlands, there are volunteers who will help you with this, but you have to share the work if you are fit.

In the Netherlands there are rural houses available and you may think that this choice is better for your family than an urban Center. However if your house is in a town or city you may have fewer problems in some ways because there are many other aliens like you. If your house lies in a small village then you will have to communicate more with neighbors and villagers. You really will face the language barrier.

Here is a comparative table:

	Aspects	In Village	In Big Town
1	Social life	Good contact with neighbors. No prejudice against children	Depends on n/hood. May be racial prejudice
2	Language	More practice with people	Different languages
3	Work	Limited chances	Bigger chances
4	Housing	According to need, big houses, good services	Small houses
5	Shopping	Limited Facilities	All Facilities
6	Public Transport	Limited to bus, taxis, bicycles	Bus, tram, metro, train, taxi
7	Health Care	Village doctor, serious cases referred/ transferred	Big hospitals
8	Help to Start business	Limited, small market	Bigger market, help from organizations
9	Children upbringing	Easy, healthy environment; schools available; easy to make friends	Schools available; urban influences
10	Volunteers' help	Available	Depends upon town
11	Contact with people from your own country	Difficult; costly in time & money.	Easy and affordable;
12	Municipality	Depends	Depends

### 6.3 Work:

After you settle, you have to register with a governmental bureau for job seekers. The current situation in Europe (Jan. 2012) is an acute financial and economic crisis. As a result there is a high unemployment rate in many countries, with newcomers worse off.

([http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics))

The first step towards finding a suitable job is to register with as many job and career agencies as possible. These are available all over Europe. However, the internet has made it easier and you will find many job resources (e. g. [http://www.quintcareers.com/Europe\\_jobs.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/Europe_jobs.html))

Registering as a job seeker does not mean that you will get a job immediately. Many refugees depend on social assistance, receiving just enough to cover basic survival.

*Omar was 26 when his application for Asylum was accepted. He had possibilities for work but he knew that real success or failure depended on his learning good Danish. Soon after he arrived he made friends with the Asylum Center janitor and talked with him. Then the janitor invited him for coffee and introduced him to his neighbor. The neighbor offered to give him conversation lessons. In 18 months he could talk fluently and sat for an exam in the language. When he finally got a job he had the language skills to be a good employee.*

To get a job, begin seeking immediately. Learn the language quickly and practice – it will widen your chances. When you start looking, adapt a wide concept of the work you could do; be ready to accept jobs that might be below your level of qualifications and experience. This will help in getting promotion to a higher position or moving to a better job. Avoid remaining unemployed for a long period of time as it will look bad in your CV (Curriculum vitae).

With the internet, you can utilize social media such as [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to create a wide network of contacts that may help you.

In each country there is government help available. Use this and follow the courses they provide for job seekers.

If you are highly educated and expert in an area, try to keep and strengthen contact with people in the same field of specialization. Make contacts with the higher education institutions in your new country. Contact the NGO sector. At times they will be seeking people with experience in MENA.

*Malik came to Europe after being in prison for political activities, When he got out, his parents and brothers met him and took him with his family to a boat. They hid below decks for days. Down in the smelly wet cabin, he started to get to know his wife and his four children well, for the first time. When, later, they got their papers – Refugee Status and Right to Work – he and his wife went to the Job Bureau. He sat in the corridor during her first interview, and heard her talking with knowledge and excitement about managing office human resources. At the coffee break he said “I want to look after the children. You take that full-time job. You want it. They want you.” So that is what they do now.*

*“For every woman who takes a step toward her own liberation, there is a man who finds that the way to freedom has been made a little easier”. — N. R. Smith*

## 6.4 More Control over your Money:

Money is an important element that you should not neglect or underestimate. It plays a bigger role in Europe than it did back home. Maybe you were accustomed to open your purse without thinking of the future. Now you need to make a budget for your expenditure and income. This is important because you get money monthly. It seems a big sum. For a day you might feel rich. But thirty days lie ahead – in which you have to pay for services such as gas, electricity, water, insurance and rent. Then there is food, drink, clothing and shoes, transport, and school

expenses. Moreover, there may be taxes, repairs to your car or scooter, your children say they cannot do school work without a computer and expensive trips...it doesn't seem to end.

Note that some of the items need to be paid every day, some fall due monthly, others quarterly or annually. So a budget is needed. This is relatively easy to make – it is more difficult to keep to it. Especially now, with the current financial and economic crisis, you need to control how money goes out. The following tips have been used by many refugees and found helpful:

1. Know your income – where from, how much and in what part of the month it comes in
2. Make a list of monthly needs – food, drink, clothes, insurance etc.
3. Do not forget the rent and tax allowances if they apply to your situation
4. Buy only what you need
5. Buy from bulk stores, to be found in many countries: for example, you could buy a whole lamb to share between three families, 100 cans of baked beans, or 10 kilos of potatoes. For this you need storage space and/or a freezer and a group of friends or families.
6. Make collective purchases with the same group of friends or families for daily items such as meat, bread, fish and vegetables. Many supermarkets sell packages containing large amounts for cut prices. In rural areas, some farms sell directly.
7. If salesmen offer you contracts for services or sales at the door, just say “no” even if you do understand the language.
8. Try to make a saving plan
9. Start growing vegetables and fruit, in the garden if you have one. If not, ask whether the village, town or city has allotments (small plots) to rent. They are normally very cheap. Gardening means you can grow familiar food, you can save money, it is very helpful for negative moods and you meet a fine group of people.

## **6.5 Concerning Adolescents – disagreement and discipline:**

When children enter the teenage years, they may want more freedom and the independence to decide their own future. Conflicts arise as parents and teens tend to impose their own decisions upon each other. To avoid a big drama, parents have to be understanding about the changes that occur during the teenage years. They also have to listen to their children with much more attention. When conflict arises, parents have to discuss issues with the teenager and acknowledge their points of view. They need to remember that their children are experiencing a period of clashing hormones and inexperience, so that they cannot see the consequences of their plans. And remember that even in European families, children and teenagers can be disciplined – punished for mistakes and rewarded for good deeds. Punishments may include: 'grounding' (where the child is told to stay in their room or stay in the house for a certain period), denying pocket money, confiscating electronic games and/or the computer, etc.

## **6.6 Concerning Adolescents – Strengthening Important Stable Relationships:**

Think about your teenager's history. Have the people who matter disappeared? Are uncles dead or in prison? How can a young person trust the people who remain? Perhaps they will disappear too. Some young people may want to push everyone away. But adolescents, like others, need to build stable relationships with adults. Can your family adopt some trustworthy

“uncles” and “aunts” from any ethnicity? Could you invite one or two to play a bigger role with a troubled adolescent?

If the teenager tries to push the adult away, the adult must resist. What some teenagers need is for the adult to be friendly and open, to say “let us go for a walk and talk and I will listen to you”; and then, “that was a good walk. Let us do it again, next Tuesday”. Is there anyone who could start to act as a replacement aunt or grandfather – someone who will be around for five years or more? Think about what else could be done to strengthen the relationships within your family. A father who really listens is important, especially for daughters. If she feels loved and valuable, she will not be vulnerable to male predators.

## **6.7 Getting back to better eating:**

The way people feel is related to how their mind is working and the health of their bodies. What you ate or drank yesterday affects how you feel. You will recognize this if you have ever woken early in the morning after too much alcohol or a lot of green fruit.

Different lifestyles and settings need different diets. Hard physical work and cold weather both need higher amounts of the food that the body uses as fuel – food that is high in carbohydrates like rice, sugar and potatoes. But most work in northern Europe is not physical; so the same foods eaten too much will make people fat. It is important to remember as well that when people feel cold and miserable they crave these same carbohydrate foods. You can control your energy better and you will eat more roughage (fiber) if you eat brown rice and brown bread instead of white. The brown alternatives also have more of the whole grain so have more vitamins.

Concerning food, people also need some protein and may not have been getting enough. Protein builds muscles and brains. It is found not only in meat. Fish, eggs, milk, cheese and beans are all good sources of protein, for women and children as well as men. Beans also contain a lot of roughage.

On the whole, a family gets better value for money if they buy raw stuff such as potatoes, and then cooks, instead of buying prepared goods like takeaways or biscuits. These are full of “empty” carbohydrates and too much oil, salt and sugar. When people get control over their own budget it is common to serve much bigger portions and use much more oil. Both habits will contribute to putting on weight and need to be watched.

Vitamin pills hardly ever give value for money when money is short. There are many proven herbal remedies which are effective and cheap. For example, bad stomachs, stress and lack of appetite can be helped by the herb mint, so advice sufferers to make and drink mint tea (not very strong and without sugar).

## **6.8 For Parents feeding the Family:**

As a family, look at how you have been eating. What you eat affects how you feel. How you feel affects what you want to eat. Discuss each individual's weight and performance compared to what you know they are capable of. One person may have got into bad habits such as eating too little nutritious food – or too many chocolate bars. Sugar is very addictive. The best help can be through a change in the habits of the whole family. So if one person needs to lose weight or eat more vegetables, everybody can start to eat in a more balanced and healthy way – less carbohydrates, more vegetables.

Because different people in the family have different food needs, allocating the family resources is not about equal shares for each. If you have a family which includes a pregnant women, a baby or small children, a woman who menstruates or an elderly person, all these people have different nutritional needs. Somebody in the family needs to get informed so that these needs are met. Talk to the local doctor or nurse, buy a book or go on-line. You could start with “Finding Mental Health after Conflict” at [Networklearning](http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=52), the link is here: [http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=52](http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=52)

## 6.9 Making use of Talking therapy:

Talking Therapy, or Counseling, is about helping you make your own good choices. So if you decide you want to know more about the different roads that you can take, then find a Counselor. In most of Europe, if your family doctor refers you, part of the costs for consultation and any medication are paid by health insurance. You may find yourself talking to a psychologist or a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist has training in medicine as well as in psychology. Most psychiatrists specialize in more severe psychological problems such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder referrals from Family Doctors and will be qualified in western medicine.

This is not the only source of help. You may know of a qualified and/or experienced person with a good reputation. Some counselors are from other backgrounds, for example, people whose main job is as an imam or priest.

**Fringe professionals and untrained counselors:** there are many people offering other kinds of talking therapy. Be very careful. Some are fine people – others would mess up the head of a dog. Insist on seeing their credentials and ask lots of questions.

There is an organized system in many European countries called 'Co-Counseling' – it offers free participation, with sessions in groups and pairs.

**NB:** The authors plan to build up a list of therapists recommended by readers in the Netherlands, where they are based. They invite co-operation from people in other countries who could do the same where they are. **Can you help?** Email [info@networklearning.org](mailto:info@networklearning.org)

## 6.10 Help through “Buddying”:

'Buddying' developed around People with Aids (PWAs). Two ordinary people with a similar problem pair up to help each other. They meet in person, and nowadays by email or phone: they can talk, argue and encourage each other to, e. g., keep taking the pills or stay off the alcohol. At times one may be depressed and the other buddy helps; then over time the situation can reverse itself. Each person needs to know their own limits and if necessary take a break.

**How to Pair Up:** As a refugee you may be looking for a Buddy. Places to put up a notice could include the nearest Neighborhood or Asylum Center. Or you could ask your family doctor, pastor, Imam or priest.

**Groups:** If people have computers or use Internet cafes, consider looking for on-line support groups. If you cannot find one that suits your culture, start one.

People can type in stories and comments and respond to those of others, either writing all at once or when convenient. These groups are particularly appropriate for people who do not want to be identified – for example, people with a mental illness, who have HIV/AIDS, or who are homosexual.

There is more information about groups in “Finding Mental Health after Conflict”:  
[http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=52](http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=52)

### 6.11 Psychiatric Problems:

This section is necessarily brief. Refugees in Northern Europe should have a personal doctor and access to the normal range of health services. There is mental ill-health in any group of people. But two conditions are linked particularly to the experience of being a refugee: depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – PTSD.

In all cases when someone has a mental illness, their community needs to remember these points:

**There is no shame** in admitting such a problem and seeking help

**Group therapy** or individual therapy combined with medication helps with most of them. The doctors treating the individual may be able to suggest how the group can adapt to be most useful. If the group has other people from the same geographic area it may help recovery.

**Caring for the carers:** The family, often one member of the family, may be taking a lot of the burden of mental ill-health upon themselves. They could benefit from support from individuals in the community. They may also benefit from meeting up with people in the same situation – who may be in a position to give the best advice around. See “Finding Mental Health after Conflict”: [http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=52](http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=52)

### 6.12 Recap:

- Try to select where you can live and feel better. Weigh up the different aspects of choosing your new home
- Work is very important, but not easy to find. Try to broaden your concept over the sort of work you wish to have
- Money is important. Make plans to save. A North African proverb says: “the white penny today is beneficial in the dark days tomorrow”;
- Your children in their adolescent age need special treatment and understanding
- Use the possibilities of talking therapy – and be positive!

### 6.13 Afterword:

You are now independent; you have survived the Asylum process and soon can apply for citizenship. What we hope for you is that your spirit is undamaged – that if bad things have happened along the way, you can forgive your new hosts – and that your enthusiasm is still there. Now the goal is employment, a job that pays not only in money, but in challenges and achievements. It is hoped, too, that you can help steer your family through the difficulties, build good relationships with your children and see them grow and be successful. We wish you only the best. From the team at Networklearning.

## Section 7: Further Online Resources & Readings

### 1 International and Regional Instruments:

- ⤴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- ⤴ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- ⤴ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- ⤴ Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951
  
- ⤴ A list of states who have signed the Convention or its Protocol is here:
  - <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf>
  
- ⤴ The European Convention on Human Rights
- ⤴ The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

### 2. Updated information about refugees worldwide, legal instruments, news, comments:

- <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>
  
- <http://refugeenews.tripod.com/>  
This site will lead you to many important NGOs e.g. Red Cross
  
- <http://www.icrc.org/>
- <http://www.reliefweb.int/>
- [Amnesty International](#)
- [Human Rights Watch](#)
- [InterAction](#)
- [Jesuit Refugee Service](#)
- [Refugees International](#)
- [Médecins Sans Frontières](#)
- [Doctors Without Borders](#)

### 3. Asylum Seekers in Europe:

- [http://www.hhri.org/thematic/asylum\\_seekers.html](http://www.hhri.org/thematic/asylum_seekers.html)
- [http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/asylum/asylum\\_common\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/asylum/asylum_common_en.htm)

### 4. Detention in Europe:

- [http://detention-in-europe.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=97&Itemid=129](http://detention-in-europe.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=97&Itemid=129)
- [http://detention-in-europe.org/images/stories/DEVAS/jrs-europe\\_becoming%20vulnerable%20in%20detention\\_june%202010\\_public\\_updated%20on%2012july10.pdf](http://detention-in-europe.org/images/stories/DEVAS/jrs-europe_becoming%20vulnerable%20in%20detention_june%202010_public_updated%20on%2012july10.pdf)

### 5. NGOs working in the field of Refugees and Exiles:

You find up-to-date information for the EU via the European Council for Refugees and Exiles. It is a pan-European alliance of 70 organizations in 30 countries: <http://www.ecre.org>  
This link will lead you to other organizations, for example in Finland: [www.redcross.fi](http://www.redcross.fi)  
You can also Google and get many other organizations in the country where you have requested asylum.

## 6. Self help Books:

Online self-help books:

- [http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/center\\_index.php?id=353&cn=353](http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/center_index.php?id=353&cn=353)
- "Where there is no Psychiatrist" is available from TALC but costs money: <http://www.talcuk.org/books/where-there-is-no-psychiatrist.htm>
- "Finding Mental Health after Conflict" Also there is Arabic version, see: [http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=83&Itemid=52](http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=83&Itemid=52)

## 7. Contraception/ Family Planning

Safe condom use:

- [www.birth-control-comparison.info/condom.htm#prevent-condom-failure](http://www.birth-control-comparison.info/condom.htm#prevent-condom-failure).

Sites explaining contraception include:

- <http://www.plannedparenthood.org> and
- <http://www.fpa.org.uk>

## 8. Psychological issues (Manuals, Organizations & self-assessment quizzes)

"Interviewing and Counseling at the Grass roots" (Networklearning: also in French and Somali):

- [http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=45&Itemid=52](http://www.networklearning.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=45&Itemid=52)

Alcohol abuse:

- <http://alcoholism.about.com/od/problem/a/blquiz1.htm>

Alcoholics Anonymous:

- [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org) (useful materials)

Other substance addictions:

- [www.healthyplace.com/psychological-tests/drug-abuse-screening-test](http://www.healthyplace.com/psychological-tests/drug-abuse-screening-test)

Stopping Smoking:

- [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov) (suggestions)

Depression:

- <http://psychcentral.com/quizzes.htm>

PTSD:

- [www.healthyplace.com/psychological-tests/ptsd-test](http://www.healthyplace.com/psychological-tests/ptsd-test)

Domestic violence:

- [www.shelterincalpena.org/Domestic%20Violence%20Self-Assessment.pdf](http://www.shelterincalpena.org/Domestic%20Violence%20Self-Assessment.pdf)

**9. Manuals on other issues** free to download from the library at [www.networklearning.org](http://www.networklearning.org) include "Health Education for Behavior Change"; "Information – its Collection & Use in the Project Cycle"; and "How to Run a Workshop". Some materials in French and Arabic.