

In the same boat 2016 Report:

The second edition of “In the Same Boat symposium: « The refugee crisis through the eyes of exiled journalists” was organized on 22 September 2016 in Borups Højskole in Copenhagen by Crossing Borders in partnership with: International media support, the Danish newspaper information, Arab-Danish partnership and sister cousins. The event aimed to contribute to a better understanding of refugees’ issues through the eyes of exiled journalists and experts.

We believed that enabling media workers to share their own stories and integration challenges they are facing in the Danish society and labor market would help build bridges between refugees/ Asylum seekers and the Danish public, through constructive dialogue. We wanted to change the focus from the refugee crisis to refugee solutions on the way to integration. With this objective in mind, we created space for exiled journalists, panelists and experts on immigration and integration to speak from their own personal experience. The public were also invited to share their thoughts, visions and recommendations on the issue.

The four hours event was comprised of keynotes from exiled journalists in the first session called “storytelling session”. Plus a panel debate gathering exiled journalists, experts and human rights activists moderated by Lotte Folke Kaarsholm journalist editor from Information Danish newspaper under the title: Constructive policies and measures on how to turn the refugee challenges into opportunities for the benefit of both Refugees and Danish society”.

As usual, this Crossing Borders event brought more than 150 people from different backgrounds and of ages including students, activists, Media, refugees, asylum seekers, civil society representatives, concerned citizens and diplomats. Thus, the event was grand in diversity and esteem and it came from people who happen to have the same interest in making Denmark a good place for newcomers. And to facilitate integration for them.

The event started at 16.00 with a song delivered by the soul singer “Ms. Joanita Lubega Zachariassen”. With her great voice, she warmed up everybody’s hearts in the room.

The director of Crossing Borders, Mr. Garba Diallo, opened the event officially together with the chairperson of the board Ms. Vibeke Quaade insisting on the importance of having such an event and dialogue in Denmark. A performance from the break-dancer Bunto Lhirba then followed, which left us all in deep awe.

The chairperson of advisory CB board Mr. Mariano Davie delivered the welcoming speech by introducing the mission of Crossing Borders highlighting the necessity of discussing the refugee issues and the implications of working towards a better integration process in Denmark.

My biggest border is...:

The first Keynote speech was focused on Noura Bittar Soborg's experience with integration challenges and obstacles, and her biggest border which she described as "fear", Ms. Noura said: "for someone who was born and raised in Syria, fear is something that he /she is used to, something he/she never thought it is a border".

She related her fear to every step she took in her new life in Denmark starting from Syria. Moreover, she highlighted how she was bigger than her fear: in learning the language, in getting a job and managing to get all her family out of Syria. She said, "The border was there. Even when people came to Denmark, did this fear flyaway? No, this fear grew and grew with all the crazy new laws against the refugees, the land of the happiest people, is also the land of the most afraid people".

The point of her speech was to emphasize how a new refugee had to face his or her fear and be bigger than the fear through her own personal story. "How can we live in the same country when your neighbor is scared? Wouldn't that be contagious, wouldn't you feel it as well?"

Bad image about foreigners is one of the biggest obstacles into integration:

The journalist, photojournalist and digital security trainer from Iraq, Bahar Jasim Mohamed, highlighted that learning the local language is not the key to integration. In fact, many obstacles keep the space big between refugees/asylum seekers and Danes. One of these obstacles is something that has to do with repulsion. This is because of what we see in the Danish media, showing the refugees as a risk to the society, or who

are bad and create problems because of issues such as religion. This however ignores the fact that religion is one of the problems that pushes these refugees to flee from their own countries and come to Denmark, the land of democracy.

Bahar shared his own story when he was in a training seminar in Helsingor and all his friends took the ferry to Helsingborg in Sweden but he could not because he did not have his residence permit yet. “I was there, I showed them the way, bought them the tickets, then, I just stopped and waved at them, seeing them going, I can’t describe this feeling, the worst I ever lived, I was feeling throttled”.

Bahar pointed out another obstacle, which is the long, anxious waiting time inside asylum camps. It causes a lot of depression and boredom among asylum seekers, “I myself spent until now one year and seven months without any answer. I am depressed and don’t have the power and desire to do anything; my motivation is drowning slowly and painfully”.

Lack of networking is a huge obstacle into the job market:

Yechiela Pojanamesbaanstit, News researcher and fixer from Thailand. She affirmed that nobody believes that a Thai woman can be a refugee in Denmark or anywhere else. “People have the idea that Thai women get marry to Danes to have the permission to stay in Denmark; they think that Thailand has no political problems (because media are afraid to be banned or get kicked out). She said that there is a difficulty in starting a new life because of the lack of a network together with the requirement of learning the Danish language that exists basically in all working places.

A new phenomenon: Refugee-phobia:

The last speaker from the first session was: Tammam Alkurdi, a journalist from Syria, who brought his vision on how the Danish media is covering the refugee crisis. “Today, all media portals in Denmark have one denominator and that is “the refugees”, and obviously there isn’t any other news to be discussed about”. He said that it seems to be covered as an exponentially growing epidemic disease under the name: Refugee-phobia.

He identified the refugees psychological obstacles: “As a refugee, you are a person with no hope; every week there is a new law that frustrates you more or a rumor that

devastates you even more”. Mr. Tammam concluded his speech saying, “this is my country now, despite all obstacles I will not give up”.

During the break, the panelists, guest speakers and the public enjoyed the delicious food sponsored by Sister Cuisine (a group of refugee women from different countries founded in Trampoline House). They also enjoyed networking and taking pictures, especially since CB had the honor to invite a special guest Nelson Mandela’s daughter, Ms. Zanze Neilson, from the South Africa embassy. She was there to support and show her interest in the question.

After the break, the panel debate regrouped gathering a multistakholder group composed of exiled journalists “Zach Khadudu / Marion Chen”, a Human rights activist “José Acre” and an expert in refugee issues “Michaela Bendixen”. The debate was moderated by Lotte Folke Kaarsholm, a journalist from the Danish newspaper information, emphasizing “Constructive policies and measures on how to turn the refugees’ challenges into opportunities for the benefit of both refugees and Danish society”

Solutions, ideas and ways to move ahead and think about refugees as resources:

Zach Khadudu: Journalist and activist from Kenya shared his vision about the Danish approach in dealing with refugees. In addition, he shared how the Western countries in general are dealing with this crisis as they named it and how developing countries are just following them. “The eyes of the world are watching how rich, Western countries are dealing with the refugee issues; many Somali refugees in Kenya were sent back to their country because they took the rich countries as a model”. Zach focused on how we can see these refugees as resources: “This is a matter of choice; we can decide to look at these refugees as a resource, as people with potential or we can look at them just as people causing problems”.

Marion Chen, a journalist from China, talked about her experience of being in prison for the last 7 years in China, detailing her utterly inhumane treatment as a prisoner; and how she finally arrived in Denmark. Marion is still living in the asylum camp waiting for her case to proceed. The camps are very far and in isolated area: “how can we be integrated in such an environment?”

José Acre, a Colombian/Mexican, human rights activist involved with refugees especially rejected asylum seekers He shared his story on how he started his work in this area expressing his concerns and thoughts about the current Danish refugee/immigration policies. “I was thinking of linking the refugees who are inside the camp to the others outside the camps who are us the immigrants, because we seem to be having more rights than the others but in fact it isn’t”.

José said that the Danish laws are pushing for more black work and slave-like jobs among refugees/ immigrants since the refugees do not have the rights to work and since the immigrants themselves cannot even get a job and have to accept anything just for money.

The final speech belonged to Ms. Michela focused on her experience with refugees, her work and how she could spread refugee awareness through her NGO, “Refugee welcome”. She shared solutions to integrate and some stories she heard from the refugees themselves.

Several participants attending the conference shared their thoughts and asked many relevant questions showing their solidarity with the refugees’ plight.

The event finished with some recommendations on how to move forward to better integration

-Spread more awareness about refugee issues.

-Involve refugees in events, NGOs and initiate projects as “Information newspaper did”.

We think that the event was great and helped to get more people involved with refugee issues. One of the immediate outcomes of the event is the Crossing Borders magazine dedicated to immigrants and refugees, which is going to be published by the end of January 2017.

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