



87 VOICES ON MIGRATION

Jonas Engman and
Lisa M. Söderlindh
(ed.)



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Migrationsverket

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PREFACE

In this book the Swedish Migration Agency and Nordiska Museet present 87 individuals' voices about migration. They come from interview material created in 2015–2016 as part of the communication initiative MIG Talks, which also assembled a number of profiled organizations for conversation. Each of us has written a concluding reflection in which we tell more about this.

All the participants have approved the publication of the texts and images in this book. In occasional cases the individuals wished to use a pseudonym, in other cases an anonymized picture. The stated age is the age of the person when the story was told. All the stories can also be found on the website *Minnen.se* and the entire material is accessible in Nordiska Museet's archives.

Jonas Engman Lisa Monique Söderlindh





Shevin, age 29

1986–2004 Birth and childhood, Qamishli, Syria
2004–2011 Studying, Aleppo, Syria
2012 Displaced
2012 Need for protection, Uppsala, Sweden
2015– Studying, Uppsala and Stockholm, Sweden

“IF YOU WANT TO DO IT, YOU CAN.”

During my last year at high school, I would get up at four in the morning so I would have time to study for my national exams before school started. If I could do well enough, I would get into upper secondary school. In my mind’s eye, I can still see the changing colours of the sky; how the orange gradually turned into gold.

The sunrise was an important view for me – it symbolised my future. My name, Shevin, also means ‘dawn’ in Kurdish.

I did well in my exams, but what good did it do? What did all the time and energy I’d put into studying amount to? Nothing. War came. It hurts to think about all the effort I put in, which ultimately came to nothing.

When you’re forced to leave everything behind and start your life again in a new country, you’re suddenly back at square one. It’s like becoming deaf, dumb and blind. As if you no longer know anything.

Sometimes I talk to my boyfriend about how we miss the air in Syria, the fresh air and the smell when we would sit on the balcony drinking tea. Here in Sweden, I’ve only felt the fleeting coolness of the breeze. Today, however, I don’t see that I could ever return to Syria, even if the war came to an end. I’ve started to like Sweden. I increasingly feel a sense of belonging here, and Sweden suits me as a person. In Syria, girls don’t work at restaurants and you

don’t get summer jobs. Only people with no education do that kind of work.

Here, you can study and work at the same time. And why not? No one judges you. Even children begin their sentences with words like “I think” and “I believe”, and they share their impressions of what’s good or bad. The first time I heard a three-year-old say this and start a discussion with me, my jaw dropped in surprise. It’s good that they’re encouraged to have their own perspective and their own opinions at school. In Syria, it didn’t matter what you thought – what had to be done just had to be done.

During my three years here in Sweden, I’ve “done what I should”. I’ve learnt Swedish, and I’ve worked for home help services. To begin with, I didn’t want that kind of job, but it gave me a new perspective and I’ve now started studying for a master’s degree. Being accepted for the course was a great dream for me.

I’ve done everything I can. If you want to do it, you can.

Some people back in Syria think that you can get everything all at once by coming here: money and a home. They don’t know the truth – that it isn’t easy. Sweden isn’t some kind of paradise, but I’m incredibly grateful for what this country has given me and I don’t think I could be part of the system in Syria again.

I’ve stopped reading the newspapers. It made me sick, because I know what it’s like to come here with the help of people smugglers. I didn’t dare to use my mobile phone for fear that my activity could be traced. The only thing people want is safety. Today, I avoid looking at the pictures from the Mediterranean because I’m scared of seeing someone I know.

Everywhere I go in my everyday life, I see others who have also fled. They’re called asylum seekers, and many Swedes don’t see that back in their home countries these were once people with established lives and a place in society. It took me a long time before I could bring myself to go to the Swedish Migration Agency and apply for a residence permit. I didn’t want to be seen as an ‘asylum seeker’. I’ve never felt like that, or like an ‘immigrant’. Little by little, I’ve come to feel increasingly like a Swedish citizen. I want to give something back to Sweden, and now this country needs me, too. We need each other. ■



Lara, age 44

- 1972–1991 Birth and childhood, Desenzano del Garda, Italy
- 1991–1994 Studying, Milan and Trento, Italy
- 1995–1997 Studying, Maastricht, Netherlands
- 1997–1998 Studying, Stuttgart, Germany
- 1998 Studying, Strasbourg, France
- 1999 Studying, Rotterdam, Netherlands
- 2000–2009 Working, Trento and Rome, Italy
- 2010–2013 Working and studying, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 2013– Free movement within the EU/EEA, working, Stockholm, Sweden

**“IN SWEDEN, I FOUND
A MORE FREE AND OPEN
ENVIRONMENT.”**

I grew up in a small town in northern Italy, in a family that was highly affected by the Second World War. It affected my upbringing, which was a particularly strict upbringing – for example, I was never allowed to wear everyday clothes such as jeans to school, or travel via public transportation. My younger brother was treated differently, and got more freedom. I attended a private school. There were only twelve people in our class, all girls. My contact with the world outside the home and school was limited.

I longed to get away, and I knew that I wanted to leave Italy and study abroad. One day, it came to me in a flash: I would study international law. I eventually decided that I wanted to specialise in public law. I wanted to travel and meet different kinds of people, and to experience places where people had more freedom. Naturally, I was particularly interested in human rights. I wanted to learn more about laws and regulations so that I could have an impact on how society works, becoming a participant rather than a victim.

First, I studied law in Milan, and then I received a scholarship and went to the Netherlands. My parents were against my decision, and I was forced to meet the new challenges without their support. When I studied at Maastricht University, a lot of the pieces fell into place. I specialised in EU and migration law, and learned Dutch. There were many inspiring lecturers whom I stayed in contact with even after my studies.

During my years in the Netherlands, I became more and more liberated, and began to be interested in issues of equality. My lecturers at the university helped me to understand the structures, and they also taught feminist law. The level of education in this subject was much more advanced than in Italy. I'm grateful for that time in my life.

For a while, I worked for the European Commission in Brussels in a group of experts on migration law. That's where I met a man from Sweden who would become my husband, a political scientist who specialises in public policy and human rights. He had worked for the Red Cross in several different countries, and we had a lot in common. So, we stayed in touch after our time in Belgium, and I

visited him in Sweden. Sweden hadn't been on my radar until then, but now my eyes were opened to this cold but well-organised country.

We come from very different backgrounds, but we were both brave enough to start a relationship with someone who was very different. After just over two years, we decided to move in together and live in his flat in Stockholm. I noted early on that this is an international city – diversity is important to me. But it's also a calm and tranquil city, with a pleasant atmosphere. People don't shout. I appreciate the peace and quiet.

Even though I work with migration issues, it was hard for me to fit in to begin with. The most difficult thing was that I missed friends and acquaintances whom I used to meet up with regularly before. There's a kind of depression that I think many people experience when they move to a new country. But Stockholm is a city that offers many possibilities for culture, sport and meeting open people with different backgrounds, so I quickly found a place here. In Sweden, I found a more free and open environment.

Life is good, now, I'm so glad to be able to feel so free. That's something I love about our relationship – we trust each other and I feel free every single day. It's a wonderful feeling.

I was able to start working as a lawyer fairly quickly, and I'm inspired by my work. Part of what I do involves helping Save the Children with documentation and policy documents. Alongside this, I also deal with petitions to the European Court. I mainly work in English and Italian.

I learnt Swedish through Swedish for Immigrants classes, passing all the levels. It was a good experience, and they adapted my teaching hours so that I could continue working full time. My quality of life improved significantly after my language classes, and I'm thinking about studying Swedish at a more advanced level when I have the opportunity.

At weekends, I like to get out and about in nature. My husband and I enjoy walking around Kungsholmen, along the shoreline or on Södermalm. Sometimes, we go to Tensta and Rinkeby, and eat out there. We also volunteer in the social work of the Philadelphia Church. This involves

helping out at the homeless shelter – cleaning, preparing food and chatting with the guests. I speak Italian with some of them, which has also become a way for me to maintain contact with people in a vulnerable situation.

It's nice to have settled down, to be married and have a home. When my husband and I wanted to get married, we simply rang up the Municipality and booked an appointment for the following Thursday. And then we were married. Afterwards, I called my parents in Italy and told them. They didn't take this news lightly.

I'd like a bit more free time in the future. I'd like to improve my Hebrew, which I've neglected for a long time. I also want to get more involved in the Jewish community – maybe also in politics, but I'll have to be able to express myself more fluently in Swedish.

Since I came to Sweden, the mood in society has changed from a more human, welcoming approach to stricter requirements. The debate has shifted towards closed doors, focusing on the problems and disadvantages with new inhabitants. Now, the media and politicians seem to have forgotten the long-term benefits of immigration, such as how it contributes to an upturn in foreign trade, a better qualified workforce and new skills in key sectors, an expanding domestic market, and a younger population, which is good for welfare – particularly in terms of health-care and caring for the elderly.

Personally, I've been treated well in my new country, and in Stockholm. Particularly by older people, who are friendly and like to chat. ■



Meni, age 34

1982–2006 Birth and childhood, Petah Tikva, Israel
2006–2007 Working, Tel Aviv, Israel
2007–2009 Working, New York, USA
2009–2012 Working, Tokyo, Japan
2012– Working, Stockholm, Sweden

“I WAS PERSUADED TO CLIMB ON BOARD THE SPACE ROCKET AND CHANGE THE WORLD THROUGH E-COMMERCE.”

If I want to get anywhere and succeed in life, I need to fight very hard. That has been my attitude since growing up in Petah Tikva, which was then a sleepy town around ten kilometres east of Tel Aviv. Israeli society has a real fighting spirit, and many Israelis become accustomed to constant, tough competition early on. There are frequent minor battles about almost anything imaginable: from parking places and fruit in the supermarket, to studies and work.

The aim that everyone should serve Israel and learn to defend their country also has an enormous impact on people within society. I was 18 years old – in many ways, still a child – when I was called up to do my military service. My service involved working with software development. I was expected to make quick decisions that could have major consequences. You’re not equipped to make life and death decisions at such a young age, but it’s informative and gives you a perspective. Several years later, when I was working in Tokyo for an IT company, there was an occasion when a network error occurred. Around 50 million

Japanese people were suddenly unable to send text messages. “OK, that’s unfortunate,” I thought, “but no one’s going to die because they can’t send a text for a few minutes.” I managed to keep calm and make fast decisions to resolve the situation.

After six years in the Israeli military, my plan was to travel to South America and spend a few months travelling and catching my breath. But things didn’t work out that way. I was offered a job at a telecoms company in Tel Aviv and they needed me to start immediately. I don’t come from a particularly wealthy family, and it was important for me to get a good job and be able to build up my own financial security, so I took a day’s leave and then took up my new position. It involved a lot of travelling: Russia, Belgium, North America... It opened up my eyes to travel and a life on the move. After working for two years without a break, it felt like I’d been working for seven years. So I took some time off and travelled to India, where I met my Canadian wife. The company I worked for offered me a job in their New York office, and we decided to move there. I was attracted by the professional challenge, but what really made me fall in love with the city was its diversity. The city was everyone’s home, but virtually no one who lives in New York comes from there.

After two years in New York, I moved on to Tokyo where I was offered a new job in the IT industry. To begin with, I found everything bizarre and fascinating at the same time. I worked uninterruptedly, and it took a while before I really grasped just how different the Japanese work culture is to what I was used to. In Israel, there tends to be a flat organisational culture without clear hierarchies. Age and position aren’t things that people are obsessed with. As a manager in my new job in Tokyo, I was intent on creating a good team spirit. Because I wanted to be there for the rest of my team, I also wanted to be the last one to leave the office. I often worked until late after midnight. Amid the silence, I wondered whether my colleagues would be going home soon. One day, it was explained to me that my colleagues were thinking the same, but the other way around – that they couldn’t go home while I, their boss, was still at the office.

That first year in Tokyo was magical. The second year was challenging, and the third year was a mistake. Work was extremely intense, and the difficulty making friends and building a social network meant that both my wife and I felt lonely. Following the earthquake and the nuclear accident, there was also a general atmosphere of being on edge and stress about the radiation. When I was offered a job at Klarna, which was expanding rapidly at that time, it therefore felt like an opportune time to move on. I was persuaded to climb on board the space rocket and change the world through e-commerce.

Neither my wife nor I knew anything about Sweden, but we decided to move there. We had a Swedish neighbour in Tokyo who we used to talk to for up to six hours every weekend. We thought that if all Swedes were even a tenth as nice as him, Sweden would be absolutely wonderful!

My time at Klarna taught me a great deal that turned out to be useful when my wife and I decided to start a business together. We examined different markets to find the best location. The cities we considered were London, Berlin, Tel Aviv, Paris, Stockholm and Dublin. There were lots of factors to consider, such as the business culture and the degree of innovation, as well as the social environment. In the end, it came down to a choice between Stockholm and Dublin, and we eventually chose Stockholm. We invested all our own savings in order to achieve our business concept and vision, which is based on online shoppers being able to get the same level of personal service as in a physical shop.

The corporate culture here in Sweden is completely unique. I've been amazed by the culture of consensus and the attitude towards workers' own time outside work. Obviously it's healthy and positive, but I can't understand how the economy keeps going with all these weeks of holiday! The tax rate here is comparable to Israel, but here the taxes are used for good things like health and education. In Israel, taxes go towards things like military funding. Swedish society's attitude towards families with children is also unique. In my eyes, the possibility of taking a pram virtually anywhere and accessibility for families with children makes Sweden the best country in the world to have

a family in. We're currently expecting a daughter, who will be born and grow up here. Where we live in the longer term remains to be seen.

What's it like for entrepreneurs who want to come to Sweden and start their own business here? I think this is an important question to raise and discuss. Just like me, many people feel that they didn't get the full picture of the circumstances through information from the Swedish Migration Agency, and that there's insufficient understanding of the situation for new entrepreneurs. Placing tough requirements on big companies like IKEA and when employing seasonal workers is one thing, but you can't impose the same requirements on new entrepreneurs. As such you have to be prepared to take big risks, particularly during the first few years. The reality doesn't fit with the requirements for things like minimum wages and insurance.

In order to be competitive in the global market, it needs to be easier for highly qualified, highly educated workers to join the workforce. From my perspective, you have to see that people who come here to work also contribute towards the Swedish economy. There should be more of a focus on needs: What's changing, and what will the workforce needs of the future be? Facilitating entry into the workforce would be profitable in the long term. Work migration could contribute towards positioning Sweden as a competitive nation twenty years from now.

The Swedish business culture is favourable, but there should be more of a focus on removing the three main stumbling blocks. Firstly, finding housing in the big Swedish cities. Secondly, making it easier for employees to be given shares in a new company. And thirdly, simplifying administrative matters and the residence permit process for foreign new entrepreneurs. As an entrepreneur, you want to be able to focus on building up your business – not being forced to spend huge sums of money on consultants to get help with applications for residence and work permits. Removing these three barriers would make Sweden perfect – a real powerhouse for start-ups! ■



Lion, age 35

1980–2011 Birth, childhood, studies and work, Aleppo, Syria
2011–2012 Working, Russia
2013– Need for protection, Märsta, Gävle, Grytan, Föllinge, Östersund and Södertälje, Sweden

**“WHEN I CAME TO SWEDEN
I HAD A PLAN FOR THE FIRST
TWO YEARS...”**

I started working as a goldsmith at the age of 13. Independence has always been important to me. I’ve studied economics and have held many different positions as an auditor, a salesman and a manager. I loved my work, and doing a good job gave me strength. Spending time with my family and friends was also an important part of my life in Syria. We laughed and cried together. We sometimes argued, too, but we all shared our faith and hope in a bright future. When the war spread and things became less safe, we lost our position and our function in society one by one.

I came to Sweden in order to continue my life. I had a plan for the first two years: to learn Swedish, to apply for jobs and work experience, to build new social relationships, to understand the traditions and the culture here, and to learn new things. I had set my sights on being a salesman, but with time I discovered that achieving my plan wouldn’t be easy. My work experience wasn’t accepted. Every job requires three to five years of Swedish professional experience. How can you do that if there’s no way to get a foot in the door? I was forced to switch to plan B and began to specialise in tourism, where I can see the scope for development here in Sweden. I’m now studying hotel and hospitality management. I’m fighting to overcome the challenges and to follow my ambitions and goals. I want to be an active social citizen, and to fulfil my obligations and take advantage of my rights. I want to develop both personally and professionally. To have a family and children, to meet lots of new people, and to get a job with a big hotel chain. I want a lot, but it isn’t easy. In my spare time I go to the gym, go cycling in the countryside, swim, read or listen to music.

It hurts being reminded of and thinking about what’s happened – and is still happening – in Syria. We’ve bled, and we’re still bleeding. Even if the war comes to an end, it’ll take many years before anything can start working again. First, we have to rebuild peace in every broken heart. People need to be mended before we can start rebuilding the cities. ■



■ Rex, age 28

1988–2008 Birth and childhood, Zhejiang, China
2008–2010 Studying, Chengdu, China
2011– Ties, Stockholm, Sweden

**“THE SUN COMES OUT
EVENTUALLY. BUT SOMETIMES
YOU DON’T SEE IT FOR A
LONG TIME.”**

In China, families should only have one child. When I was born, my parents already had three daughters. They moved to another city, and I wasn't registered until many years later when there was a census. It was only then that I officially became a name in the system. A year ago, it became legal to have a second child – if the first is a girl.

Growing up as the only boy with three sisters had its challenges. My parents treated us all the same, but there were higher expectations on me. The longer I went to school, the clearer that became. They only wanted me to hang around with the kids who got good grades, and who were disciplined. I should strive to achieve a high status in society and to make a career for myself. When I received praise once from a teacher for being a good pupil, my parents were proud. But I didn't do that well in the national tests. That was a disappointment, both for me and for my parents. Despite the focus on performance, my parents and my sisters were very loving. My sisters sometime cared about me too much, which made it hard to make my own choices.

All my life I've fought hard to do good things and to be loyal. I fought to improve my family's life, and tried to be a good child who helped out at home when needed. Sometimes I wonder whether it was worth being born just to fight so hard for everything.

When I met my ex-wife, it was love at first sight. I thought she was such a good person, and with her I saw an opportunity to make a fresh start in a new country. She was born and grew up in China, but she moved to Sweden with her family when she was 15. My sister introduced us when she was back in China for a visit. We got engaged and decided to move to Sweden together. I thought we could start a business together, and I could start studying again and acquire work skills.

But our love didn't stay strong in Sweden. To begin with things went well, but we didn't share the same opinions about our future paths. I wanted to study in order to achieve what I wanted in life. Our differences broke us up. Now I'm living on my own, and we're continuing in different directions. There's both anguish and happiness. If I were still living in China, I would have children, a family, a job and a career. Instead, I'm now studying linguistics, which is what I really love. Linguistics involves discovering new intrinsic knowledge, and

you learn to decode your surroundings in a different way by listening to how people express themselves. I also work as a guide for Chinese tourists visiting the Nordic region. As a result, I've learnt a lot about the region and its history.

I'm increasingly becoming part of Swedish society. It's changed my thinking and my way of looking at things. I've learnt that you must always be patient and stay calm. The sun comes out eventually. It's just that sometimes you don't see it for a long time. I now have a broader view of China, Sweden and the world. I'm fighting hard for my girlfriend from when I was a student in China to be able to come here and live with me. I need to be able to support us both. I hope it works out, because I wouldn't want to have to bring up my children in China and see them forced to follow the same journey I've been on.

My dream is to have a home one day, with two walls filled with shelves of books. When my wife and I have finished work for the day, we'll go there and read out loud to our children. Then we'll have discussions together and talk about our reflections. That's my great dream.

Migration issues are the biggest social topic right now. The discussion about how many are coming and the consequences of this makes me wonder whether migration makes people more uncertain. It also makes me think about what needs to be done in order to integrate people and how best to motivate them to learn the language and find work. I myself was motivated to study and find a job, but it might not be like that for everyone.

There are risks involved in focusing so much on migration and refugees. It means that you are singled out as a newcomer, rather than being seen as a member of society. People here always think that I came here to study, and often ask me in English how they can help me. "Interesting" is a word I often hear when I answer in Swedish and explain the real reason why I came here – for love.

How do other countries outside Europe deal with receiving immigrants? This is a question that doesn't crop up much in the debate. China, for example, doesn't accept refugees even though it could. Right now, I believe that China should accept refugees from North Korea, but many of the people who come from there are sent back. In many respects, I have no idea about the reasoning of the Chinese government. ■

Raiza, age 39

1976–2013 Birth, childhood and work, Barquisimeto, Venezuela
2014– Ties, Stockholm, Sweden

**“PEOPLE SAY THAT
SWEDES ARE RESERVED,
BUT IF YOU JUST KNOCK
ON THE DOOR A LITTLE
THEY’LL LET YOU IN.”**

In Venezuela, I ran my own business. I travelled to Miami and bought clothes, mobile phones and perfumes, and sold them in my shop. Brands such as Ralph Lauren and Polo were particularly popular.

I was on holiday in Stockholm with my cousin when we first saw each other. We were at a restaurant when I saw him looking at me. And he had the most beautiful, most amazing eyes I’ve ever seen. To begin with, we couldn’t communicate in any language. We were both so shy! For the first few months, we met together with my cousin who interpreted for us. Eventually, my husband began to translate things himself via a mobile app. We used several different apps to communicate, such as WhatsApp and Viber. Eventually I thought: “OK... This guy has captured my heart!”

He proposed in Gamla Stan, the old part of town. It was so romantic! I remember that we’d been to a restaurant with a large red carpet and many paintings on the walls. When we left, he proposed to me in a narrow street, beneath a bridge that ran between the houses.

Straight after coming to Sweden, I started studying

Swedish. Now I’m training to become an electrician. My husband has a construction company, so he carries out renovations and specialises in tiling, and he often needs plumbers and electricians.

Everyone who’s met me knows that I’m happy here. I think it’s important to focus on all the good things and not the bad things. I don’t even complain about the weather! I like wearing a nice, thick coat when it’s cold.

People say that Swedes are reserved, but if you just knock on the door a little they’ll let you in.

We chose to live in Sweden because we have lots of opportunities for a good life here. You can come here and start studying very quickly if you want. The authorities offer plenty of help, and education is free. Children have a better life here. My daughter goes to school, and she loves it! She goes to the theatre and dancing, and she plays tennis and the piano. I want to bring my daughter up here. But I don’t want her to forget where her roots are.

The image of immigrants in the media can be negative. But you can’t judge everyone based on the actions of a few people. All immigrants are different. We all have different principles when it comes to education, culture and religion. ■





Jérôme, age 41

1975	Birth, Jakarta, Indonesia
1976–1988	Childhood, Zwolle, Netherlands
1988–1992	Studying, Kortrijk, Belgium
1992–1997	Studying, Leuven, Belgium
1998–1999	Studying, Delft, Netherlands
1999–2001	Studying, Umeå, Sweden
2001–2003	Working, Leuven, Belgium
2003–2007	Working, Toulouse, France
2007–2011	Working, Pordenone, Italy
2011–	Working, Stockholm, Sweden

**“I’VE GONE WHEREVER
LIFE HAS TAKEN ME.”**

As a child, it was always complicated when the subject of my origins came up. Both my parents are from Belgium, but I was born in Jakarta where my family lived for many years. When I was just over a year old, they moved from Indonesia because my dad got a new job in Zwolle, a city in the east of the Netherlands with a fascinating architectural history. When I was young, I didn’t think about where I would live in the future, but I never felt that I would stay in Zwolle. The place where I lived came to define my identity, while at the same time my upbringing was characterised by external influences. My family home was a dynamic place – both culturally and socially. The house was full of art from Indonesia and Africa, and I heard many legends and stories from other cultures. People often visited our home. My parents wanted everyone to feel welcome, and there was never any difference between guests – the door was always open, whether for neighbours, friends or relatives. This attitude has followed me throughout my life, and has also become something of an ideal for me.

When I was 13, I was faced with the choice of moving with my parents to Zambia, where my dad had a new job, or going to boarding school in Belgium. I chose the latter, figuring that it would be better for me to study in Europe than in Africa. Later, my studies took me from Belgium to the Netherlands, and then to Umeå. The aim was to follow my bachelor’s degree in interaction design with a master’s degree at Umeå Institute of Design. I knew early on that I wanted to study architecture. I’ve always been fascinated with how things work, from objects to cities. For example, what is it that makes people look up and look around when they find themselves somewhere with enormously high ceilings, like churches? When I visited new cities as a tourist with my parents, they often took me to churches. I particularly remember the cathedral in Florence, which we visited when I was a child. The beauty of what human-kind can achieve isn’t just technical in my eyes – the actual thought process fascinates me. The Duomo in Florence is an example of how something has been built based on a purpose greater than humans, and then elevated to something greater than life itself. My interest in the thought

process and users' experiences of what is created led me to industrial design. You need to get people to love the product you design, but how do you get there? In my current job at Electrolux, I'm part of a bigger team that focuses on that specific aspect, which is more interesting to me than having my name associated with a specific product.

After finishing my university studies I moved back to Belgium, and then to France, and subsequently to Italy. My wife and I had an agreement that if one of us got an interesting job offer somewhere else, we would move there together provided that the other one could also get a job there. We decided to do things together, rather than continuing to focus on a long-distance relationship. After we had our second child, it wasn't just career advancement opportunities that affected where we wanted to live. We'd moved around for many years and become accustomed to the types of challenges that such a lifestyle involves, but eventually we realised that we had to stop running and think about the future from a family perspective.

When both my wife and I got job offers in Stockholm five years ago, we saw an opportunity to combine our careers with family life. We were ready to settle somewhere where we could live a healthy life, and where we could see ourselves growing old and our children growing up. We thought that Sweden was the least polluted place we could live, and that it would remain so for at least the next 15 years. Most of our international friends had also settled in Stockholm. There was no other city in Europe that we could come to and already know so many people. That was another reason for deciding to move here. Compared with our moves to Italy and France, everything has gone extremely smoothly. It was pretty much a case of just crossing the border into Sweden and continuing onwards...

When I look back on my many moves, it's clear that it's always been about acting on opportunities that have arisen rather than having actively sought them out. I've gone wherever life has taken me. But now I want to put down roots. The little red house I imagined when we moved here has become a reality. My wife and I now own a house that we can see as our own home. Somewhere we can settle down and grow as a family.

When it comes to news reports, I often feel manipulated. We're fed content that is driven more by sensationalism than by information, such as images of people trying to get to Europe by land or in overfilled boats. The debate often focuses on details, such as how many people are expected to arrive and what their religion is, rather than the context. What I'd like to know more about is things like how do those fleeing from their home countries feel and what challenges have they encountered here in Sweden? I believe there's little understanding of what new arrivals are actually going through – we need to hear more of their stories.

And we don't hear about how much those who have moved here contribute towards society and who tries to help them. There are many good initiatives that aim to support new arrivals, but that kind of information rarely makes it through the hubbub of the news. The focus is often on how migration to Sweden is a burden on society, which can create misunderstanding about the costs associated with migration. Facts are needed to show the reality of the situation.

Migration isn't just about asylum seekers. A large proportion of Sweden's new inhabitants have used the right to free movement within the EU. Workers from Poland are a typical example of EU citizens who move here and broaden the service offering, but the way in which these workers are regarded and discussed is often one-sided. It would be good to hear more from the workers themselves. It would also be interesting to hear from Swedes about their experiences of employing foreign labour for jobs that are carried out at home, for example, such as building work. There are many reasons why people move around within the EU. The breadth of newly arrived EU citizens and what they bring to the new society should be highlighted. ■



Aya, age 20

1996–2015 Birth, childhood and studies, Homs, Syria
2015– Ties, Laholm, Sweden

“MY MUM WOKE ME AND SAID THAT SHE AND MY BROTHER WERE LEAVING.”

In 2013, during Ramadan, my mother and my brother left Syria. The situation in Homs was extremely dangerous. My brother worked at the hospital helping those who had been injured in the war, and it was not safe for him to stay. My mum woke me and said that she and my brother were leaving. All along, I had thought that the war would end soon, and that everything would be over. When they told me they were leaving, I was so surprised that I couldn't even cry. My mum left Syria as a strong woman. It takes incredible strength to leave your family behind and set off on such a dangerous journey.

As a young girl you need your mother, but I no longer had mine. The only thing I could do was to accept the situation. I knew that this wasn't something that was only affecting my family – the entire population of Syria was affected.

Because of the electricity shortages and communication problems, we couldn't always contact my mum and my brother while they were on the move. Every other day we would hear a sign of life, which made us so happy. Especially when they said that they had finally reached Sweden.

I came here in 2015 with my dad, via Lebanon. Getting here was very difficult. There were lots of soldiers, and we couldn't tell them where we were heading. They asked us why we had so many bags with us, but we said we were just visiting Lebanon. I was so scared.

When I came to Sweden, I had already spent two years studying at university in Syria. Now I go to school with 16-year-olds. It doesn't feel right, but my teachers say that this is the situation and I have to accept it.

At the university in Homs I was a successful engineering student, but my studies haven't given me any advantages here which makes me sad. I can't get accreditation for any of my studies – I've had to start again from scratch. My main aim now is to learn Swedish so that I can continue my university studies and then find a job.

I had lots of friends in Syria, and I really miss them. I miss our street, and the little house where we lived. It was more than just three rooms – it also represented my entire life's memories. You could feel the love in that house.

Family reunifications take a long, long time. I had to

wait two years to see my mum again. Now I've heard that it might be harder for people to see their families again. If I hadn't been able to come to Sweden with a residence permit, I would have remained in Syria and continued my studies. Of course, it would have been dangerous, but I never would have been able to cross the Mediterranean as a girl on my own. My family would never have accepted it.

While I'm glad to be here and safe, I do miss studying. As a child I had great plans for the future. I wanted to be a doctor or an engineer, and to travel around the world. I had many dreams. What I need now is support, someone to tell me that I will achieve my dreams and be able to continue my life here in Sweden.

Because we're Palestinians we can't travel freely – we're denied entry to many, many countries. Travelling is a dream that I still have. When we get Swedish citizenship, we will be able to travel wherever we want. We won't be refugees anymore. Then I want to travel to Palestine and the Arab nations that have said no to us. Swedish citizenship will bring me respect.

It's good that the world is being told what's happening in countries like Syria, but unless the journalists go there and give a perspective from inside the country, the reporting won't be realistic. I feel as if the journalists are reporting from outside. It's always the same news – the same words, the same information, the same details of the number of deaths. I wish that we could hear more from the people affected instead. Interview someone who has lost their child! Let them talk about how they feel. It would be more realistic and more personal, which would be better.

The moment when a mother sees her child again is fantastic. That would be something for the media to report on. Being reunited with my family was so exciting, so joyful and so tearful. It wasn't just my family who were crying – other people at the airport were crying, too. I think that if people could see these reunions, they would understand what we've been through. I believe that they would see what we've experienced in our eyes, and the difficulties we've had to deal with. I believe that they would respect us.

I want Sweden to know that those of us who come here are good people. Many Swedes believe that we're terrorists.

When they see my headscarf, they think I'm a bad person. I get the call to prayer via my phone, and one day it sounded while I was in a shop. That's when someone said to me: "We don't have mosques to pray at in this country." I felt sad, and I immediately turned down the volume on my phone. I hadn't done anything wrong. Sweden is a democratic nation and people have the right to think what they want and to follow the religion of their choice. That's something I like about this country. I know that there are bad people who come here, but that doesn't mean we're all bad. We're people just like everyone else. We have our goals, and we have the right to live our lives in safety. ■

Dorothea, age 26

1990–2006 Birth and childhood, Bremen, Germany
2006–2007 Studying, Katrineholm, Sweden
2007–2009 Studying, Bremen, Germany
2009–2010 Studying, Greifswald, Germany
2010–2011 Studying and working, Uppsala, Sweden
2011–2013 Studying, Norrköping, Sweden
2013–2016 Studying and working, Linköping, Sweden
2016– Studying, Lund, Sweden

“I WANT TO BE ABLE TO VOTE IN THE COUNTRY WHERE I LIVE.”

When I was a child, my family often went to Scandinavia on holiday and my image of Sweden has probably been shaped by these early summer memories: a Pippi Longstocking paradise of red cottages, lakes and extensive forests.

I grew up in Bremen, a beautiful old Hanseatic city in northern Germany. There's lots to see, but we often ignore what's on our own doorstep and it was only when I returned to Bremen that I discovered how wonderful the cathedral is and how pretty the streets of the old town are.

I've always known that I wanted to travel – when your parents have the travel bug, it's infectious. We never had an expensive TV or anything. We spent our money on travelling instead, and I'm grateful for that.

When I was 16, I came to Sweden as an exchange student. After all our holidays here, I had a positive image of the country and I wanted to learn a new language. My host family had an equestrian centre near Katrineholm. Because I rode and loved horses, it was a good

match – the first Swedish word I learnt was “grimma”, which means “halter”.

After completing my school exams in Germany, I studied English linguistics and German literature. I enjoyed it, but I didn't feel that I would have any use for my studies later on. One of my friends said he was going to move to Uppsala to study cultural anthropology. I also submitted an application, and got in. Back in Bremen, I'd just left home and my parents hired an enormous trailer, packed up all my things and took the ferry to Sweden.

My friend and I shared a student apartment, and it was nice that I already knew someone there. After a month of studying, I felt uncertain about what my education would lead to and I was more interested in social issues and politics. So I took a job as a personal assistant and then applied for the political science and economics programme at Linköping University.

Finding an apartment in Linköping wasn't as easy as I had expected. That's something I still find strange about Sweden – that it's so hard to find an apartment to rent. I don't really understand why Sweden doesn't deal with the housing shortage. Things work better in Germany, and there are 85 million people living there! The fact that I didn't have a Swedish personal identity number made the situation even more difficult. As soon as you need to sign a contract or an agreement in Sweden, for example when taking out a mobile phone subscription or registering for a housing list, a Swedish personal identity number makes things much simpler. It took me two years to get one.

Because I couldn't find anywhere to live in Linköping, I moved in with one of my best friends in nearby Norrköping. Living there and studying in Linköping wasn't a problem – there were free buses for students. I met my current boyfriend during my very first week in Linköping – he was my ‘buddy student’ during student orientation. He lived in Linköping, and after a year in Norrköping I managed to get an apartment there, too.

Before I started studying in Linköping, I didn't have any idea that student orientation was such a big thing in Sweden. I'd heard about it, but didn't realise it was a two-week thing with activities such as drunken softball. On the first



day, we had to wear a really ugly, bright pink sweater – so I didn't have to worry about what to wear. The student orientation period included lots of games and meals with other students. It was a great way to make friends – we got to know each other very quickly.

Three years at university flew by, and suddenly I found myself wondering what to do next. To work out what I wanted to do, and to save some money, I took a year off. I got a job at Burger King, which might not have been the best thing for my CV, but I wanted to take a break.

After my year off, I applied for various master's programmes and got my first choice, in Lund. And it really feels like I made the right decision. I like the city, and I'm enjoying studying globalisation and international relations. The fact that I'm so happy here is partly to do with the people. My classmates and I see each other every day, and we play games and cook together. There are 32 nationalities represented among the students on my course, which is a real asset. You get so many different perspectives on things. For example, someone from Ethiopia and someone from the Netherlands can have very different ways of looking at development aid. Students from outside the EU sometimes have a different, more positive view of the EU than students from within the EU. Those of us who have the advantage of studying for free and travelling wherever we want take these things for granted a bit.

I'd love to stay in Sweden, and I'm thinking about applying for Swedish citizenship – I want to be able to vote in the country where I live. In the future, I want to work with human rights in some way. It might be fun to live abroad for a while – Sweden already feels like home. I want to see a lot of the world, and find a job that I enjoy.

The public debate on migration is largely characterised by prejudice and narrow-mindedness. When members of the public talk about migration, they often mean 'asylum seekers' – they lump everyone together and talk negatively about something that can actually be a real asset. Generally speaking, there are too many opinions and not enough facts. There are lots of websites where people just spout their opinions. Of course, people should be able to criticise and improve things when it comes to migration, but they

should propose actions and suggest improvements instead of engaging in populism. I'd like to see a more constructive, more solution-focused debate.

I believe that migration is something that will benefit both Sweden and Europe, but unfortunately I think people take too negative an approach. People talk more about the negative side-effects of migration than about the advantages. When a few people behave badly or commit crimes, it gets blown out of proportion.

I also think we talk about subjects relating to migration in terms that are too abstract. We talk about integration, about the fact that people should integrate into Swedish society, but what does that mean?

When the media reports on food in old people's homes, you get the impression from the subsequent discussion that the municipalities are taking money away from them so they can serve up three-course dinners for asylum seekers while the elderly have to eat noodles. I find these types of discussions to be over-simplified and populist.

I wish there was more of a focus on the positive effects of immigration, for example in view of the low birth rate in Sweden and the shortage of engineers and healthcare workers.

Migration needn't necessarily be a positive thing in itself – it's actually just a matter of people moving from one country to another – but I think we should talk more about how society can benefit from it. Simply hearing new perspectives and finding out about new cultures can result in people broadening their views and maybe not having such fixed opinions about what it means to be Swedish. Swedishness can take different forms. I feel Swedish, because I speak the language and I feel like part of Swedish society. But my way of being Swedish might be different to someone who was born and grew up here, or someone who has a migrant background several generations back. ■



Sinead, age 35

1981–1998 Birth and childhood, Longford, Ireland
1998–2012 Studying and working, Dublin, Ireland
2012– Ties, Växjö, Sweden

**“I BELIEVE IN JUSTICE AND
EQUALITY, SO I PREFER HOW
THINGS ARE IN SWEDEN.”**

Growing up in the rural Irish town of Longford was like living in no man’s land. Everything was too far away. My parents had a farm, and my older sister, my younger brother and I helped them to look after the animals. It’s all green and pretty and great for children, but as a teenager I thought it was the most boring place on earth. I’m a very sociable person, and I need contact with other people. So when I was 17 and left school, I moved to Dublin to go to college. I left as soon as I could.

Moving to Dublin was fantastic! What a sense of freedom! I made lots of new friends right from day one, and having previously relied on my parents to give me a lift everywhere, I could now go out with my friends and come home when I wanted. My economics course was also very good. After two years of studying, I did an internship at the HR department of a company which had its European head office in Dublin. That’s where I met Per, who is now my husband. After a while, he went back to Sweden to finish his education. So we had a long-distance relationship for a year and a half until he came back to Dublin.

There were excellent job opportunities in Ireland during the early 2000s. These were boom times, and as a software expert Per had no trouble finding work. He got excellent job offers – it didn’t matter that he was Swedish.

After completing my education, I returned to the company where I’d met Per. We both climbed the career ladder quickly – by the age of 30, we both had management positions. We earned well, which meant that we could save up some money before moving to Sweden.

It was when we decided to have children together that we chose to move to Sweden. We didn’t want them to grow up in the concrete jungle of Dublin. Also, Irish employers aren’t particularly supportive when it comes to starting a family, especially not for the mother. In Ireland, the norm is for the mother to stop working when she has her second child and not return to work. Preschools are run privately and cost around 10,000 kronor per child per month, and there’s no national curriculum. Here, people pay peanuts for a fantastic service, but they don’t always seem to realise just how good Swedish preschools are. In Ireland, you can’t take a paid day off work when your child is sick – you have to take it as a day of holiday. It’s not unusual for parents to give their children painkillers

and send them to preschool. In Ireland, women with children always seem so stressed. I think Sweden's a better country in which to raise children. Society takes a much more supportive attitude towards families with young children.

Our first son was born in Ireland in 2012, and we moved to Sweden the following year. My husband got a job in Växjö, and thanks to EU rules it turned out that I was entitled to parental benefits. They were also based on my Irish salary, so I got a great deal.

We wanted our children to be close together in age, and since moving to Sweden we've had two more sons. That's meant that I've had to take a break from my Swedish courses and I haven't finished them yet. I've heard that it takes women with children the longest amount of time to complete studies in Sweden, and in several parts of the country there are coffee groups where parents can meet up together with their children to practise their Swedish. I started up such a group in Växjö in November. We hold our meetings at the library, where we can use a room for free. Every Tuesday, a group of mums and dads meet up there, and it's great fun.

In the future, I really want to work. My children are fantastic, but I have no interest in being a housewife. My plan is to start working in August when the youngest one starts preschool. I'm optimistic, but at the same time I'm not sure how much businesses here appreciate international experience. In Sweden, it seems to be more about who you know than what you know. I have a lot of experience and a good education, and during my maternity leave I also managed to build a network that I hope will help me. One reason why I started these language sessions for parents was to show that I'm competent and to be able to write on my CV that I've achieved something here in Sweden.

Right now, I see the language as the only obstacle to getting a job. English doesn't seem to be fully accepted in most workplaces, even though Swedes are the third best in the world at English as a second language. Why can't employers be a little more open? Even though we can't speak the language, we have a lot to offer in the form of experience and ideas.

I think that Sweden is wonderful. I love the different seasons, the traditions and the outdoor activities. The culture is fantastic, and things work as they should. Society is extremely

family-oriented, and people are well looked after. People have a real sense of justice, and are careful to follow the rules. In Ireland, things are often quite the opposite. I believe in justice and equality, so I prefer how things are in Sweden.

In my free time I enjoy hanging out with my friends and family. It helps having children when you come to a new country. I've met my closest friends through my sons.

I wish people wouldn't take such a negative view of asylum immigration as I feel people do in Sweden. The human story isn't always told: that people have had to leave a war, and that they're not here of their own free will. Yes, it costs money, but if you were in their situation wouldn't you want openness from others? And I'm sure that in the long run people give more than what they cost society. A hundred years ago, it was people from Sweden and Ireland who emigrated. They went to the USA, and were allowed in. We're just lucky that we don't live under the same conditions here today.

Many migrants move to the same residential areas, which can contribute towards exclusion. The planning decisions in Ireland require all new construction projects to include a certain proportion of subsidised homes with right of tenancy. The aim is to counteract the formation of poor areas – those on low incomes aren't all grouped together in the same place, which also makes integration easier. I think it would be a good thing if Sweden did this.

It would be good to read more positive articles – for example about successful integration, people who fill needs in the Swedish job market or who create new jobs.

The Swedish Public Employment Service organises a lot of things for non-EU citizens. I don't know why we EU citizens can't also benefit from the same initiatives. Maybe it's because EU citizens can get jobs more easily that we're seen as being more like Swedes? I find that people are more welcoming towards EU citizens or Americans than they are towards other migrants, and that it's easier for me to get a job as a result – which is unfair. But many of the challenges are the same for all migrants. For example, we have to learn the language. And it's taken an endless amount of time to find out how things work with the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and preschool, but I'm lucky to have a Swedish family who can help to explain things. ■

Deepak, age 30

1986 Birth, Ludhiana, India
1987–2008 Childhood, Dehradun, India
2008–2010 Working, New Delhi, India
2010–2011 Working, Mumbai, India
2012– Working, Stockholm, Sweden

“I MAKE THINGS HAPPEN, AGE AND I HELP OTHERS TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP.”

I have a recurring memory: riding my Royal Enfield motorbike across the green foothills of the Himalayas. I pass several waterfalls, and the wide open skies stretch above me. It's like watching myself in a video game when I remember my trips to Mussoorie. That's where I used to go when I wanted to get out into the countryside. The journey took around half an hour from Dehradun, where I grew up. Being close to nature has always been important to me, as having friends and social activities.

After studying business management at university in Dehradun, I was offered a job in Mumbai at one of India's leading IT companies, L&T Infotech. It wasn't easy adjusting from a life in a small, green town to everyday life in a hectic city like Mumbai. My family had actually expected me to start working at my father's company, but I wasn't interested. I didn't want to be tied to one place – I wanted to explore new locations and build up a career on my own merits. My family supported me in this choice, even though it was hard for them to let their son move away and live on his own in a big city. In India, it's common for adults to continue living with their parents. Parents are sad if their children choose to move out. It's a completely different culture to here in Sweden.

The competition is incredibly tough in a country with such a large population as India. There's always someone who can replace you, so if you want to advance you need to stay at the cutting edge. In Mumbai, both life and work were challenging. I worked extremely hard to carry out every task with the level of perfection that was expected. At the same time, I could do what I wanted and had the scope to do what comes naturally to me: to think and to suggest new ideas. I've always been outgoing and able to use my creativity as well as my social skills to structure and organise things. I'm one of those people who makes things happen and helps others to take the next step. My go-ahead spirit and my leadership opened new doors: I was given the chance to represent the company internationally, and had to choose between an overseas posting in Sweden or the US. At that time, I was the youngest person in the sales department where I worked to receive an offer of that kind from such a well-known company. It was all like a dream – too good to be true!

The choice was fairly easy. Sweden offered promising growth within the IT industry, and I saw good opportunities to progress in my career. My friends said that the Swedish business culture was the best in the world, and that the country was also a leader in terms of employment conditions and respect for human rights. My mum voted for Sweden because of the lower crime rates. For my own part, other than the purely professional reasons, Sweden was also more interesting than the US. I was particularly attracted by being close to nature and the chance to explore what was ranked as one of the five most beautiful places in the world! I also thought I would be able to go to concerts and discover Sweden's world-famous house music scene.

Not only have my hopes and expectations been met – they've been exceeded! There's so much to say. Sweden is virtually pollution-free. It's an environmentally friendly country, and everyone's so health-conscious. Seeing people out running at all hours is highly motivating. If a 74-year-old can go jogging, so can I! I'm proud to say that I now live a much healthier life than before. Being fit and dressing smartly makes integration easier. I've fitted



into Swedish society well, and have adapted to the culture here. For example, coffee breaks are part of my daily routine – they help me to be productive and to build social relationships. At the same time, I'm more open-minded and international than ever. Stockholm is so multicultural – people from all over the world live here. Not only have I made many friends from around the world, I also met my wife here. The fact is I've come to appreciate life here in Sweden so much that I haven't been back to India at all since moving here five years ago.

As a result of my hard work and adapting to working life here, my employment was extended. I now work as an advisor and management consultant at a company called Opticos, a leading service company that specialises in sourcing advisory and IT-based business development services. I'm very happy there, and I work with incredibly talented, professional people.

Beyond my professional role, I see myself as a change leader – someone who tries to bridge the gap between different cultures. Since I myself have made the journey successfully, I can help others along the way. This can involve anything, from small matters to big issues. It's important to adapt according to where you live and what the people in that country do. You need to be open-minded when you first come to Sweden.

I'm looking forward to continuing to live as a successful social citizen: someone who works hard, pays tax and contributes towards the development of society. But it's also important to make time for exercise, music, parties and everything else that allows you to keep having fun! Once I've learnt to speak better Swedish, I'll enter the Swedish Idol TV talent show. I'd like to give the programme an Indian twist...

Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Prize that he founded show how Sweden pays tribute to innovation. Reaching out a hand to welcome foreign workers should be discussed and viewed in the same way: innovation and creativity contribute towards change and development. The receiving society should see the benefit of people moving here to work. External talent and skills are needed in order to maintain the pace and to have a presence in the international mar-

ket. Foreign workers aren't here to steal anyone's job or because they're greedy – they fulfil a need! So don't portray workers from abroad as a threat – see them as an enormous resource and a source of potential.

We're young, and we want to discover new countries, new cultures and new ways of working. Let's cooperate and focus on how we can complement each other's strengths and knowledge strategically. Together, we can achieve great things.

Just look at India. Swedish companies like H&M, Scania and IKEA have a presence everywhere, and have created lots of new jobs. Swedes should take note of the benefit in the other direction and look at what can be gained by making it easier for foreign workers to become established here.

After all, we live in a digital world – today, almost everyone can make contact across borders and work for anyone. The labour market will only become more internationalised. It's high time that we accepted the changed reality, adapted to it and embraced it. Let's cooperate and do something "Nobel" together! ■



■ Henrik, age 41

1975–2002 Childhood and work, Malmö, Sweden
2002–2011 Studying and working, London, England
2011– Returning, Malmö, Sweden

“SWEDES HAVE THE GENERAL IMPRESSION THAT THIS IS THE BEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD.”

I had a happy childhood, with a loving family. But growing up in the Möllevången district of Malmö was quite tough – my mum told me that if I found syringes in the sandpit, I mustn't touch them. This was in the 1980s, and the atmosphere in Malmö was pretty gloomy. The shipyard closed down, lots of people lost their jobs, and alcoholism and drug addiction were widespread. At my secondary school, several of the teachers were such alcoholics that they dozed off in the staff room. The Hells Angels head their HQ a short distance from my school, and on one occasion we had to evacuate due to a bomb being detonated. That was my reality at the time, but it was also part of a bigger story about Malmö that only became clear to me as an adult.

The culture at my secondary school involved the bigger boys constantly picking on us younger ones – I had a constant tension headache during those years. Despite the situation at school, I still enjoyed my life. I had my little circle of friends that I hung around with, a group of computer nerds who stayed at home doing programming. At upper secondary school, I realised that I wanted to work with graphic design. Various different specialisations had emerged among our group of friends, and I was the one who did graphics. When I was 17, a friend and I started a computer animation company. A few years later, our company was bought up by a film company that we started working for. We were good at something that not many people were doing at that time.

Because everyone in the part of Malmö where I lived was very Marxist, I lied to them and didn't say that I ran a company with employees. Sitting on a company board was very much looked down on there, and I would never get a girl if I explained what I did. So I said I was unemployed.

In the late 1990s, the company that my friend and I had started once upon a time underwent a series of buy-ups. Different companies were incorporated into each other and merged together, and after a while I decided to get out. The corporate culture had become too dull. We were young people who had run creative projects. We came up with our own things, and had our own way of doing it. When we started to be steered by people from big IT com-

panies who were twice our age, I grew tired of it. I wanted to be creative.

In 2002, my partner and I moved to London. I started my own company producing visual effects for documentaries and films, which was an extremely positive experience. The British work market turned out to be much freer than the Swedish market. When I called the tax authorities and said I wanted to start a company, I was told to call back once I was earning money. In the UK, you can earn money for several months before you have to deal with the paperwork. That would be a good example for Sweden to follow!

I love the cosmopolitan feel of London. We lived right in Notting Hill in a red brick house, a beautiful old ramshackle building. Some evenings I climbed up on the roof, smoked a cigar and watched the planes forming a string of pearls in the sky as they headed into Heathrow. I remember thinking that the whole world was heading there.

After four years in London, I got fed up with being poor. I started to produce more commercial material, and built up enough capital to invest seriously in new companies. In 2009, I started an innovation company called Divine Robot. Our first big success came two years later when we launched a mobile game for children that reached third place on the US App Store chart. Since then, we've continued to work with software design and game development.

My partner and I moved back to Sweden in 2011 when we had twins. We wanted to live somewhere that was child-friendly, and we wanted our daughters to know their grandparents. I found it quite hard leaving London. During my time there, I'd become decidedly English. I'd got involved in the political system, built up professional contacts and come to appreciate drinking tea at eleven o'clock. It wasn't easy having to move from an international context to a much smaller context.

Today, life is great. We've found a situation in Malmö that suits us. We have good friends, and we run a number of exciting companies. My professional ambition is that my businesses should be financially stable and should continue to grow creatively.

When it comes to the immediate future, my top priority is for my children to attend a good school. It winds me

up when people think that those of us who have made a career for ourselves abroad only come home because we want to send our children to Swedish preschools. As if I would want to subject my daughters to those municipal institutions that I'd endured myself. But you can't deny that Swedes have the general impression that this is the best country in the world.

The whole of Sweden is obsessed with the migration debate – spanning everything from extreme dystopia to extreme utopia. On the one side, the media discourse is pessimistic: we hear from people who say we can't take in so many people and that other cultures bring problems. On the other side, people try to smooth things over with rhetoric: they don't want to recognise the problems that occur when people stay outside the job market.

I see it as a central problem that the debate on migration has got hung up on the right-wing Sweden Democrats and how people react to their hostility. There are so many other things we should be talking about. For example, I think those who advocate open borders should talk much more about the necessary labour market reforms. Today's integration problems have nothing to do with ethnicity – they're a result of ineffective introduction to the job market.

Now, asylum migration is virtually the only type of migration that we talk about. Something else we could highlight is work migration. For example, my business has recruited employees from the EU, but employing people from countries outside the EU is harder, which I think is a shame.

The image of migration as a process is very much coloured by the fact that so many vulnerable people come here. If we welcomed more workers, that could also contribute towards the public debate on migration being a little more nuanced. ■



Logal, age 21

1994–2011 Birth and childhood, Tartus, Syria
2011–2014 Studying, Damascus, Syria
2014 Displaced, Lebanon and Turkey
2014– Need for protection, Torpshammar and Stockholm,
Sweden

**“THE URGE TO MOVE
ON TO NEW PLACES IS
FUNDAMENTAL TO
WHO I AM.”**

My friends were the patches of light in the darkness during my childhood. I appreciated the simple everyday things that characterised life in Tartus, but many people were narrow-minded and homophobia was widespread. When I left home in the morning, it was as if a heavy rucksack followed me out the door which I then had to carry around with me all day.

I found out early on what it means to be discriminated against – to be excluded from public entertainment and activities, to be bullied, to be hit and to be the one who no one wants to walk next to. With time, those of us who had been excluded formed our own group and found support in each other, but the battle I was forced to fight against society's oppression and people's ill-treatment was primarily an individual battle. On the one hand, I wanted to stand up for what I was and change people's views. But on the other hand, I didn't want my family to have to be ashamed and punished for having a gay son. Even if my family knew how things were, it wasn't something we talked about until I was 18.

Tartus, a Mediterranean coastal town in northern Syria, was too small for me. I moved to the biggest alternative: Damascus. I wanted to meet more LGBTQ people and to stop living a life of secrecy. When more people are open about what the majority of society regards as being deviant, both the number of opponents and the degree of vulnerability become greater. Even though I had the chance to feel a sense of belonging for perhaps the first time in my life, the discrimination became more commonplace. I was attacked just for being gay. Although they tried to take away my right to live my own life, nothing could prevent me from thinking the way I wanted to think. My mother was the source of my love for life and the world, and no one can take that away from me. It was while studying the history of English literature in Damascus that I first discovered one of my favourite writers, Richard Lovelace. My life's motto is taken from one of the poems that he wrote to his love from prison: "If I have freedom in my love, And in my soul am free, Angels alone that soar above, Enjoy such liberty."

I was forced to return to Tartus when the conflict esca-

lated. It was like taking a gigantic step backwards. I asked myself what I was doing there. To avoid being forced to join the military and either be killed in battle or die in the conflicts that had turned my home city into a jungle, I travelled to Lebanon. After four months, I moved on to Istanbul in Turkey. There, I met the first and the greatest love of my life. It felt like everything suddenly fell into place – as if everything that had happened in my life until that day was leading up to us meeting. In a situation where I had nothing at all, he loved me for precisely who I am.

I had the opportunity to come to Sweden. I knew it might be the only chance I would ever have, so I took it. I've been here for two years now, and I think coming here was the right decision. But it wasn't until three weeks ago that I finally accepted that this is where I will live. The time I spent at the asylum accommodation dragged me down into a deep depression and much of Swedish society has been extremely hard for me to deal with, particularly the social element. Why do Swedes turn everything that's easy into something hard, and everything that's hard into something easy? For example, why is it so hard for people to say hello to each other on the bus? And even neighbours never become anything more than people who hurry past each other in the stairwell. In my home country, the social context is so much more vibrant and natural.

I recently moved to Södertälje, which was a good step to take. Different cultures come together here, and I feel more at home in this setting, but the image I had of Sweden doesn't correspond with what I've encountered so far. I saw Sweden as the ultimate country in terms of democracy and questions of equality and feminism. A country where people respect the rights of women and children, and of animals. My experience is that you can wear what you like, but your actual opinions aren't welcome if they aren't in step with popular opinion.

Constantly having to prove that you're not in the wrong can propel you forward. In my case, it drove me to educate myself about my own rights and the desire to stand up for others. As a result, I now run an organisation that works to protect the rights of LGBTQ individuals. For example, we want to provide legal advice to asylum seekers in need

of protection because of their sexual orientation. We hope to be able to grow and be represented in more countries. One day, I might even return to Istanbul or move to a new country. I don't see myself as being tied to a specific country. The urge to move on to new places is fundamental to who I am.

In my view, the things you hear and see when it comes to migration issues are narrow-minded and superficial. The constant pigeon-holing and stereotyping can be devastating. The most important thing is that someone who has done something wrong is held accountable for their actions. What does it matter whether they're a refugee, an asylum seeker or a homosexual? Immigrants shouldn't be judged too leniently or strictly as a group – they should be judged as individuals. Why are women harassed? How does that fit with values that characterise the idea of masculinity, for example? Getting to the bottom of why things happen is absolutely fundamental. In the long run, it's not enough just to prescribe a painkiller – you have to establish the actual cause of the complaint. We should never forget that things can change very quickly. In 2010, Syria was ranked the eighth safest country in the world. Now it's the third most dangerous country. Nothing is set in stone. Even Sweden needs to defend its historical foundation in the form of the values and principles on which the country is based. ■



Nida, age 25

1991–2013 Birth, childhood and studies, Karachi, Pakistan
2014– Ties, Linköping, Sweden

**“SWEDISH CULTURE WILL
BRANCH OFF, EITHER NOW
OR IN THE NEAR FUTURE.
THOSE OF US WHO COME HERE
ADAPT, BUT WE ALSO HAVE
OUR ROOTS.”**

Aranged marriages are traditional in my home country of Pakistan. My parents and my husband's parents were the source of our contact, but the decision to live together was our own. When we first made contact he was already in Sweden, studying for a master's degree at Linköping University. I noticed a lot of similarities during our conversations. For example, we both enjoy travelling and discovering new things. We fell in love as we spoke to each other, and I thought that my life would change for the better and our life together would be wonderful.

I'm currently studying for a master's degree in industrial economics at Linköping University, and my husband is working as an IT consultant. I trained as a chemical engineer, and to begin with I hadn't planned to continue studying. I hoped to find a job, but I realised that I would have to learn the language first.

In Pakistan, girls usually live at home with their family until they get married, while it's common for boys to live at home all their lives, even after marrying. At the same time, society has become increasingly liberal – particularly in the big cities. Marrying for love has become more common. Pakistan doesn't have a strong economy, and in order for young people to get a university education their parents have to pay for their studies. Since parents give their children so much support, they expect something in return. This pressure is especially strong on boys. So perhaps my husband and I will return to Pakistan one day, but it's not something we've decided to do.

When I came to Sweden, I noticed that the way people spend time with their families is different here. In Pakistan, we have many more family gatherings, and that's something I miss. Because I've been studying day and night, I want my efforts to pay off. But sometimes I wonder whether the language barrier will prevent me from making my own career, or whether I'll learn enough Swedish with time. I hope to get a job working with environmental issues. We live in a time when people are becoming ever more environmentally aware, and we must try to find innovative ways to solve the challenges we face.

When it comes to my career path, I've been guided by my head. My heart wants something different – painting

and sculpture are my passions. During my first spring in Sweden, I photographed the cherry blossom in Gothenburg and then painted it on canvas. I'd love to work with art, but I haven't worked out how to achieve this dream and incorporate it into my future.

Life is good here in Sweden. I use my time efficiently, and I don't feel that I have as much responsibility as I would have had if I'd lived with my in-laws. I feel comfortable and more relaxed. No one is checking up on me all the time, but I do miss my family.

Swedish culture will branch off, either now or in the near future. Those of us who come here adapt, but we also have our roots. The new generation will have a new culture. It would be good to highlight the various cultures that people come from in different ways. Existing inhabitants need to know where new inhabitants come from. Now that so many people are fleeing from Syria, for example, the positive aspects of Syria should be emphasised so that people can learn more about the culture and history of the country.

Many people associate Pakistan with corruption and terrorism, but there are also good things about the country that the media should show. The countryside of northern Pakistan is extremely beautiful, and attracts many domestic tourists. Some international tourists also come, but sadly many people are afraid to travel to Pakistan because of the one-sided media coverage. Despite the political instability and the problems that exist in the country, people live rich lives and enjoy close relationships with their families and friends. Pakistan features great cultural diversity, and more than thirty different languages are spoken there.

The Pakistani media is fairly commercial, and produces a lot of popular drama series. I like the fact that the Swedish media depicts different aspects of topical issues. They show what's happening in other countries, whereas the Pakistani media focuses more on domestic politics. The media here in Sweden shows what people are fleeing from and encourages sympathy, but it also reports that Sweden must protect its borders. Border controls are presented as something good from a Swedish perspective – but they're not good at all from an asylum seeker's perspective. I therefore think you get a mixed impression when watching these reports. ■

■ Petra, age 39

1977–1996	Birth and childhood, Sigtuna, Sweden
1996–1997	Working, Wokingham, England
1997–2001	Studying, Uppsala, Sweden
2001	Studying, Prague, Czech Republic
2001–2003	Studying, Uppsala, Sweden
2003	Studying, Prague, Czech Republic
2003	Studying, Uppsala, Sweden
2004–2010	Studying and working, Prague, Czech Republic
2010–2015	Working, Stockholm, Sweden
2015–	Working, Norrtälje, Sweden

“YOU THINK YOU’VE GROWN AS A PERSON, BUT NOTHING HAS CHANGED BACK AT HOME.”

It was only later in life that I realised the town I grew up in, Sigtuna, was very homogeneous. Apart from a few individuals from Yugoslavia, there were no migrants to be seen, but my parents always encouraged me to travel and see the world. As a teenager, it was also obvious to me that I would move abroad one day to study and work. And that day came after upper secondary school – I was tired of studying, and wanted to do something completely different. I applied successfully for a job as a matron at a classic boarding school for boys in the English town of Wokingham. The protected upper-class environment and the unreflected elitist spirit there were unlike anything I’d ever experienced before. Had it not been for the fact that I’d read Roald Dahl’s descriptions of British boarding schools in the 1930s, I wouldn’t have had a clue about anything. Earning a salary and being able to stand on my own two feet made me grow on a personal level, but I also realised

that I didn’t want to continue pairing up football socks for more than a year.

While I was at upper secondary school, I’d watched a TV series about the writer Franz Kafka. I was fascinated by his life in what’s now the Czech Republic, and I became interested in Central and Eastern Europe. That was a factor in my decision to choose Eastern European studies at Uppsala University after my time in England. I also took my brother’s advice to supplement my education with a slightly unusual language, as it would make me more interesting in the job market. I chose Czech, but I gave up after a year – despite having studied classics at school, it was harder than either Latin or Ancient Greek. I switched to studying political science, but the idea of continuing to study Czech stayed with me. Three years later, I went to Prague and spent a semester studying an intensive course. Suddenly, the language came to me much more easily and I also fell in love with Prague. It was beautiful, cheap and lots of fun. As a student with a Swedish study allowance, I was able to live well and I made friends from all over the world.

However, my boyfriend was still back in Sweden so I returned to Uppsala and my studies there, but after graduating in political science I headed back to Prague. I studied Czech at advanced level, and this time I really made the effort to get to know Czech people. The language was an important part of making Czech friends, which also gave me new insights about myself. Up until then, I’d been surrounded by people who largely shared my own views and perspectives on important issues. As a result of my schooling and upbringing, the principles of the equal value of all people and gender equality seemed entirely natural to me. Suddenly encountering homophobia and everyday racism, for example in the form of discrimination against Roma, came as a bit of a shock. And I couldn’t possibly understand how people could *not* think that women and men should receive the same pay for the same work, or how people raised their eyebrows when I said I had played football as a girl. This was completely new to me, but it did give me some insights. Not everyone comes from a Swedish middle-class background with the same attitudes or values



as me. Of course, I knew this in purely theoretical terms, but I hadn't really understood what it meant in practice. At the same time, I didn't have any good arguments for why I thought the way I did, as I'd never actually come across or had to respond to such a different way of thinking. It gave me cause to reflect on why I thought the way I did, and to sharpen my arguments in order to win the debate.

I came to love Prague more and more, but at the same time my boyfriend was still in Uppsala, so I returned to Stockholm once again after the end of the semester. Six months later, however, I got a job offer from Accenture based in Prague. It was too tempting an offer to refuse, and I wasn't enjoying my unqualified job in Stockholm. After a number of trips back and forth and a few really tough months, our relationship ended and in 2004 I moved permanently to Prague. It was during my next job with the oil company Exxon Mobil that I met my husband, but the job didn't last long. It didn't suit me working for a global American company with a strictly regulated working environment and little personal responsibility. I looked for other jobs, and spent the next few years working at the Swedish Trade Council's office in Prague. Everything was going well until the financial crisis of 2008. My work circumstances changed for the worse, and thoughts of moving back to Sweden grew ever stronger. I missed my friends and family back at home. The desire to have children was also a driving factor. Quite simply, it's easier being a parent with young children in Sweden. There's also nowhere better when it comes to striking a balance between family life and work.

The initial period after moving back in 2010 was a little uncertain. My husband and I didn't have jobs or a home of our own. We stayed with my parents for a while. After many applications, I got a job as a collaboration coordinator at Stockholm University, and we were able to find an apartment to rent through a colleague of mine. Life carried on, but in a new way in many respects. In Prague, you just called a friend spontaneously and went out for a few beers. Now, it was a matter of planning in advance and dinner parties. The lack of a pub culture is something my husband really missed to begin with. Living and working

in Sweden was also a new situation for me. I found myself at a completely different stage in my life compared with having lived in Sweden when I was younger. However, I found myself experiencing once again what I'd experienced as a student after coming back from England: the sense of having changed while everyone else seemed to have stayed the same. They're plodding along with their lives, they're still with the same guy, still talking about the same things as before... You think you've grown as a person, but nothing has changed back at home and people aren't particularly interested in what you've experienced. On the other hand, it was really nice having my old friends within reach again – the people I'd been to primary school with, and who'd shared my history. And now it's really easy to stay in touch with the whole world via social media, compared with when I moved to the Czech Republic and you had to stay in touch by e-mail.

At the same time, I also saw many things in Sweden with new, positive eyes, and that's the way it is – sometimes you have to go away in order to see the advantages at home. The fact that there are actually effective systems for studying and social insurance in Sweden is something I can appreciate in a different way having experienced bureaucracy in other countries, and I particularly appreciate it now that I have a child of my own. The non-hierarchical working life structure in Sweden is also something I've come to appreciate more since returning home. And the little everyday things, like the fact that the shop assistant can actually smile and laugh when I go and buy stockings. Being able to read the Swedish newspapers again on the bus to work or over a cup of coffee is another little everyday treat...

A lot of things in Sweden are fantastic, but of course I also miss Prague. One day, when our son is older, we might move back there. In the meantime, we'll continue to visit regularly. Even today, when I gaze up as I sit on the tram crossing the Vltava River, I'm still astonished at how strikingly beautiful Prague is.

Since autumn 2015, there's been a real focus on refugees. Those who shout loudest on these issues are the ones who are heard most, but aren't necessarily the ones with

the best thought-out arguments. In my eyes, the debate is very shrill and polarised. Several times I've taken a break from Facebook because I can't bear to see everything that's written there. The tendency towards greater resistance to facts worries me, as does the absence of source criticism. Many people don't even seem to want to consider and evaluate the various sources that the information comes from. It's as if the reptilian brain takes over, and that concerns me.

In the wake of the presidential elections in the US, the issue of fake news has shot up the agenda, which is good in the sense that it contributes towards awareness of the widespread existence of fake news. It might even make people think more about *who* is spreading information, and in whose interests.

In the Czech Republic, there's a fairly widespread impression that Swedish suburbs are just ghettos. The media reporting has contributed towards this impression. At least one TV channel has intentionally skewed information to support a political agenda that is largely about inspiring fear and creating resistance to immigration, including by using Sweden as an example of how badly things can go when a country accepts large numbers of refugees.

What I want is a more nuanced discussion on migration issues, from all parties, and in the longer term I think source criticism and human rights must occupy a central position, right from school age. Being well informed and critical of sources is more important than ever before in today's society. It's also incredibly important that people with a foreign background are able to carry out and represent important roles within society, for example as police officers and teachers. The composition of these professional bodies, with their extensive contact with citizens, must reflect the entire population – and the entire population must be able to feel represented by the people they see and hear in these roles.

You hear very little from those who actually have experience of migration. There are positive examples where people from Syria and Eritrea, for example, have succeeded here in Sweden. Positive examples are a good thing, but at the same time you shouldn't have to 'succeed' or 'be a

success' in order to get protection in Sweden. Humanitarian and legal positions don't depend on enterprise or level of education.

I'd like to see more examples of how things have gone for people from Yugoslavia who came to Sweden in the 1990s. I think it's also important to highlight foreign students who come to Sweden. There's also the issue of how we can make it even easier for students who actually want to stay here and contribute after their studies. I'm also thinking about examples like myself – many of those who move to Sweden are returning home, but this isn't something that attracts much notice. ■

Winnie, age 27

1988–1989 Birth, Kingston, Ontario, Canada
1989–1989 Childhood, Toronto, Canada
1990–2006 Childhood, Ottawa, Canada
2006–2011 Studying, Bloomington, Indiana, USA
2011–2014 Working, Berlin, Germany
2014– Working, Stockholm, Sweden

“WHEN MY COLLEAGUE RAISED A GLASS TO THE NEXT 40 YEARS, I WAS STARTLED.”

I began playing the violin when I was four years old, but I didn't like it at all. Mum and I often argued about me practising. She takes a very Korean approach towards practising, in that it's much stricter than the Canadian approach. I was expected to devote a lot of time to the violin – ideally two hours every day. I hated it to begin with! But when I was 14, my attitude changed. That summer, I took part in an orchestra festival together with other young people. It was exciting being away from home, and my new friends were passionate about playing. Their passion was contagious. Suddenly, I enjoyed playing. Now, when I look back on my childhood, I'm grateful to my mum for nagging me. I appreciate what she did. Today, I'm a professional violinist with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, and I love my job!

When I was a child, I never thought about how much diversity there was in Canada. No importance was ever attached to people's ethnicity or religion at school. When a classmate was off school you might hear that they were celebrating Ramadan or Passover. And that wasn't something that we attached any importance to, either – it was more a case of being jealous of them for having time off school. Di-

versity was so natural that I never even thought about its existence until I moved away. Compared with Canada, I don't think diversity is particularly obvious in Sweden. You see it more in Stockholm, but even here I've shared a stage with 800 people and been the only one who isn't white.

After high school I moved to Indiana in the USA to study music. While studying I spent a couple of summers in Germany, performing in an orchestra festival with people from all over the world. When I later visited Berlin, I contacted a violinist from the philharmonic orchestra there. I told him I was interested in a place at an orchestra academy, which is a bit like an internship at an orchestra. He thought my chances were good. So I applied to the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin academy, and I got a place.

A Swedish musician I knew thought I should come to Sweden and try out for the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra. I went to Stockholm and auditioned – and I got the job! I was so happy.

When I came here, I rented a room in a house in Sundbyberg from a family. They gave me an excellent introduction to Sweden. They invited me to their Christmas celebrations and taught me to sing traditional drinking songs. Several orchestra colleagues have also invited me round to celebrate Christmas. They really are genuinely thoughtful.

Stockholm is a beautiful city, and I truly feel at home here. It's just the right size city, and I love the fact that there's water everywhere. Much of my life revolves around my job. That's where I spend most of my time, and I've met most of my friends through work. I love cooking, trying out new recipes and inviting friends round for dinner. The fact that I have a permanent job and a schedule means that I can plan my time differently compared to before. One thing I would like to spend time on is voluntary work – and I'd also like to travel, either for voluntary work or for pleasure. Previously, I've mostly travelled for work.

I don't currently have any plans for the future other than to stay. But when my friend who plays for the same orchestra raised a glass “to the next 40 years”, I was startled. The idea of staying in the same place for 40 years felt very scary.

At the same time, I don't know where else I would want to work. Stockholm Concert Hall is fantastic. I love my job,



and my colleagues are great. As orchestral musicians, we move around for work. You have to be extremely lucky to be able to choose your city first. My friends who work elsewhere in the world enjoy their jobs, but I really love my job. I miss it when I'm not there!

I was talking with a friend recently about the difference between the words 'expat' and 'immigrant'. Technically they mean the same thing, but they're still used to describe certain types of people. Immigrants are people who migrate to find a better place to live – and not necessarily out of choice. However, an expat is usually a wealthy white person who has decided they want to live somewhere and has the means to choose where in the world they want to live. They can go somewhere, decide that they like it, and choose to stay. People don't have any prejudices against them. They don't encounter raised eyebrows, and a look that says: "We don't want you here!"

I don't hear much about my type of migration, but I feel that it is generally seen as a more positive kind of migration. A company has decided that they want me in particular – and so you're chosen, and not seen as someone who's intruding.

Personally, I've never had any negative experiences of coming here to work. My colleagues like meeting new people. And almost all the most recent jobs at the orchestra have gone to people from outside Sweden.

What I'd like to hear more of in the media is more positive things about refugees, because I think things are more organised for those who come here to work. In my case, everyone has been friendly to me and the orchestra arranged all the paper work. There were post-it notes that said "Sign here", and they even provided the actual envelope. I didn't have to arrange anything myself.

Last autumn and spring I worked as a volunteer in Greece, at the camps where asylum seekers come. There, I met many people from North Africa who are usually referred to as 'economic migrants'. They haven't come from war torn countries, but they've still had it tough. But they're described in a negative way, as if they're trying to use other people and take advantage of the refugee situation. I met one man whose sister was blind and his mother couldn't work – all he wanted was to get a job so he could help his family. I wish their stories could be heard. ■



Will, age 35

- 1981–2000 Birth and childhood, Wells, England
- 2000–2002 Studying, Taunton, England
- 2002–2004 Studying, Bournemouth, England
- 2004 Working, London, England
- 2005–2006 Studying, Bournemouth, England
- 2006–2007 Working, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2007–2014 Working, Beijing, China
- 2014– Working, Växjö, Sweden

“I MOVED FROM ONE OF THE MOST POLLUTED PLACES ON EARTH TO ONE OF EUROPE’S GREENEST CITIES.”

Life in the English countryside, where I grew up, was extremely isolated. When it snowed in the winter, the school bus didn't turn up. They said on the radio that the bus wouldn't come, so we ran outside and played instead. My parents kept chickens and grew vegetables, and I used to spend time in the garden with them, digging in the vegetable plot.

I did spectacularly badly at school – I was the world's worst pupil. I didn't listen, and I failed my tests. But I was good at drawing and making things, and my parents have always encouraged my artistic side.

After upper secondary school I went to art school and specialised in graphic design. I saw working as a designer as the only possible career option for me, and I moved to the seaside town of Bournemouth to study interactive media. It was incredible! The town was full of life, with music and bars. I started playing bass in a band, and music and studying took up almost all my time.

I chose to take a break from my studies after a couple of years and moved to London to do an internship for the famous fashion photographer Nick Knight. But after a while, I lost my focus and took a kitchen job at a restaurant. It happens quite easily in London – you have to put all your energy into trying to earn rent money. So I spent a year partying and enjoying city life, but not much happened in terms of my career.

When I returned to Bournemouth and completed my degree, it was very hard to find a job. The financial crisis, which would hit particularly hard a few years later, had just started to affect the labour market. Many of those working in artistic industries took low-paid jobs that they were over-qualified for. I myself took a teaching job in Birmingham, the most horrible city in the whole of England. It's dirty, dark and grey – in short, it's extremely depressing. Many people live close to the poverty line, and integration is ineffective.

Chaos reigned at the school where I worked. Many of the pupils were verbally and physically aggressive. Some of them came to school drunk or high on drugs, and after a tough year I decided to move to Asia. I'd been there on holiday before, and I wanted to get as far away from En-

gland as possible. I wanted to throw myself out without a parachute.

I got a job as a graphic designer at a clothing company in Taipei, and I stayed there for a year. Taiwan was absolutely fantastic – an idyllic place. The sun always shines, and life's a party. You can be lying on a beach by the Pacific, just half an hour away from Taipei. The food was incredible, and the mountainous scenery was magnificent. I found myself as far as possible from the English countryside. And I desperately wanted to stay.

My best friend since childhood was working at a university in Beijing, and encouraged me to apply for a job there. I got a job as a lecturer in art, film and media – and a promise that the university would help me with all the paperwork. But despite what I was told, it wasn't possible to convert a tourist visa into a work permit. I was afraid that I would have to leave the country, and thought a lot about what I should do, when suddenly a solution appeared from an unexpected source: I'd taken my art pupils to a park to paint, when a woman sat down next to me on the bench. She asked if I had a job and needed a visa, and explained that she worked for a visa company. I jumped at her offer, which involved making an underhand payment, and a work permit arrived just six days later!

While living in Beijing, my attitude was to do as much as possible. I volunteered for an HIV/AIDS organisation, ran a marathon on the Great Wall of China, learnt Chinese and played in bands. After a few years at the university, I started freelancing as a graphic designer. My customers included large companies such as BMW and foreign embassies. Finding a job in China isn't particularly hard, but dealing with authorities and landlords is tough. I had to stand up for myself and trust that everything would work out. I believe that's a success factor for your own integration – if you can succeed in getting where you want to be despite setbacks, without losing faith and giving up.

In 2014, I decided to move back to Europe. I'd reached a crossroads: either leave now, or stay for another 20 years. And I wanted to go back, to be close to my family and friends, and to work under more secure conditions.

I'd uploaded my CV online, and I was open to job offers

in other European countries. A communications company in Växjö got in touch. I was attracted by Växjö's proximity to nature, the lakes and the opportunity of living halfway between Stockholm and Copenhagen. I've lived in big cities previously, and I wanted to get a more authentic experience of Sweden. I moved from one of the most polluted places on earth to one of Europe's greenest cities.

I was extremely excited about coming to live here. I started Swedish for Immigrants classes, made friends and met my girlfriend, who had moved here from China. Maybe it's because we both have education and experience, but we've always felt needed here. We've become part of society, and we're talking about getting a house and starting a family. We've been able to stay thanks to the fact that we have each other and the stability that brings.

I've started my own business, and once again my attitude is that I want to do as much as possible with my life. When you migrate, it's important to step outside your comfort zone and to get out and meet people. You might not be that good at the language, but you can still try. A while ago, I was invited to speak at an event and the people who invited me said that I could speak in English. But I didn't want to do that, so I wrote down what I wanted to say and gave my little speech in Swedish. Afterwards, several people came up to me and asked if I wanted to work with them on various projects! I think people should dare. The risk of someone thinking you're stupid is very low – they're more likely to see that you're doing your best.

I tend to follow the international media more than the Swedish media, and it seems to me that there's a lot of focus on asylum seekers' involvement in negative incidents. I find that the British media is extremely right-wing and sensationalist, and I think the focus is on the wrong things – there are far too few positive stories. Personally, I don't usually read articles that begin with a negative headline. I think it would be better to focus on the positive results of migration, on the success that migration feeds. After all, it's not as if we can change anything – we can't go back in time and stop people from migrating. Surely it's better to show people the benefits.

In my experience, it's the voice of the political right

that's heard most loudly right now, and people in general have very strong opinions. The media's way of reporting on ISIS and international terrorism makes people afraid of migrants, even though so few of them sympathise with terrorism. And I believe that the media wants to create this fear – it's part of the media machinery.

The decisions that are made within the field of migration arouse strong feelings, as the public debate has shown. For example, many Swedes were outraged when the borders were closed, and there was a great deal of outrage in Europe when the refugees were removed from the camp in Calais last autumn.

Tales of migration and integration will always be one of mankind's greatest stories within the world of film. Whether it's cultural diversity in 1970s New York or emigration from Europe in the 19th century, these stories say something about our humanity, about how we've always fought to survive and to fit in. ■



Jia, age 28

1988–2004 Birth, childhood and studies, Heilongjiang, China
2004–2009 Working, Shenzhen, China
2009–2012 Studying and working, Damascus, Syria
2012–2015 Working, Huizhou, China
2015– Ties, Vänersborg, Sweden

“CHILDREN AND PARENTS NEED TO BE TOGETHER.”

After completing my education, I began working with accounting and sales at various international companies. It was through one of these companies that I came into contact with a businessman from Dubai and started looking after his business dealings in China. While I was working for him, I met the man who became my husband. He's from Syria, and was working for a company from Qatar.

After a few years in China, he wanted to return to Syria – a country I knew nothing about. But I trusted him and decided to see what I could do there. We have a saying in China: If you marry a man, you should follow him wherever he goes. And I did.

My first impression of Syria was that everything was different. The language. The people. The streets. The buildings. I saw it as an adventure. The people I met were very friendly and hospitable.

I spent my first two years in Syria focusing on learning Arabic. It wasn't particularly hard. I'm an incredibly focused person, and I achieve what I've decided to do.

After completing my language studies, I got a job as a translator at the Syrian news agency SANA. We enjoyed a comfortable life before the war, and I felt very safe. In China, I'd repeatedly had my handbag stolen when I was out and about in the city. I never worried about that sort of thing happening when walking in the streets of Damascus.

When the war broke out, I didn't want to leave Syria. That's where my life was, and I hoped that the war would end soon. The uprisings in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt were over fairly quickly, and I thought that the same would happen in Syria. We heard bombs and shooting every day, and our windows were broken. But still I didn't want to leave. However, my husband was anxious for my safety and so I travelled back to China. I left everything behind, as I expected to be able to return soon. But straight after we left Syria the airport in Damascus was closed. We managed to get out on the last plane.

Our first child was born in China. When he was six months old, my husband went to Sweden. Fortunately, my mum was living with me.

I applied for family reunification at the Embassy in Beijing, and got an interview just a month later.

I remember that the initial period without my husband

was exhausting. Our son needed his dad, and I needed my husband. I was tired and worried, and was thinking about whether people were treating him well. He constantly reassured me that everything was fine.

More than half a year had passed by the time my son and my husband saw each other again for the first time since he had left. By then, my son was about a year old and was usually wary of strangers, but when he saw my husband he ran straight up to him.

I think it's terrible that the opportunities for family reunifications are being reduced. Children and parents need to be together. Travelling to a safe place to be reunited with one's family enables people to maintain their dignity. Because my son and I came to Sweden through family reunification, we were able to fly here without worrying that something terrible would happen along the way. Here in Sweden, I've heard many stories from people who came here on the so-called boats of death. They set out on their journey for the sake of their families, to be reunited with their children and to look after them.

People come here with energy, skills and power that can be used to create something positive in their new country. But if they can't see their families again, the spark will be extinguished. Without their families, what else do they have? As a woman and a mother, I appeal to the authorities not to make it harder for people to see their families again.

The most important things for me in my life are to look after my child, to learn the language, to get to know the country and to find a job – that's very important to me. Hopefully I can continue working within commerce. I'll find my way.

People often talk in terms of figures: "Such and such a number of people are coming to Sweden or Germany." I think it's because of this focus on figures that the rules are now being tightened up.

I believe that we need to talk about migration in a more compassionate way: How can we help, and how can we make it easier for people to become part of this country? I also believe that the process needs to be sped up so people can start their new lives faster and do positive things for this country. You reap what you sow. If you plant bad seeds, it might be that nothing grows. But if you plant something good, you will get even more of a good thing. ■

Justus, age 32

1984–2005 Birth, childhood and studies, Nairobi, Kenya

2005–2011 Studying and working, Seremban, Malaysia

2012– Ties, Dalarna and Stockholm, Sweden

“LUCKILY, I HAD SOMEONE WHO COULD SHOW ME HOW THINGS WORK HERE.”

I had a good childhood in Nairobi, where I grew up with two brothers and a sister. My mum worked for a government ministry, and my dad started off in the army and then became a diplomat. He travelled extensively, and had plenty of stories to tell which made me want to see more of the world, too. Life in Kenya was fun, and our parents could afford to send us to good schools. We were at school almost all the time – we even took extra courses during the holidays – which was hard work, but now I understand the benefit.

After upper secondary school I wanted to study abroad. Studying in America would have been very expensive, so I chose a newly opened university in Malaysia. I initially enrolled to study IT, but I eventually settled for a programme in economics and marketing. It went well, and I then got a job at an accounting firm there, but it wasn't nice travelling by bus or train – people pointed at me, and no one would sit next to me. The atmosphere could be threatening at times. After a while, I managed to get a job in Kenya so I returned after almost six years.

On my way home, the plane made a stop in Doha in Qatar, and it was there at the airport that I met Emma. She was on her way home to Sweden after travelling in Asia. Eight months later she came and visited me in Nairobi,



and the following year I visited her in Dalarna. It's good that I did it, as it gave me an impression of what it's like in Sweden. We cycled a lot, we went on trips and I met her friends. The whole village knew I was there, and from time to time someone would come by to say hello. That was nice, and I felt welcome.

After that, we were like: "OK, one of us needs to move, but who?" Since Emma didn't have a university education she would have found it hard in Nairobi because there's already a shortage of jobs. So we decided that I would move to Sweden.

I started looking for work immediately, and I got my first job after three months. By then I'd sent off around 900 applications and received responses from two employers. I thought it took a long time, but when I spoke with my course mates at my Swedish for Immigrants classes they said that they'd been unemployed for two years.

I've put a lot of effort into learning Swedish. For a while I had two jobs while studying Swedish for Immigrants at the same time. It's hard to integrate into society without knowing the language. Luckily, I had someone who could show me how things work here. Things like how a dishwasher works and how to sort waste. When people come and only interact with other people from the same home country, I think it's harder because everyone speaks the same language. I'm thinking about people who come from Syria, for example. Who will show them how people live here?

What can I say about what it's like here in Sweden? People are less 'in your face' – they avoid you if they don't like you, and they don't usually say what they think. On the Metro, they don't want to sit next to you or they turn away. But what should I do about it? The vast majority of the people I meet are nice, so I try to focus on them. Emma and I now live in a two-room apartment in Farsta, and we're happy with our jobs and the flat.

I enjoy challenges, and I like it when things are difficult. I started off washing up in a sushi restaurant, and as I learnt more I also had the chance to work as a chef. When the manager told me she wanted to give me a try in the kitchen, I decided that I had to take the opportunity and

make the best of it. I started making even more of an effort to learn Swedish. I'm now working as a chef, but I'm also responsible for purchasing for the restaurant. The better my Swedish becomes, the easier everything is.

I'd like to resume my studies. But I don't want to work in an office all day – I need some kind of balance in my work duties. I'd like to work with agriculture and organic farming. In Nairobi, I was part of a research project that involved teaching smallholders how to grow organically. I re-wrote the instructions so that the farmers would understand how to grow soybeans, tomatoes, onions and other produce. It was like a simple manual, not just about the crops but also about the soil, watering and so on.

After that, I started growing crops in Nairobi with my mum. It went really well, and now she has two employees who tend to the crops for her. They grow soybeans, red onions, maize, bananas and pineapples, and she gives them instructions by phone. Now I'm also working with food at the restaurant in Midsommarkransen, but it'd be fun to go back to growing crops again.

My dad called me a few months ago. He'd seen on the news that they were chasing immigrants on Sergels Torg, and he was worried. But I've never experienced anything like that. Things are calmer here than I initially expected.

I see a lot of negative things about immigrants on the news. If someone does something wrong, people easily generalise and think "they all do that". Or they report on areas where it's too dangerous to go. But I don't recognise this – I've never experienced it myself. Through my work, I have friends from all over the world who live in these areas and they don't agree with the picture painted by the media. They work late and go home without being worried. They have children at school there, and they're happy. I think the media gives a very one-sided impression sometimes, which often reinforces the 'us and them' idea... It's a shame. ■



■ Uyen, age 34

1982–2015 Birth, studies and work, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
2015– Ties, Gothenburg, Sweden

**“I READ BLOGS ABOUT
OTHERS WHO HAVE MIGRATED
TO SWEDEN.”**

I chose to study civil law at university in Ho Chi Minh City – just to go against my father. He’s a businessman, and he thought I should follow in his footsteps. Now I agree with him. A while after studying I set up my own company, and it would have been useful then if I’d studied economics. I also like law, but without contacts it’s very hard to make a career as a lawyer in Vietnam. My family doesn’t have these contacts.

Eight years ago I met my Swedish partner, who was in Vietnam doing an internship. It was with his help that I started my own business, a website selling food. When we launched the site, we were one of the first in Vietnam to offer this kind of service.

After a while we were bought up by a big company. We continued working for the company for a bit, but we then decided to move to Sweden. We had grown tired of the hectic pace of life in Ho Chi Minh City. The population of the city is the same as the whole of Sweden, and the traffic is completely crazy. It’s quiet here in Sweden and the air is clean.

Marriage is important in Vietnam. My partner and I aren’t married, but when my parents met him they realised that he represents more security than a piece of paper. They really like him.

When I came to Sweden, I heard that it would be hard for me to get a job if I didn’t know the language. I was naïve and didn’t believe it, but I soon realised that it was true. I started my first Swedish for Immigrants course after just over a month, while actively looking for work at the same time.

I now work as a project assistant at a digital production agency in Gothenburg. I found my employer by chance while sitting at home, idly surfing the web. I was tired and irritated at having nothing to do, and as I sat in front of the computer I started Googling various phrases. I wrote something like “Web agencies that like me” – and the company I now work for came up! I sent off my CV and asked about an unpaid internship. They ended up offering me an actual job.

When I got the job, people congratulated me so enthusiastically it was as if I’d won the lottery. I was pleased to

hear I'd got the job, but my partner was even happier if anything.

Life here is extremely secure and peaceful. And I have more benefits as an employee in Sweden compared to Vietnam. There, you only get twelve paid days of holiday a year, including sick days.

One downside for me in Sweden is that people cook a lot more at home. In Vietnam, people eat out all the time. Breakfast, lunch and dinner – I ate all my meals at restaurants. I'm not very good at cooking, but I realised that if I wanted to eat Asian food I would have to learn to cook it myself.

In the future, I'd like to become better at Swedish. I'd also like to find more nice restaurants in Gothenburg. For me and my partner, our main interests are travelling, spending time with friends and eating well.

I feel like the media focuses on refugees. I follow various bloggers to read about others who have migrated to live with someone in Sweden. For example, when I moved here I read a blog by an American who lived in Sweden. Reading about his experiences was rewarding. I also follow bloggers from countries such as South Korea, Singapore and the USA who have moved here. It feels as if they understand what I'm going through myself. Their blog posts can be about anything from how healthcare works to how to get a Swedish personal identity number.

I'd like to read more about the job market for people who have migrated to Sweden, and how to set up your own business. And I'm not just talking about theoretical knowledge – first do this, then do that – I want to read personal accounts by people who have come here and started their own companies. What did they do? I think blogs are a good way of sharing this type of story.

I'd also appreciate more online forums where people can share tips with each other. For example, where to find the best Asian food in various towns. That's the sort of thing I'd like to know. ■

■ Lisa, age 34

- 1982–1989 Birth and childhood, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1989–1991 Childhood, Montreal, Canada
- 1991–2001 Childhood, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2001–2003 Studying and working, Paris, France
- 2003–2006 Studying, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2006–2015 Working, Paris, France
- 2015– Returning, Stockholm, Sweden

“I THINK I COULD END UP ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD AND TRUST THINGS TO WORK OUT.”

The first time I returned to Sweden, I was almost nine years old. Three years at an English-language school in Montreal had given me a slight accent when I spoke Swedish. As I was only six when my family moved to Canada, I'd never been to a Swedish school and I hadn't learnt to read or write Swedish. Lots of people wondered where I came from. Was I really Swedish? Well yes, why wouldn't I be? I'd also grown up with home-baked cinnamon buns and summers in the archipelago. I grew tired of the questions about my origins and tried to ignore their comments. It was harder to ignore other things, such as the fact that I was the only one in our terrace who wasn't invited when the neighbours had garden parties. And sometimes I didn't understand anything at all – was I expected to laugh when the other children made fun of black people?

There had been 30 of us in my primary school class in Montreal, and we represented 25 different ethnic back-



grounds. Our class photo showed faces from all over the world, and the school calendar included everyone's festivals. We learnt about each other's traditions and cultures. Since no two people were the same, no one stood out. On returning home to homogeneous Sweden, the opposite was true – suddenly, I was seen as being different. I experienced the feeling of being a foreigner for the first time in my life. In my world, multiculturalism had become the norm, but with the attitude that you have to adapt to the place you come to. In Sweden, I came to understand with time that it was better not to emphasise my experiences from Canada as this often aroused jealousy. Many people jumped to the incorrect conclusion that we have lived a life of luxury because we lived in our own house there.

Were it not for my time in Canada, the idea of living abroad probably wouldn't have followed me around throughout my school years in Sweden. After upper secondary school, I took the leap. I moved to Paris and began studying at the Sorbonne University. To support myself, I started working as a babysitter in the evenings. I lived in a nine square metre space, I didn't have a shower or internet, and I didn't earn more than 36 euros a week. I was able to borrow a bike through an acquaintance. It didn't have any brakes, but I didn't care. Making my way through the streets of Paris filled me with enormous pleasure, and I got to know the city inside out. This was where I wanted to continue living! At the same time, I realised that it would be hard to live well if I didn't get good qualifications. When you're 20, you can work 65 hours a week and learn to live on next to nothing – which I literally did. For a while, I spent my mornings waiting tables in a café, studied and attended lessons at the university during the day, and worked as a bartender in the evenings. I was managing to get by financially, but it wasn't what I wanted in the long term.

I returned to Sweden to study. My dad more or less forced me to study engineering at KTH in Kista. Out of a total of 120 students starting the course only five of us were girls, but the other girls all dropped out. Suddenly, I was surrounded by nerds that I had nothing in common with. For them, everything revolved around computers

and many of them were so shy they couldn't even talk to each other face to face. When they wanted to communicate, they sent chat messages via MSN. Personally, I hardly knew how to turn a computer on and didn't actually know what I was studying for. IT had sounded good in the course directory... I mostly cried my way through the first year and was about to change track and become an aid worker, but I decided to bite the bullet and keep my eyes on what had been my goal since day one: to complete my studies in Paris. Half the students would have the opportunity to study abroad for their final year. The coveted exchanges were with universities in Hong Kong, Cambridge and Zürich. Paris wasn't ranked as highly by the other students, but that was the only place I wanted to go. And so I did.

When I went back to Paris again in spring 2006, it was with the intention of staying there – I had no interest in returning to Sweden. I did my degree project at Alfa Laval and had to carry out a number of internships before I managed to get a job that related to my studies. Surprisingly enough, however, it wasn't my expertise in IT and computer analysis that determined whether I got the jobs I applied for – at everything from banks and telecoms companies to L'Oréal – but my English language skills.

The working climate in France is tough. There's a lot of jealousy, and many people focus on finding fault. It's hard to be able to trust your colleagues, and during my years in Paris I found out what it's like to be a woman in a male-dominated world. It took a lot of energy and I had to be constantly on my guard, and I suffered from mental exhaustion a couple of times. Around the same time as the attack on the Charlie Hebdo office in 2015, which happened in the area where I lived, I felt that everything was starting to go astray. French society wasn't shaping up well, either financially or mentally. I started to get fed up with life in Paris, and I was tired of my salary getting swallowed up by expenses. Rent, insurance and everything else was so expensive in Paris. An alarm was going off in my head. I wanted sun and a more relaxed pace of work, so I thought about moving to the French Riviera. I also considered working in Denmark and living in Malmö, but I re-

alised that the increased migration to Sweden had created so much chaos that it was virtually impossible to commute across the bridge on a daily basis. All the obstacles were lining up. Eventually, I followed a friend's advice to move back to Sweden and apply for a job at Klarna.

Even though I'd chosen to come back home to Sweden, things were very tough. To begin with, I lived with my parents. I went from living in the big city, zipping around on a Vespa and going out to bars with friends in the evenings, to sitting in a freezing cold cottage in Värmdö with a bus link to the city once a day... But I got the job I'd applied for at Klarna, which saved me. I've never had so much fun as I do working there.

Of course, there was a bit of a sense of starting back at square one, but at the same time the grass is certainly green in Sweden. For example, contact with the authorities and transport links are simpler here than in France. And for once, my bank account isn't in the red. I've always felt that Sweden is quite stuffy, that people want to pigeon-hole each other in a way that doesn't happen elsewhere. I think Sweden is more multicultural and more open today than it was ten years ago when I moved away. At the same time, almost none of my new friends are from here and the old friends I'm still in touch with are the ones who have lived abroad.

Both my boyfriend and I are engineers and want to benefit from the international opportunities that our work offers. If one of us were to get an attractive job offer abroad, I can see myself moving again and learning a new language. But the question is what I'm prepared to give up to live abroad again. Canada is probably the only sensible alternative where I would be able to have the same quality of life as I do here, and that's important to me.

Everyone should live abroad at least once in their life. You become more independent, and you learn to help yourself. Personally, I've grown a thick skin – now, no one can make me do something I don't want to do. I think I could end up anywhere in the world and trust things to work out.

I grew tired of the discussions and the politics that emerged in the wake of the terror attacks in Paris. There,

lots of people argue that Sweden is opening itself up to save the world, but that the country will face the same challenges as France. There's a growing far-right movement which is also affecting Sweden. From my perspective, it's important to listen and to be vigilant for this. Political correctness does great damage and needs to be removed from the discussions. We need to talk about how segregation can be avoided. No matter who comes to a country, it's important that they have a place in society. In order to move in that direction, I think we need to stop talking about differences. The focus should be on people – their interests and experiences, rather than their religion and nationality.

I haven't had a TV for 15 years. What you see on TV isn't reality, and I want to talk to people instead. I think the media focuses on the negative rather than what's actually relevant. Do they want to control people by spreading fear? The reporting usually takes a conflict situation as its starting point, and refugee immigration is depicted as a burden. Politicians need to present clearer information about the plans for the future. In the absence of this, people listen to the rumour mill instead, which twists information. We should also talk more about the positive aspects of migration. Many new arrivals do good things, but these things aren't highlighted and you don't actually hear from the people who are being talked *about*. More people should listen to Radio Sweden, which I think has an excellent balance when it comes to who is given a voice.

A friend of mine has recently published a children's book about a young refugee girl. I think it's becoming increasingly important to communicate with children in a way that can counter the idea of *us* and *them*. Here, adults have an important role to play. As a child, you don't question much. It's only when adults make a big deal out of something that it becomes important. When we lived in Canada, for example, my dad once said that perhaps I should appreciate what I had when I expressed my wish to have the same curly hair and skin colour as a boy in my class. I thought to myself that he was out of touch. Looking like one of The Jackson Five was just so cool. It was only later in life that I realised ethnic discrimination still exists. ■



Naome, age 41

1975–2001 Birth and childhood, Uganda
2002–2007 Working, Rwanda
2008–2011 Working, Uganda
2011 Displaced
2012– Need for protection, Gävle, Sweden

**“IT’S NOT A CASE OF
ME INTEGRATING ALONE.
THERE’S SO MUCH THAT
YOU CAN LEARN FROM ME,
ABOUT WHAT I’VE DONE
IN MY COUNTRY.”**

I grew up in Uganda in a Rwandan family with a strong Christian faith, who believe in God and that things must remain the way they have always been. As I grew up, I was never interested in boys and I didn't have any boyfriends. My friends thought this was strange, but they said it was because I came from a religious family and that my parents were very strict. I had my first relationship with a girl when I was fourteen.

A few years later, I moved to Kampala to continue my studies and it was there that I met the father of my children. He worked at the airport. He had a lot of money and lived a life of luxury. I think that's what I was attracted to. I became pregnant soon afterwards. After my son was born, I began a secret relationship with a young woman. The relationship lasted five years, but I felt guilty all the time. So I left my marriage. I didn't want to live a lie anymore.

After the divorce I moved to Rwanda, where I got a job at a bank. I met many different people there, some of whom were gay. They said that the police harassed them and they were thrown out of clubs. I started contacting journalists to tell the other side of what was being reported in the media, and I spoke anonymously to various newspapers.

I started coming out to the gay people I met, and we decided to do something together. This resulted in an organisation for LGBT rights in Rwanda. We couldn't risk setting up an office, but we hired a car once a month and held meetings in it.

We wanted people to know that it's normal to be gay – and I started telling people that I'm a lesbian. When I contacted organisations that we wanted to work with, I always dressed up. I used expensive perfumes and highly educated language. In Rwanda, homosexuality is seen as something western, as something deviant, and I wanted people to see that I was normal.

Some of them accepted me, but I also received threats – always anonymously. The message was that if I didn't stop my activism, I might end up dead. Being gay is not against the law in Rwanda. But when we reported harassment or threats to the police, they asked us: "Why are you gay? Don't you know that society doesn't accept that?" Once I asked the policemen whether it was the police themselves

who were threatening me. They denied it, but they also said that they would only stand up for me if it didn't come into conflict with our culture. I always reported the threats, but nothing happened. Instead, the police mocked me and asked how lesbians have sex. They turned everything into a joke, and I realised that they would never stand up for me.

During a radio interview with Voice of America, I opened up for the first time about how I felt about the injustices, the threats, the discrimination and the stigma. After the interview, everyone knew who I was. I was in the media a lot, and the threats escalated. It also affected my family, and I went into hiding.

Although it was hard for me to remain active in Rwanda, I had never thought about seeking asylum. However, after the radio interview the situation became worse and I received a great many threats, by phone and by e-mail. I moved home constantly, and I was exhausted. I thought about my life. Where would I settle down? How would I be able to bring up my children? I didn't have a job, I had no peace of mind and I wasn't popular with my family. Amid all this, a close friend of mine – the activist David Kato – died. He was murdered in Uganda. When David died, I realised that I might meet the same fate. That's when I started to think about fleeing the country.

My girlfriend never supported my decision to seek asylum, and nor did my mother. My fellow activists asked me not to do it. I was a well-known activist in Africa. In a society where most people hide their sexual orientation, my friends said leaving the country would be treachery. They thought I was being selfish. Why would I withdraw mid-battle? It wasn't an easy choice. But I couldn't keep running away and hiding.

Despite everything I've experienced, I also have reason to be happy. My children have been able to see that I'm not abnormal. The transformation took place here. Swedish society is different – being homosexual is no big deal. My children have always loved me, but in Africa they were stigmatised – by their family, by their friends, and at school. Here, they've taken part in the Pride parade. Today, I feel that I'm on my way back. I don't receive threats, and I'm not frightened or afraid. I can hold my head up high.

Of course, starting a new life in Sweden isn't easy – it's never easy for anyone who has to make a fresh start. First and foremost, you don't know the language and you don't have any friends. Even people who I thought were my friends don't want to be associated with me because I'm gay. The question of why I fled came up at the asylum accommodation, and I couldn't lie. But when I told the truth, I became an outcast.

In Africa I was a respected activist, but not here. And sometimes it's hard – that no one knows who I am. It's dangerous to be openly gay in Africa, but there are also privileges. When I was out and about, people said "Wow, Naome's here!" Everyone wanted to be with me. Here, you're seen as a newcomer who knows nothing.

Here in Sweden, I've started the Find Hope organisation for LGBT asylum seekers. I did it to support new arrivals and so that they would be able to share their stories with others and talk about the asylum process or the challenges they've faced. When we meet, people feel loved. They share their experiences and give each other tips. We speak our languages, eat our food and find happiness together. But my commitment isn't only to LGBT issues. I'm also committed to helping society to understand new arrivals better, and to promote diversity and intercultural encounters between new arrivals and Swedish society.

I think that migrants are portrayed as liars, and as people who seek a better life and make up stories. They are depicted as not being for real. Their stories aren't believed. When they aren't trusted, nothing they say is seen as being important. I think it then becomes hard for them to love the country and to get involved in community activities.

Sweden is a good country, for example when it comes to welfare, and Swedes are extremely friendly. But there are suspicions that we come here and seek asylum, expecting the streets to be paved with gold. I never came here for money. I came here for safety, to settle down and bring up my children. And I want to become part of society, to get involved in social progress or politics. That's how I can repay Sweden.

I want new and old immigrants alike to live in mutual understanding. And I want people to see the ideas we bring

with us. We're not idiots. We have plenty to contribute. If I've come here to settle in this country, then my energy, my ideas and my development will all take place here. Not in Rwanda! Work with me, and let us integrate together. Integration isn't a one-sided project. It's not a case of me integrating alone. There's so much that you can learn from me, about what I've done in my country. Give us the time and the opportunity to teach you, not just to learn from you. I love it when everyone is included, when integration is both physical and emotional. ■



Ingrid, age 30

1986–2012 Birth, childhood and studies, Mexico City, Mexico
2012– Ties, Malmö, Sweden

**“SWEDEN IS DIVERSE.
IT’S NOT ONLY SWEDES WHO
LIVE HERE, AND SWEDES
AREN’T JUST PEOPLE WHO
WERE BORN HERE.”**

I grew up in Mexico City with my mum, a hard-working nurse. It’s great having grown up with an independent woman who taught me that I can stand on my own two feet.

Mexico is a very unequal country. While I had everything I wanted, one of my classmates worked as a refuse collector to support his family. He was involved in an accident when he was 11 years old. He got stuck in the garbage truck and lost a leg. This made a deep impression on me. Some of the other pupils and I raised money for his healthcare. There’s public healthcare in Mexico, but it’s mainly for people who work for the state. The accident was a wake-up call for me. I realised that the system in Mexico is in such a bad state that an eleven-year-old has to solve the problems that the state should deal with. His accident has influenced my entire life. It’s the reason why I wanted to study social sciences and do something to benefit society. I realised how lucky I was to be able to go to school and to have parents who looked after me.

I’ve been interested in Mexico’s rich cultural history and the country’s large indigenous population from a young age. I understood that there were different groups of people in Mexico, and that people with darker skin were seen to be worth less. My grandmother always used to say that I was beautiful because my skin was so pale. Racism is widespread in Mexico. If your skin is a little darker, you’re less likely to get a good job. It’s all based on our history and colonialism. There’s a belief that what lies beyond our country is better.

I did a degree in international relations, and a few years later I travelled to Japan with Ship for World Youth, an exchange programme that aims to strengthen commerce between Japan and other countries. 150 foreign and 150 Japanese participants spent two months on a boat together, taking part in workshops on cultural understanding and sustainability.

At night on the boat, I used to gaze at the stars. Those starry skies were the most beautiful I’ve ever seen. It was there, out on deck, that I met my partner. We had an immediate connection, and began a deep conversation about politics and relationships. One evening he taught me to dance salsa, and we’ve been together ever since.

When I moved to Sweden I heard that it can take up to seven years to get your first job, but things went really well for me. I passed my Swedish for Immigrants course in three months, and shortly afterwards I was employed by a supply agency and began working as a teacher. I was nervous, but very happy. It's true that getting a job is hard, but it's not impossible.

In Skåne, I've helped to start a Mexican cultural association. There were a number of reasons for doing this. I meet many Swedes who associate Mexico with drugs and violence. Those problems do exist, but Mexico is so much more than that. I also wanted to do something because of the growing racism. I think it's good that those of us who come here form associations and try to show what we have to offer. The aim of the association is to spread information and create forums for anyone who wants to learn more about Mexican culture. We have a small library with books by Latin American authors, and we arrange meet-ups with Mexican music. Diversity on every possible level is extremely important to me. If we are to create a dialogue, we need to know about other people. During my time in Japan, I realised that forums are needed where people can offer information about the various cultures that make up a country. I previously thought "We're all people, and can communicate", but sometimes the differences are a little greater than we believe. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't have contact with or be able to understand each other, but it can create barriers to understanding and we can overcome these by creating a dialogue.

When I think about the future, I think about my family. My son is half-Swedish, half-Mexican. I want us to live in a society where there's a place for everyone. When it comes to the immediate future, I want to finish my master's degree in human ecology at Lund University. My dream is to be able to teach here in Sweden, and maybe even in Mexico.

I worry about the future, as I've seen how inequalities can ruin a country: how a society is affected by many people being unable to participate, and by many people feeling excluded. In Sweden today, I believe that many people feel excluded. Some of the people who have come here

complain about Sweden and the Swedes, without thinking that they are also Swedes now. Everyone thinks that other people are the root of the problem, and no one wants to take responsibility and do their bit to make society work better.

People in Sweden don't dare to talk about migration issues. People are afraid, but they don't dare to discuss their fears. No one wants to be seen as uneducated or unopen. That makes it hard to ask the right questions, and even harder to find the right solutions.

Moving to Sweden for love sounds fairly straightforward. But it isn't – it involves creating a life for yourself from scratch. You have to find a job even though there are hardly any available, and you have to learn the language. When the authorities and people talk about integration, I don't think they're thinking about those of us who have come here due to close ties. They might think it's easy to integrate when you have a Swedish partner. But you also have to create your own life. I think it would be good if the authorities focused more on the group of people who have moved here to live with someone in Sweden, to analyse the problems we encounter and our experiences of coming here.

When it comes to migration, people only talk about refugees and beggars. The only thing I've seen that has anything to do with my type of migration is the *Welcome to Sweden* TV series. I think people should talk more about migration in general. The media can influence people's views of Swedish society. Sweden is diverse. It's not only Swedes who live here, and Swedes aren't just people who were born here. The media can be used to create an identity – an identity that's more open.

People who live in the segregated parts of the cities – those are the ones we need to listen to. There are many people who aren't employed or studying after several years in the country. Their voices need to be heard. ■

Marcia, age 26

1989–2008 Birth, childhood and work, San Salvador, El Salvador
2008 Working, Düsseldorf, Germany
2009–2010 Working and studying, San Salvador, El Salvador
2010– Ties and working, Stockholm, Sweden

“I STILL DREAM OF BECOMING AN AIR HOSTESS.”

We always celebrated Christmas at my grandmother’s house on the beach. On the way there, we children would crowd together in the back of my dad’s pick-up truck. Stretched out, lying pressed up close to each other, we stared up at the night sky and tried to count the stars. I don’t think there are any other skies in the world with as many stars as in El Salvador.

I was very close to my grandmother. I talked to her about life and the future. I used to say that I wanted to be an air hostess, and that she would be on board my first flight. It was actually because of my mother that I wanted to be an air hostess. I want to do everything she dreamed of but never had the chance to do. Both my parents come from simple backgrounds. They weren’t able to study beyond high school – they started working early on. My dad worked hard to support the family, and he didn’t want my three siblings and me to end up on the street. He persuaded me to start studying international relations, even though it never felt like the right thing for me. I love cooking and baking, but he didn’t want to pay for me to train as a chef. He didn’t believe it was a profession that you could earn money from in El Salvador.

People are warm and open in El Salvador. The door is always open to neighbours and friends, and there’s always a place at the dining table. You don’t need to arrange to

meet up a week in advance – you just knock on the door. We help each other, and the country has lots to offer: the sea, beaches, waves, surfing, cities and nature. At the same time, the crime rate is high and there’s a lot of poverty. This has a negative effect on quality of life, and lots of people feel like I do, that there’s no future in El Salvador. So people dream of going to Europe or the USA. A ticket there opens up the world.

Three weeks after I found out I was pregnant, my husband was offered a job in Sweden at the embassy. At that time I had a job at a bank, but I thought there would be more options for our family in Sweden so I decided to study and work there. But I also had my concerns – how would I cope with the new situation and a new life in Sweden?

We moved to Stockholm in 2010, and to begin with I looked after our newborn daughter. Because I love languages I started to teach myself Swedish, for example by watching films and reading the subtitles. As well as Spanish, English and now Swedish, I also speak German which I learnt when I worked as an au pair in Düsseldorf after completing upper secondary school in San Salvador. That’s when I learned to stand on my own two feet and the same feeling came with me to Sweden – I wanted to feel that I had the right to be here as my own person, not just because my husband had a work permit. I wanted to be just like any other normal person: someone who works, who can study, who has insurance and can claim an allowance if their child is sick. So I started to apply for work and got a job at Hemfrid, a company that offers domestic services. I didn’t have a clue about cleaning, but I decided that I could learn. Hemfrid has been my guardian angel – they helped me to apply for a work permit from the Swedish Migration Agency, which I eventually got after waiting for almost two years.

Working at Hemfrid allows me to move around from room to room, which reminds me of what an air hostess does, travelling from city to city. Because I’m a highly methodical person and a bit of a control freak, it’s easy for me to create order and tidiness for others. Other people open up their homes to strangers and put their private belongings in your hands, which is a big responsibility. I think



a lot about what others would say about my work, so I'm extremely thorough – everything should be perfect, and no one should be able to complain. And no one has complained during my four years at Hemfrid. I also think it's good working with something that brings mutual benefit – you help people who don't have time to clean their own homes, and at the same time the industry helps people and new arrivals to find work. My colleagues at Hemfrid come from more than 40 different countries.

I learnt the job quickly, and I now have more responsibility – I'll be a supervisor for new employees. Having the opportunity to progress from the bottom to the top, to advance from a cleaner to a team leader to a manager, is a positive thing. I want to continue advancing and develop within my profession. At the same time, I'd also like to have the chance to study more and perhaps work with cooking and baking one day. And I still dream of becoming an air hostess!

I'd like my daughter to be able to grow up here, even though she loves El Salvador. She has visited her home country twice, and she always asks when we'll go back. And she often says that she misses the stars there...

I don't think there's much talk about your rights as an employee, or about organisations that can help you. There's a need for more information and assistance with the actual application for a work permit. I think that lots of people hesitate to ask – they're embarrassed about not understanding how things work. It's also hard for many of those who come from non-EU countries to get a work permit. In my experience, many people from Latin America don't really know what's what. Lots of them believe they can come here and look for work, but are forced to return when they don't find anything.

I also think there should be more of a focus on those of us who come from poor countries – we're prepared to move to any country to help our families. All we want is to work. It doesn't matter what the job is. We want to improve the quality of our lives and think about the future – that our children should have a good, secure life.

All the focus is on asylum seekers. The rest of us who are here for different reasons are forgotten about. Take me,

for example. I have a permanent job, I've paid tax since 2012 and my daughter was born here, but I have virtually no rights to any social allowances because I still haven't received a personal identity number from the Swedish Tax Agency. Why should I pay tax if I don't get any allowances for me or my daughter? "It's so that you have the right to stay here and walk in the street," came the answer from the Tax Agency. And I've been waiting for nine months for the Swedish Migration Agency to extend my work permit, but when I call to ask what's happening they just say that asylum seekers are being prioritised. This means that I can't travel, and the whole situation makes me very sad. It feels like I'm in prison, and that I'm completely invisible. I know that there are many others who have ended up in the same situation, but who speaks on our behalf and what's being done to resolve the situation? ■



Nipavan, age 34

1982	Birth, childhood and work, Ban Phue, Thailand
2010	Seasonal work, Munkfors, Sweden
2012	Seasonal work, Munkfors, Sweden
2014	Seasonal work, Munkfors, Sweden
2016	Seasonal work, Munkfors, Sweden

**“I FEEL VERY MUCH AT HOME
IN THE FOREST AMONG THE
BERRIES – EVEN MORE SO
THAN IN MY HOUSE!”**

I live in northeast Thailand, in a small village with around 200 inhabitants. Everyone knows everyone else. I was about nine years old the first time I saw a foreigner. He was a big, old man with a dark face. I was terrified, and ran away. Today, I realise that it must have been awful for him that people either ran away, like I did, or stared at him. But people react strangely when a foreigner appears in the village, as it happens so rarely.

Neither my two siblings nor I had the chance to study, as my parents didn't have any money. It felt tough seeing other families who could go on trips and let their children go to school. Several of my friends were able to continue studying, but I had to leave school after year six. If I'd only had the chance to carry on at school, I would have been happy – I could have studied anything at all. Instead, I had to help my mother at home. We didn't have running water in the house, so we had to fetch it from a well. I also had to look after my little brother, who was ten years younger, when my parents were out in the fields. They grow rice and fruit. Sometimes I would play with my cousins and friends. We pretended that we had a market where we sold things like toys and sweets, and we used tree leaves as money. I secretly dreamed that one day I would be rich and have enough money to buy whatever I wanted and to live a life of comfort.

I met my husband in my home village. He had been married before, but his wife had left him. I saw that he was a good man, because he helped my family a lot. I was about 25 years old when we married in the traditional way – by tying a piece of string around each other's hands as a symbol that we were united. I loved him to begin with, but my love has cooled now. It doesn't matter much, things are still good. He still loves me, and we have two girls aged seven and eight.

It was through my husband that I first heard about Sweden. He had been there three times picking berries and wondered if I might like to try it. I thought that if he can do it, so can I!

The first time I came here to Munkfors was around 2010. I felt right at home straight away, and I liked the weather. Even though it was cool, the countryside was green and

everything was in bloom. My first thought was: “I want to live here!” But to begin with, I was very sceptical about the actual work. Because you have to pay to travel to Sweden, you’re already out of pocket. When I saw the berries for the first time, I thought they were so small – how would it ever be possible to pick enough to make a profit? At first, I tasted the berries to find out what they were. My favourite ones are the red berries, the lingonberries. Blueberries are nice too, but I avoid them now because they make your mouth so black. I don’t actually know what happens to the berries once we’ve picked them.

I feel very much at home in the forest among the berries – even more so than in my house! It’s so nice and beautiful, and there are so few people moving around. You set off early in the morning and talk to the others in the car on your way to work. Sometimes I see the sun rise in the forest. We’re lower down here, but once we’re up high I can see further than I can at home. I work around ten hours at a time, and take breaks when I feel I need to. Usually there are so many berries that I just want to keep picking. At lunchtime, those of us who are in the same part of the forest usually eat our packed lunches and talk to each other. Lots of my relatives are here, including my brothers and my nephews. At the moment I’m the only woman in the team, but there are probably more than ten women from my home district who’ve been here at least once. Some of them come alone, without their husbands, but I can’t imagine doing that. I wouldn’t feel safe without my husband, either at our accommodation or out in the forest. I would be scared of the other men, and I know several women who feel the same way.

This is the fifth time I’ve been here, but it’s still fun and it still feels like the first time. I’ve become more effective at doing the actual work. At the end of the day, everyone’s berries are weighed and I’m often the one who has picked the most. Maybe it’s because I keep working when the men stop for a cigarette break... Coming here and having the chance to spend time with the other workers has also made me happier and I’ve laughed more. The bears don’t scare me anymore. The last time I was here, a big bear ran across the road and it struck me that it was probably as scared of

us as we were of it. The first time I came across an elk, I was very happy. It’s a woodland animal and we have buffalo in Thailand, so I wasn’t afraid of it. I’d like to see a beaver, and to see more of the area around here.

The money that my husband and I earn from picking berries goes towards paying off debts back at home, and of course towards food and other essential expenditure. We borrowed money to build a house for us and our children. The season for growing sugar cane and sweet potatoes, which we grow at home, only runs from January to May, so we don’t make much money from that.

At the moment, I don’t know if I’ll be able to come here again next year. My parents look after our children while we’re here, but they’re old and it’ll be even harder for them to cover for us. I would love for my children to be able to discover the forest. They would like it in Sweden with the weather here, as they’re sensitive to the heat back home in Thailand. Most of all, I’d like to be able to live here in Sweden permanently. The people here are very nice and friendly.

I don’t follow media reports or social debate, but the opportunities for coming here to Sweden to pick berries are well known in Thailand. It’s seen as good seasonal work that gives you the chance to earn a decent amount of money in the short time you’re here – around two months. I believe there’s a link between money and happiness. It’s all about money. If I only had money I could give my children what they want and, above all else, what I never had: the opportunity to get a higher education. ■



Kaisa, age 23

1993–2012	Birth and childhood, Oulu, Finland
2012–2013	Studying, Tampere, Finland
2013	Working, Oslo, Norway
2013–2014	Studying, Visby, Sweden
2014	Working, Tranås, Sweden
2014–2016	Studying, Gothenburg, Sweden
2016	Studying, Seoul, South Korea
2017–	Working, Gothenburg, Sweden

**“UNDERSTANDING OTHER
PEOPLE’S PERSPECTIVES
TEACHES US ABOUT
OURSELVES.”**

I come from a small town in northern Finland. Everyone knew everyone else there, and things could sometimes be a bit boring. By the time I reached upper secondary school, I was already interested in travelling and took every opportunity to get away. I probably realised that I wouldn't stay in Finland.

When I understood that I would have a chance to move, I was happy. I'd applied to universities in both Finland and Sweden, and got into the Swedish university but not the Finnish one. I don't know how my life would have turned out if it had been the other way around.

The summer before starting university, I worked at a warehouse in Oslo. It wasn't a particularly exciting job, but the weather was fantastic and it was exciting being in a new city on my own. Before the semester began, I travelled to Visby by boat. I remember very clearly how I wandered around – I didn't know where I was going. I had lots of bags with me, and I was trying to get hold of the landlord for the flat where I was going to live.

I'd visited Sweden many times previously, and I had a positive impression of the country. Swedes are usually very friendly. In a way, I thought there were many similarities between the Nordic countries, but there are also differences. One amusing example is a bit of a culture shock I experienced when I went shopping. In Finland, you can't start paying by card until the cashier has finished scanning everything, so I stood and waited like I was used to doing. For a few weeks, I wondered why I was getting strange looks at the check-out. Then I realised that you can start paying for your purchase in advance in Swedish shops.

My first eight months studying in Visby were during the autumn and winter. I missed the best months, but I still got to see the beauty of the city and took lots of walks along the water's edge. At first I thought it was close to Stockholm and that I'd be able to take boat trips there at the weekends, but it's not actually that close. When my classmates and I managed to get organised we went on trips to Stockholm, but otherwise we mostly hung out in Visby.

When I moved to Gothenburg, I was already used to living in Sweden. I was able to speak and understand

Swedish much better than before, and I'd started to feel at home in Sweden. I've always loved travelling and discovering new cultures. When I had the opportunity to do exchange studies as part of my bachelor's degree, I jumped at the chance. I wanted to try living outside Europe, so I applied to many of the non-European universities that the University of Gothenburg has partnerships with. In the end, I was accepted by Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea.

When you live so far from your home country, you're forced to think about your identity. In South Korea, I met many international students who were curious about my background. When we talked about our home countries, I found that my stories were more often about life in Sweden than life in Finland. I'll always see myself as Finnish, but I think my connection to Finland has started to loosen. In Asia, I felt European first and foremost.

Being an EU citizen is a real privilege. It was just a case of coming to Sweden – no specific procedures were required for settling in Sweden, other than being able to prove that I was studying or had a job. It's an opportunity that everyone should take advantage of. Not everyone can move as freely around Europe, even if they wanted to.

There's a wealth of different nationalities in Sweden. Today, partly thanks to various social media platforms such as Facebook, we're in a better position to communicate and understand each other than ever before. By being able to meet on the same platforms, our interactions enrich our cultures.

Sweden should take advantage of the opportunities that migration offers. We must give everyone a chance, and not have prejudices about each other. Understanding other people's perspectives teaches us about ourselves. We all need to stand together.

Although I was happy when I moved from Finland and had great expectations, I was positively surprised that I felt so at home in Sweden. I've never felt homesick, and I've learnt to adapt to wherever I am. My life has been enriched by all the people I've met from different countries, and I now have friends that I never thought I would have.

I've previously been strict with myself when it comes to

the language, and I've worried that I won't get a job because my spoken Swedish isn't perfect. My friends have helped me to proofread job applications, and have encouraged me not to worry too much. I'm very grateful for their support, as I've just got a job as a consultant at a communications agency.

It's exciting to think about what the future has to offer. Everything is so open, and there are many opportunities. My plan is to continue studying this spring and to get my bachelor's degree in media and communication studies. I've also applied for master's courses, both in Sweden and abroad. Later on, I hope to get a job as a strategist at a large business. But my sister, who also loves travelling, has spoken about her dream of moving to Australia and how much fun it would be to live in the same town again. We're very close to each other, but we'll have to see how things turn out.

I think the media is very focused on the refugee crisis. People choose to move for very different reasons, but there's no mention at all of study migration to Sweden, for example. It would be good if the media could highlight the reality of the situation more, and show migration's positive aspects.

The public debate feels extremely politically correct, with people making cautious statements. If the debate was more relaxed and allowed everyone to express their opinions, the arguments could lead to a better society. ■



Hewan, age 28

1987–2006 Birth and childhood, Asmara, Eritrea
2006–2014 Displaced, Sudan
2014– Need for protection, Härjedalen and Stockholm, Sweden

“THE ONLY WEAPON THAT CAN FIGHT THE EVIL IN THE WORLD IS LOVE.”

When I see someone from the older generation of Eritreans wearing their traditional clothing, I miss my home country. I moved from Eritrea at the age of 17 to avoid being sent to the Sawa military camp. I refused to carry out the compulsory military service. The future that awaits women who come to Sawa isn't a future I ever saw for myself. I would have ended up pregnant and been sent home. I would have been released from the rest of my military service and schooling, but would have been consigned to a life at home, bringing up the children and looking after the house.

My mother supported me in my decision to leave. I first went to Sudan so that I could save up some money and then continue onwards to Europe. I took various temporary jobs, and because I didn't have any papers I had to move home every three months. Every never-ending day I awoke to the sound of war, and the images of the military trucks and soldiers from home burned inside me. The burden of what I had experienced in Eritrea and what I encountered in Sudan became too much for me, but I had made up my mind to stand on my own two feet and keep moving on. The idea of travelling alone across the Mediterranean didn't scare me. I had already seen inhumanity and

experienced so much evil. What I never would have believed was that it would take so long. It took me nine years to save up enough money to pay for the journey to Europe.

Here in Sweden, there's peace and I have options. I'm happy, but when I look back on my life and my long journey, I think leaving was a big step to take. Sometimes I feel old, but I believe that you have to work hard and stay strong. I'm a Christian, and I believe in goodness. The good in your own heart can change the evil that also tries to force its way in and take its place. I don't want the world to go to my head. The only weapon that can fight the evil in the world is love. If you have room for love, nothing can break you down.

There are things I would like to do and that would make me more proud of myself, like being where I can do good and carry out humanitarian work. One day I'd also like to write in order to tell my story and affect people in a way that can change their thinking and get them to feel love for each other. I'd like to give a voice to all the women I met during my time in prison in Greece. I cried when I was released, not because I wanted to stay, but for those who were left behind and their situation. When I left there, I wished that one day I would be strong enough to speak on their behalf and to pass on what they had told me. One day I also want to write about everything I've lived through and survived. Everything that still lives on in silence inside me.

People I know from Eritrea who have been here for many years say that there's a lot of talk about all the people coming from Syria, but less talk about what's happening in Eritrea. A friend from Khartoum called me a while ago. He said it was a shame that Sweden was also closing its borders now. I didn't know what he meant, as it's hard for me to read the newspapers in Swedish and I haven't found any Swedish news channels with news in English. I asked my neighbour what the border issue was all about. He explained that in broad terms there are two camps: those who want to keep Sweden open and those who want to close the borders. Knowing why people flee and what happens along the way, it's completely incomprehensible to me that people would want to close the border. How can you



close the door on someone who's running for their life? How can you send the message that it's too dangerous to try to cross the Mediterranean and that people shouldn't waste their money trying to do it? Does anyone really believe that mothers would risk their own lives and their children's lives if there was a better alternative?

I think we should talk more about what's happening in Eritrea, for example all the kidnappings, all the mothers who are suffering and all the attacks that are carried out in prisons. We also need to talk about what awaits Eritreans and other people who are trying to get to Europe but are stuck in Libya. We need to find solutions to put an end to the inhumanity. ■



■ Saipirun, age 35

1981–1993 Birth and childhood, Mae Sot, Thailand
1999–2000 Studying, Lamphun, Thailand
2000–2004 Studying, Chiang Mai, Thailand
2004–2010 Working, Mae Sot, Thailand
2010– Ties, Gothenburg, Sweden

**“THERE’S MORE TO
THAILAND THAN JUST
THE SEX INDUSTRY.”**

I'm a Buddhist, but I went to a Catholic school to learn English. My parents were quite strict when it came to studying. During the week, I had to go straight home from school to do my homework, and the only TV I was allowed to watch was the news. I also had to study at weekends, which meant that I didn't have much time to spend with my friends. My parents had high expectations for me.

You need to be an excellent student to get into the state-financed universities in Thailand. I got good grades and got into a well-known university, where I studied agricultural economics.

When I went there, I had more freedom. I travelled, I tried new things, I spent time with friends and I joined the ladies' rugby team. My time at university was the most fun period in my life.

As part of my studies, we had to spend time on a farm up in the mountains. There were no modern tools, no fuel and no electricity. We shared our knowledge and our experience with the villagers, and worked on the farm. It was hard work. In the evenings, my body ached so much from all the work that I couldn't lie on my back. Physical labour was a good experience for me, having grown up with maids and gardeners and being used to getting looked after.

I come from a well-to-do family. My dad runs security and accounting companies, and after I'd finished my education I started working for him. I worked long days, and there were often corporate parties and customer meetings late in the evenings. That meant that I didn't have time to see my friends. By the time I'd finished for the day, they were tucked up in bed. I signed up to a website to have someone to talk to when I came home and other people were asleep. That's where I came into contact with my current partner, a Swede, and after a few months he came to visit me in Thailand. I didn't have particularly high expectations to begin with. People can pretend to be someone they aren't, but he wasn't like that. He was genuine. Honest. When he suggested that we should move to Sweden, I thought it was worth a try. If things didn't work out, I could just move back. I had a life in Thailand that I could return to.

Sometimes, other Thai women ask me to introduce them to a Swedish man. There's a big income gap in Thai-

land, and people dream of a better life. The differences in Sweden are not so great. At the same time, of course, there are also women who already have good careers in Thailand and who have a good life. Moving to Sweden means having to start from scratch with the language, friends and everything else. It's a big decision.

Since I moved to Sweden, I've changed careers. I've just completed a degree in engineering, and I've been offered a job.

When I lived in Thailand I was waited on. I was used to someone knocking on my bedroom door in the morning and asking what I wanted for breakfast, putting out newly polished shoes, making the bed and washing the car. Here, I do everything myself. And I've started to enjoy it. Life has changed for the better. Things are calmer here in Sweden. I used to think about work all the time. Here, I have more time to think about other things. I read a lot, and I enjoy cooking. At the weekend, I can spend several hours in the kitchen.

In the future, I want to progress in my career and become an expert in my field. It would also be fun to work abroad while my partner is on parental leave.

Last spring, I followed the debate about how a Swedish journalist had used the phrase "cheap bit of pussy" in an article about men who buy sex in Thailand. I thought it was a highly unprofessional way of expressing herself, and I shared my opinions on social media. I've also reacted in the past to the way women from Thailand are portrayed in the media. For example, I saw a documentary about the sex industry in Thailand that I didn't like. It only showed one side of Thailand, which means that viewers could have got the wrong impression of my country, even if what was shown was accurate in itself.

I think that other perspectives should also be shown. Why do certain women end up in the industry? How do the majority of women live in Thailand? Of course there's a sex industry, but there's also so much more to Thailand. The proportion of women who work in the sex industry compared with other areas should be highlighted. I never see Thai women portrayed in other contexts, for example as career women. That's something I'd like to see. The media could show life in other parts of Thailand. After all, there are big differences between the cities and the tourist areas. ■

Sanchari, age 30

1986–2011 Birth, childhood and studies, Kolkata, India

2014– Studying, Lund, Sweden

“MY REASON FOR CHOOSING SWEDEN WAS QUITE ROMANTIC: AN INGMAR BERGMAN FILM.”

I grew up as the only child in a middle-class family in Kolkata. It's a highly cosmopolitan city, and I don't think our life was very different to that of a middle-class family in a Swedish city. Kolkata has long been seen as India's cultural hub. Rabindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, was the first non-European to receive the prize and he came from Kolkata. The city has also been the site of popular protests – it's where the fight for freedom from British rule began.

When I think about my childhood I don't get nostalgic – I prefer life as an adult. Corporal punishment was common when I went to school. The teachers used to beat us if we hadn't prepared our school work properly. There's wasn't as much physical violence at girls' schools, but we were subjected to verbal harassment instead. Those who hadn't prepared well for the lesson were bullied by the teachers. They could force us to stand out in the school yard all day in the burning sun. My parents protested, but it didn't help. My school was managed in the English Victorian style – like something out of Charles Dickens' novel about David Copperfield. The teachers paid close attention to our appearance. Your hair had to be tied up, and your nails had to be kept short. They could harass pupils for having dark skin. My skin was deemed to be quite fair, but the teachers bullied me because of my weight instead.

There was always a pressure to be top of the class in order to avoid being bullied. I never liked that type of competition. Today, India takes a different view of corporal punishment. The Government has forbidden it, and the media takes an active position against it. But for me, my school years were traumatic.

My view of education changed when I went to college. I started to enjoy it. My late teenage years were better. I studied English and Bengali literature, and at university I did a master's degree in English literature and film studies. While studying I lived at home with my parents, which is the usual way in India. After completing my studies, I worked for a few months as an archivist at the university's department for Indian film history. The following year, I applied for research studies.

I began studying the Shahbag movement which started in Bangladesh in 2013. It started when the younger generation began protesting about war criminals from the 1970s not having been brought to justice.

It's fascinating to see young people who have never experienced genocide rallying to see that justice is done. Many of those who are part of the movement say that Bangladesh should become a secular state and no longer have a state religion.

When I came to Sweden in August 2014, I came into contact with a blogger from Bangladesh who wrote extensively about religious extremism and scientific explanations as an alternative to religious explanations. I was due to interview him when he came to Sweden, but he was brutally murdered on the street in Bangladesh. I found out via a photo on Facebook.

I'm currently researching popular movements and blogs: How asylum seekers use their right to express their opinions in a European context, and how they are supported by society. How they use social media to discuss and scrutinise the countries they have left.

My reason for choosing Sweden was quite romantic: an Ingmar Bergman film. When I was studying film studies it was compulsory to watch films every day, and so it happened that I saw “Wild Strawberries” which is partly set in Lund. I really liked the film.



I thought of Sweden as a very liberal, feministic country. I applied for an Erasmus grant, and was successful.

I was very happy and psyched up before coming here, but I was also a little nervous as I suffer when it's cold. I couldn't find a student room, so I rented a room from a lady who was very helpful. She came and met me at the airport, and showed me how various things work.

Since coming here, I've never felt homesick. I've never felt like I'm away from home. And I don't get nostalgic when I think about India. If I miss my friends, I can just call them. I've never felt as if this is a *new* life – it's just a continuation. I've met lots of new people and talked about my research. People appreciate my work, and I've received constructive criticism from my university colleagues.

Alongside my research, I also work as a native language teacher. I like the fact that children in Sweden have the right to learn their native language. It's unique, and it's also very generous.

I feel like I'm living in a society that 'looks after' my human rights. And I hope that I will stay here and get a good job within the field of migration, either at the Swedish Institute or at the university.

I haven't been particularly involved in the social debate here in Sweden.

The articles I read about foreign workers are mainly about people within the IT industry. I feel that the focus is on the private sector, and not so much on research and academia. One article that I remember well was about a man from Bangladesh who wasn't able to continue working here because the job had only been advertised on LinkedIn. So I'm always careful when looking for jobs to check that they've also been advertised via the Swedish Public Employment Service.

Living as a single woman in Sweden isn't a problem at all. Sweden is a feministic nation that defends women's rights. At the same time, life as a single person and a migrant can sometimes be lonely. You can't visit your family as often, and in this country people don't speak to strangers. Some people also assume that a woman who has migrated here alone wants to meet someone to get a residence permit. But some women might not actually want a

relationship at all. You never hear any success stories in the media about single women who have migrated. I'd like to hear more stories from single women who have come here and managed to get a job and a work permit despite the inevitable setbacks. I wish the media would give us a voice.

I also wish that there was more of a focus in the media on the world of research. For example, about researchers who – just like me – have come from a non-Western country, and what we contribute and how we've integrated into society. Above all, I'd like to hear more from social science and humanities researchers, who are often ignored by the media. I'd like to hear about how their research can contribute towards a country's development. When someone researches refugees instead of robots, for example, many people find it harder to see the benefit. You can make a career as a social science researcher – and I wish this would be shown.

It's interesting to hear about the reasons why people come and how people contribute towards society. I believe that when people like me come here to study and work in Sweden, it strengthens relationships between countries – even if we don't actually work with diplomacy. ■



Karolina, age 34

1982–2002 Birth and childhood, Stockholm, Sweden
2002–2005 Working, London, England
2005–2006 Studying, Plymouth, Devon, England
2006–2008 Studying, Edinburgh, Scotland
2008 Working, London, England
2008–2010 Ties, Melbourne, Australia
2010–2013 Ties, Brisbane, Australia
2013– Returning, Stockholm, Sweden

**“FOR THE FIRST TIME
IN MY LIFE, I FELT TRULY
AT HOME.”**

still remember the name of my first English teacher, Stefan Vertes. He showed us slides of London: Piccadilly Circus with the statue of Anteros, Leicester Square in full bloom and Trafalgar Square... Something clicked in my head – I wanted to live there! I was only 12 years old, but I fell in love with London and the English language in my very first lesson. From that day on, I also nagged my mum endlessly to take us there. By the time we finally went there, I was 16. While waiting to depart at the airport, I was so excited I couldn't stand still.

Four years later, I was back at Arlanda Airport, waiting to catch a plane to London again. This time, I felt sick with nerves. After a long period of consideration and mental preparation, I had decided to take the leap and move to London. I wanted to get away from Stockholm and everything the city reminded me of. High school had been a tough time for me. The feeling of being a bit of a misfit and sometimes being misunderstood had left its mark on me. Memories of my childhood and teenage years weighed me down like a heavy rucksack. I wanted to run away from the fears and phobias that had accumulated during my upbringing. Stepping onto that plane also felt like I was finally cutting the umbilical cord with my mother. The time had come for me to find myself outside our relationship, which was loving but complicated.

At the airport in London, I was met by the family for whom I would be working as an au pair. Their shaggy cocker spaniel had also come along. The family's warm welcome and the sudden feeling of being at home brought tears to my eyes. A few days later, I set off for Leicester Square. It was as if I had stepped right into the slide that my English teacher had shown us eight years previously. For the first time in my life, I felt truly at ease.

Life in London also made me happy. I met new people and explored the Australian party culture with my new-found Swedish au pair friends. On Sundays, things could turn wild. Dancing on the tables in flip-flops at the Walkabout pub wasn't unusual.

In January 2004, I set off with three girlfriends on an extended backpacking trip. In the taxi heading for the airport, we raised a toast to the adventure that lay ahead of us.

We spent the next six months travelling around New Zealand and Australia. We took our chances with youth hostels and got bitten by bedbugs, but the positive experiences outweighed the negative ones. I had one of the best jobs of my life at a tomato farm in Bundaberg. Rising with the sun and taking in the stillness out there in the fields gave me peace in my soul. But four weeks in, I was forced to quit as my back was suffering. I travelled onwards to Perth with a guy I had become besotted with among the tomato plants. Our paths separated, but we promised to stay in touch. My money had started to run out, but I wanted to explore Singapore. When I arrived there, I came down with severe flu. I'll never forget the unknown family who opened up their home to me. I spent almost a week in bed at their house, eating frog porridge until I was back on my feet again.

After Singapore, I flew back home to Stockholm. I felt like an Australian in my surf shorts and flip-flops – I didn't belong there anymore. It didn't feel good at all. I returned to London with the aim of getting a job in a surf shop. Everything went smoothly. Three Australians and I found a fantastic Victorian flat on the Thames. Adam, one of the guys I shared the flat with, eventually became my boyfriend. At Easter 2007, he proposed in the basement of the hotel where J.K. Rowling wrote her Harry Potter books. We got married in my dream destination, Mauritius. After completing my degree in film and photography at Edinburgh Napier University and spending a while working in London, we decided to move to Melbourne. During my first week there, I came across an article about a short film being made called *I Can Speak Swedish*, and one of the scenes would be set in IKEA in Melbourne. "It must be fate," I thought, and I contacted the production company which I then began working with.

I was 26 when our first son, Oskar, was born. Staying at home to look after children was seen as an honourable thing to do by many of the women where we lived. But putting my career on hold and going home wasn't such an obvious choice for me. In order to be closer to Adam's family and get help with babysitting, we moved to Brisbane. Shortly afterwards, the city was hit by flooding. It

then became clear to me that it wasn't only on the matter of equality that I had a different approach to many Australians. Having grown up in Sweden in the 1980s, it came naturally to me to think about sustainability and to take responsibility for how we affect the environment. But this was far from obvious to my neighbours, who couldn't understand why I bothered with recycling.

Oskar's birth and the fact that my parents were getting older served as an acute reminder that moving home should be my next step in life. So after a year of preparations, we moved to Sweden in June 2013. In Australia, I had been actively involved in several groups and networks for expat Swedes. There was a lot of negative information in these channels about how Sweden had changed. For example, they said that racism was widespread, that the quality of schooling had dropped dramatically, that people no longer talked to each other and that Stockholm had become a superficial Botox paradise. I understood that coming back wouldn't be a bed of roses, but I wanted to distance myself from all the information I'd been fed and just see with my own eyes what Sweden had become after my many years abroad.

The first time I went to a Swedish supermarket, I asked the check-out girl where I could find the crumbs of bread. After a few seconds of bewildered silence, she asked me whether I meant the breadcrumbs. I laughed and explained that I'd been living abroad for eleven years. She was curious, and we started talking. The incident also sums up what I quickly came to realise: that it's all about your own attitude. The more I smiled at people, the more they smiled back.

If you focus on the negative, that's what you'll see. For example, when I see lots of girls on the Metro with their false eyelashes, it contrasts with my impression of Sweden as a country of equality. At first glance, it's easy to judge them and ask: "Why do you want to look like a Barbie doll?" But I immediately realise that it wouldn't benefit anyone. Everything's part of a bigger social context – let's try to understand it instead. Before I moved back to Sweden, for example, I'd never heard of the phenomenon of having a breakdown. What does that mean? The question

of exhaustion and angst is something I want to explore in my forthcoming documentary.

Global uncertainty means that many expats are returning to Sweden. I think most of them miss the idea of what Sweden is, but you need to be open and see that the idea is more like a utopia. I've always celebrated Swedish traditions with my children, like eating semla buns and waffles, and celebrating midsummer and Christmas in the Swedish way. Since returning to Sweden, I've also realised that it's more important than ever before to hold on to these traditions and to pass them on to my children and the next generation.

I feel rooted in Sweden now, and our second child – Ruby – was born in April 2015. When our children are older, we might move back to Australia. For me, keeping an open mind is important – no matter what the situation or where, we'll make the best of it. And as I always say to everyone who complains about Sweden: Dare to put yourself out there, and you'll see that it opens new doors.

Within the many networks for expat Swedes, migration is often linked to rising crime in Sweden. This in turn is a reason why many Swedes don't want to move back home. For example, a family I know recently said that they would rather move back to New York because they were under the impression that crime had risen in Sweden. If you're going to voice your views and discuss these matters in open social forums, you need knowledge and facts. But these – together with analysis and source criticism – are often lacking when people spread this misinformation. People are often furious in these forums that Sweden has accepted so many refugees. They rarely talk about the benefits of cultural diversity, which is a little paradoxical. In the Australian state of Queensland, for example, many Swedes make pilgrimages to a restaurant on the Gold Coast that serves kebab pizza – a Swedish staple that was actually invented by immigrants.

In order to counter all the negative information being spread in many of these networks for expat Swedes, I started a Facebook group for Swedes who have returned home and their partners: 'Swedes back home'. The focus is on providing support, making things easier and sharing ex-

periences and tips with those who are preparing to return home, or who have returned home. We don't need more information that acts as a deterrent. Instead, we need positive examples that can encourage those who are considering returning home or actually doing it.

I worked on the final production of the award-winning documentary *Detained*, which gives a voice to asylum seekers who have been refused asylum in Sweden and who have to leave the country. After seeing it for the first time, my immediate reaction was that this film needs to get a cinema release. These are people whose voices also need to be heard, and the relationships between the staff at the detention centre and those who will be returning need to be seen.

How easy or hard is it to enter the Schengen Area? Is everyone who has come here actually entitled to cross the border, and how is this checked? These are also questions that I think deserve more attention. At the same time, there needs to be a wider discussion on how Sweden deals with these experiences and everything people from other countries bring with them when they move here. ■



Omar, age 28

1987–2012 Birth, childhood and studies Aleppo, Syria
2012– Need for protection Stockholm, Järvsö, Stockholm, Sweden

“MOVING TO STOCKHOLM WASN'T A DISASTER – IT WAS THE RIGHT DECISION.”

Hell began in 2011. At first I thought I would stay, but I didn't want to have to join the fighting groups and kill others.

Slowly but surely, everything changed. I had always hung out with other people, whatever their background. It hadn't mattered whether they were Armenian, Christian or Muslim. But suddenly it was of deadly importance.

Politics is a filthy business. It should be washed clean and influenced by philosophy. As Plato proclaimed: reality is here on the ground, not somewhere up there.

I'd only been working as a philosophy teacher for a few months when the war broke out. I'd never thought of moving to another country before, but now I had no choice but to flee.

In Turkey, people talked about Switzerland and said there were jobs there. Then I met someone who recommended Sweden. He said it was a good country.

When I was first asked if I wanted asylum in Sweden, I was terror-stricken. I thought that if you're granted asylum, that means you can never return. Would I never see my home country of Syria again?

I'd lived all my life in a city of more than two million people, but suddenly I found myself in a town with a few

thousand inhabitants, Järvsö. I lived at a kind of camp site. The day consisted of eating, drinking and going to school. Once I'd received my residence permit, I asked the municipality if they could find me a new home. I'm young, and I wanted to meet people and do things. At school, they said it would be a disaster if I moved to Stockholm, as I didn't know anyone there and I didn't have any contacts. But it didn't matter. I wanted to provide for myself and not live on hand-outs. I decided to go my own way.

To begin with, I moved from place to place. I rented a room from month to month, and for a while I was homeless. Now I have a bit more stability. I rent a room in a lady's house, and I'm employed. There's a lot that I would like to do, like teach philosophy again and stand on my own two feet, but at least I'm heading in the right direction. Moving to Stockholm wasn't a disaster – it was the right decision.

Some people spread false information. They have no idea what it means to be forced to flee from your home country. I believe that the incorrect stories that circulate make things harder for refugees. Particularly when it comes to getting help, because people can distrust someone's intentions if they believe the prejudice that is spread around. Everyone is different. The news and the media need to show that there are different people, not just 'refugees'. ■



 **Marzieh, age 28**

1988–2011 Birth and childhood, Mashhad, Iran
2011–2014 Need for protection, resettlement programme,
Strömsund, Sweden
2014– Studying, Stockholm, Sweden

**“THE POSITIVE ASPECTS
ARE OVERSHADOWED BY THE
FOCUS ON THE MIGRATION
CRISIS.”**

When I was younger, I used to wonder when my parents would return to Afghanistan. I wanted to see my unknown home country that they'd fled from when the Soviet Union invaded in the early 1980s. My father is an ethnic Hazaras, a group who have faced structural and institutional discrimination since the 19th century. While Abdur Rahman Khan was Emir from 1880 to 1901, more than 60 percent of the Hazaras were killed because of their ethnicity and their religion. Now, it's the Taliban who are continuing this 'cleansing'.

Today, I understand why my family don't want to return. I also see how difficult it would be for me as a woman to continue living in a patriarchal society. When I was 11 years old, these types of insights and questions began to occupy my thoughts. *Why should children and girls have so few opportunities in life? How does a country come to be at war? How can you be born an immigrant?* Although I grew up in Iran, I've always felt more Afghan than Iranian. There are obligations, but not rights. For example, I've only ever had a temporary residence permit. Despite the fact that I was fortunate enough to have parents who could pay for my schooling, I was always worried before each school year that the state would decide I couldn't continue to study because of my nationality.

The injustices that were such a feature of my upbringing inspired my interest in politics and human rights. Early on, I wanted to find out more about issues relating to equality, equal rights and children's rights. By always watching the news, I got a better insight into what's happening around the world and I realised that the world doesn't begin or end in the country where you live.

My life continued away from Iran: In 2011, my family and I moved from a city with nine million inhabitants to a town in northern Sweden with just 4,000 inhabitants. It was a strange feeling coming to a country with the same size population as the city I grew up in. To begin with, it was chaos and I cried a lot, but my life began again. I'd had freedom in Iran, but here I had rights. I've always wanted to feel as if my voice meant something, so I was eager to try everything. The hope of going to Stockholm and studying at the university pushed me on. My sisters and I all passed

our Swedish for Immigrants courses in five months. We went everywhere imaginable to meet people: supermarkets, the bank, the library... We weren't shy – we went right up to people and introduced ourselves. When it was Midsummer we took part in the celebrations, and people helped us to understand what we were dancing around.

I believe in helping oneself. You can't rely on anyone else to look after you and show you the way. I invited myself into various situations, and after seven months in Sweden I started working alongside a coach at the Swedish Public Employment Service. Since then, I've worked in several different places: at a pilot company providing social information for new arrivals, as a study supervisor and native language teacher at a secondary school, and as an hourly-paid employee at Strömsund Municipality's refugee reception centre. I'm currently studying on the international migration and ethnic relations programme at Södertörn University. At the same time, I'm also actively involved as the deputy chair of a students' union and as a volunteer for the Red Cross friends group. I also sing in a choir for new arrivals.

My dream is to be able to visit Afghanistan one day once the war is over, but I don't see my future there. I want to be an MEP, or maybe Prime Minister of Sweden. You don't need to have been born here or be a man to do that. I came here as a refugee, but I'm a strong person who moves forward, following the path I want to take.

There's currently a sharp focus on new arrivals, but why are the guys from Afghanistan so visible while we girls are so invisible? It seems to be the guys who automatically get to speak, but there are many girls who want to be interviewed to put their views forward. If you come from a society that brings people down instead of raising them up, it's easy for women in particular to take a step back when they think about the possible consequences after an interview has been published. It's a shame, because it's important to tackle prejudice by hearing the breadth of voices – young men and women from Afghanistan and other countries. When there's an imbalance in terms of who's seen and heard, this can reinforce prejudiced thoughts among those who come from patriarchal societies. Although Sweden is

often spoken about as a country of equality, a lot seems to be decided in a patriarchal order.

It's a good thing that migration issues are discussed extensively in the mass media. We live in what's sometimes called the Age of Migration, and it's good to draw attention to the issue of migration, but I personally prefer to learn from books, documentaries and films. In my eyes, these forms of expression convey more facts about migration and are less political. The TV, radio and newspapers often focus on the negative side of migration in order to generate awareness and encourage debate. They want more viewers and readers, but in doing so they spread a bleak picture of migration among the Swedish population. The positive aspects are overshadowed by the focus on 'the migration crisis' and questions about national security and economic problems. This can feed hate and undesirable comments on social media, the effects of which reinforce the 'us and them' divide. But for how long should someone be regarded as Afghan and not Swedish, for example? Despite having a Swedish passport, people will often be regarded as a quasi-citizen – no matter how long they've lived here. This type of structure has a negative impact on everyone in society.

I'm a good person, and I contribute towards society. Around 60 percent of new arrivals are educated, and we are all resources that lead to economic growth in Sweden. I expect politicians and the media to do more to highlight the positive effects of migration and new arrivals. ■



Nina, age 40

- 1977–1996 Birth and childhood, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1997–1998 Working, North Potomac, Maryland, USA
- 1998–1999 Working and studying, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1999–2001 Studying, North Potomac, Maryland, USA
- 2001–2003 Studying, Savannah, Georgia, USA
- 2003–2007 Working, Frederick, Maryland
- 2007–2013 Working, New Bern, North Carolina, USA
- 2013– Working, Stockholm, Sweden

“I HAD BEEN GONE FOR 15 YEARS, AND UNDERSTOOD THAT THINGS WOULD HAVE CHANGED.”

I grew up in the suburbs of Stockholm with my parents and siblings. Every year, the family went on a ski trip, and we spent the summer break at a cottage outside Stockholm. In secondary school, children from one side of the tracks mixed and mingled with the other side. Suddenly, we had classmates with a different background and skin colour than our own. For me, it was nothing out of the ordinary, but after the fact, I realise how strong the segregation was, even then. Since I have two cousins who were adopted from Ethiopia in the early 1970s, I have never reflected on things like a person's skin colour.

In secondary school, my eyes were opened to the world outside Sweden. During one summer break, I went to the USA with my aunt and visited my older cousin who was studying there. Everything was pleasant and hospitable. I remember being fascinated by everything from the food and people to the architecture, and how big it was. That's probably when my interest in moving abroad took root.

Two of my friends from secondary school had been exchange students. I was very curious to hear about their experiences. At that time, working as an au pair in the US or Australia was extremely popular with Swedish girls. It seemed to be a good way of having experiences abroad, so after secondary school, I applied for a job as an au pair.

I was 20 years old when I headed off. I was with a group of girls who were travelling at the same time, and we were picked up at the airport in New York and taken off to an au pair school. After a week-long course, we were placed around the whole country, and started working for our respective families. I was flown to Maryland, outside Washington, DC.

Once I was with my host family in North Potomac, I experienced mixed feelings. I missed home, and felt small. Thoughts whirled around my head, but the parents were welcoming and the children were wonderful. It was a real change for me, living and working in another family's home. I remember staying inside my room at first when the family would have friends and family over. But over time, I felt like more of a member of the family, and even went on holiday with them. My year as an au pair was enriching, and I grew with my experiences. I found once

again that Americans are very open, friendly and genuinely interested in getting to know others. Most are very proud of having roots in other parts of the world.

In North Potomac, I met other au pair girls from many other countries. I avoided the Swedish girls, who often kept together – I had decided that this was my chance to learn English really well, and gain new experiences. My two best friends were from Germany and England. The first time I met my friend, Claire, she talked for an hour in strong British dialect, and I didn't understand a word she said. With my new friends, there was always something going on – fun concerts, an active night life, exciting people, trips and weekend excursions.

At the end of my one-year contract in the summer of 1998, I returned home to Sweden. A sense of melancholy set in almost immediately. I went from an intensive, active life where something new was always happening, to an 8-to-5 job at a staffing company as a telephone salesperson. I had changed so much. Back home in Sweden, it felt as if time had stood still. Everyone was busy with their own lives, and Swedes are not as spontaneous as they are in other cultures. There was nobody at home that I could share my thoughts with. There was no one who really understood how it feels for those who return home to what should be familiar but really no longer is. I experienced a reverse culture shock and had a minor episode of depression. Everyone talks about how it can feel to travel, and what feelings can arise from it. But this was entirely unexpected. My poor parents, who had always supported me in every way, probably took it personally, though it clearly wasn't personal. It got a little bit better when I moved to a new flat and started to study English at the University of Stockholm. Then, something new happened, and I felt independent again.

I was still in contact with the family I'd worked for, and when they asked if I wanted to come back to America to study, I was overjoyed at the offer. I, my parents and family in the US arranged a student visa, and almost a year after I had returned to Sweden, I moved back to the US.

This time, things were a bit different. My German friend also returned to the US, and we spent a lot of time togeth-

er, but I focused mainly on studying, which led to an exam in graphical form. I stayed with the family for another year and a half. During this time, I met my current husband, and we decided that I would move in with him and switch schools so that I would study at an art school in Savannah. It was sad to move away from the family in Maryland, but at the same time, I was ready for the next step.

At university in Savannah, my boyfriend and I lived in a flat that we shared with another student, a girl from Kenya. The school had lots of international students, and I met people from South America, Asia and India, among other places.

Savannah is an incredibly beautiful city with many old colonial buildings, some of which are now campus buildings. The city is very pedestrian- and cycle friendly, and I cycled and walked to lessons. In the parks, where the trees were covered with Spanish moss and the paths are cobbled, I studied during the day. I have many good memories from Savannah, but it was also here that I first experienced racism in the USA – in both directions. My roommate told about having an African-American friend that would never set foot in certain stores in Savannah, because they were considered to be “white” stores. My roommate also heard a few comments to the effect that she “had become white” because she socialised with me. Another time, I was accused of having stolen something from a dressing room by another customer. “It was probably that white girl that was in here!” we heard them say. This made me ill at ease, and I remember being unable to understand how they could judge me based on my skin colour.

The years went by, and my husband and I moved to Maryland. After a few years, we moved to North Carolina. We lived together for eight years before marrying, which was not very popular on his side of the family. My husband’s parents both grew up in Sicily and immigrated to the US in the 1960s. Particularly my father-in-law had a more traditional view of marriage and gender divisions in the home. For me, from liberal Sweden, it was a day-to-day way of thinking that I found difficult to understand. A bit of compromise was needed over the years. When we married, I was officially welcomed into the family, even

though we had socialised and spent holidays together many times before.

When we moved to New Bern, in North Carolina, I went through my third migration process in the US. This time, it was to get a Green Card - i.e., a residence permit for living and working in the US. It was a long, painstaking and expensive process.

In North Carolina, we later had two children, and I suddenly became more Swedish. When the children were born, I ensured that our Swedish traditions would be maintained. I met a few other Swedes, even though we lived in a small city. We spent Midsummer’s Day, National Day and Lucia together. It was important that my children would know about my Swedish culture. We baked cinnamon rolls, read Alfons Åberg and sang Swedish children’s songs. Each summer, we went back to Sweden and lived in the summer cottage where I had spent summers myself; they played with their cousins and took swimming classes in a cold lake. I even took a long-distance course on bilingual children and followed discussions on various message boards and blogs. My daughter’s first words were in Swedish. It was important to me that the children spent more time with our Swedish family. I wanted us to be able to experience Swedish nature, the Swedish right to roam, safety, school lunches, and a balance between work- and family life. My husband and I had reached an agreement very early on: he would spend a few more years in his career, but afterwards, he promised that we would move to Sweden.

And suddenly, the day arrived.

At that point, I felt a stronger bond with my mother-in-law. She had lived in the US her whole adult life, far from her closest family members and friends that she had left in Sicily when she was young. She showed an understanding for my desire to go back to Sweden, and she looked forward to my husband and her grandchildren making a contact with the family in Italy. Even before the move, we began planning their first visit to Sweden, and spoke about how we would travel to Italy together and find her and my father-in-law’s childhood neighbourhood among the lemon fields.

When we came back to Stockholm in 2013, I was prepared for a culture shock. I had been gone for 15 years, and understood that things would have changed. It felt almost exotic landing at the airport in Stockholm. Our entire first year was a voyage of discovery, and things I normally would have taken for granted – like travelling by bus – were exciting! Where we lived in the US, it was usually a matter of going everywhere by car, but here, we could walk to school or use public transportation. In fact, we did not drive a single car during the first 18 months. My husband took the bus to get pizza. The children could run out and play at any time, and immediately found friends on the street.

Since the move, we have also been able to visit the family in Italy twice. And it has been very meaningful for my husband to resume contact and be able to show our children where he spent his summers when he was growing up. Sadly, my mother-in-law passed away – tragically and entirely unexpectedly – one year after our move, so she was never able to go on the trip that we had talked about.

Of course, there were difficulties too. Our daughter was six years old when we moved, and she found it hard coming here. She often missed her “real house” and wanted to move back to North Carolina. It wasn’t easy to explain to her why we couldn’t go back there. We tried to help her put her feelings into words. Teachers and after-school assistants were helpful and understanding. With time, she became less homesick, even if the homesickness does still crop up sometimes. Now everything feels good and we’re happy here in Sweden.

Before moving back to Sweden I looked for information for returning Swedes, but didn’t find much. Instead, I looked for other Swedes in the same situation and came across the “Swedes Back Home” Facebook group. I joined the group, and got involved by contributing relevant information that could make things easier for others in our situation. The group now has over a thousand members, and arranges annual meet-ups for returning families.

Living abroad is amazingly enriching, and everyone should experience it at some point in their lives. It affords an insight into other people and cultures. Not everything

is black and white. It also leads to a greater understanding of those who come to Sweden from other countries, and try to learn Swedish and understand our culture. In Sweden, we are good at helping other people, but we can be even better, particularly when it comes to integration. I look up to everyone here in Sweden who is engaged in helping new residents via friend groups, dinners and foster homes, and provide the administrative and legal help that is needed.

When we moved to Sweden four years ago, we had no problems, and the application process went smoothly and quickly. Since then, requirements have become stricter, and returning Swedes experience greater inconveniences when coming back. It takes a long time to obtain a residence permit, and the new maintenance requirements lead to anxiety and numerous questions. Often, half-Swedish families must split apart and live in different countries for a long period of time in order to meet the requirements, which is neither well-justified nor even possible in many cases.

In the Facebook group for returning Swedes, it’s mainly practical issues that are raised, such as how parental benefits work and what happens with preschool placements. There’s a need for a platform that brings all this type of information together. The Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Tax Agency should address the subject of returning Swedes, and find a better way to communicate with them. Many of us are returning to Sweden after a long time abroad, and we have many questions, but the debate is currently taking place in the wings between those who have returned. ■



Jihad, age 24

- 1991 Place of birth and childhood, Yarmouk, a refugee camp for Palestinians in Damascus, Syria
- 2013 From Egypt to Europe across the Mediterranean
- 2013 Need for protection, Malmö, Västervik, Sweden
- 2014— Studies and work, Gothenburg, Sweden

**“FILM IS THE GREATEST
TOOL WE HAVE TO DOCUMENT
THE WORLD WE LIVE IN.
FILM IS HISTORY.”**

I know what it means to have a legacy of fleeing. I grew up in the Yarmouk refugee camp with second and third generation Palestinian refugees. As a stateless person, you have no nationality, but you have your traditions as a Palestinian. You have your family, but no one who helps you. You learn early on that the only way to prove yourself is through education and using your brain. Science, politics and culture therefore played a key role in Yarmouk. Before the area was besieged, over 20 organisations were gathered in a space of around three square kilometres. Yarmouk was one of the most cultural areas in the region, and the breadth of ideologies and world views reflected the divided political currents of the Palestinian landscape. There were five different ideologies co-existing in my own home alone.

I followed the path I believe in: that we cannot wait for progress to come from outside, progress must start from the inside. After upper secondary school in the camp, I ran a project at the UN office in Damascus. The project involved training young leaders in how they can participate in social life and develop society. That was the most meaningful thing I have done and it felt like my real life started then in an instant, but this was also during the period when the fighting escalated. All of southern Damascus became a revolution area and Yarmouk ended up in the combat zone.

Around 750,000 people in Syria fled to the camp and the areas around Yarmouk over a period of a couple of months. I am proud that we managed to make space for everyone, even if it was just a mattress to sleep on. There wasn't enough food, but we survived. People can't believe that we were able to receive so many people in an area of two and a half square kilometres, but for those of us who had seen the war and know what it means to flee, we couldn't have done anything else. When you see injured people, when you live with the sound of bombs, when you see a mother blown up with her child in her arms, and when you have buried your friends, resources don't mean anything, only life means something. Life is the most sacred of all things.

I made my way to Sweden with my two brothers. The first step toward my new life came after I completed the SFI plan and got a foot in the door of the work system.

Since then, I have been involved in the situation of new arrivals in various ways, including as an ambassador for the Gothenburg Culture Administration and as a Red Cross volunteer. Last winter, I spent my evenings at the train station to help the people who were arriving. This type of initiative is important, but is partially cosmetic. What happens afterwards is more important. For a time, I lost faith in the ability of other people to do something to change all the terrible things happening in the world, but I want to continue doing what I can to make things easier for those who come here.

The refugee issue is generally portrayed as a problem for Sweden. The angle has made the situation into a major issue where your opinion on migration determines your views on other political issues as well. Those who actually have problems are those who come to Sweden to seek asylum. They have trouble finding a place to live, and also lack other factors that could provide a sense of security. It is also difficult to participate in cultural and similar contexts. It is difficult to start a new life here, which is not because of a lack of interest from asylum-seekers. Those who come to Sweden come here to live, but there is large-scale bureaucracy and a lack of understanding, which impacts their motivation to move forward with their lives. Even though the borders are open, Swedish society can be perceived as closed, as the climate here is not always welcoming.

What is the real problem in Sweden? No one talks about it, but almost everything here is based on material values. People talk about how much the introduction plan for new arrivals costs, not what I as a human being provide and contribute to this country. Economic terms are used, but only one type of cost is highlighted – not, for example, what Russia's campaign in Syria costs per day.

People always generalise, whether intentionally or not. This becomes problematic in relation to the media, because the angle becomes very one-sided. For example, there is no mention of how many people leave Sweden or other important topics that make the issue more nuanced.

The most important thing is to talk about asylum-seekers as individuals and human beings – not as statistics. There is also very little focus on success stories involving

asylum-seekers and their everyday lives in asylum housing across Sweden. It is a secluded place and few people know what it is like to live there, what day-to-day life is like and who the people are who live there. It would be helpful for everyone if the media had portrayed asylum-seekers on a more individual level instead of just as a homogenous group. The image that is spread reinforces existing prejudices.

It seems to me that the refugee issue fills approximately 70 per cent of media headlines. Headlines are inflated to attract public interest and there are many people who base their truth and their opinions solely on headlines without any critical reflection. The role of the media in migration issues not only involves how they are delivered, but also how they are received. The focus should be on showing images of what is happening for real in other parts of the world, such as in Syria. Images showing reality should be allowed to speak for themselves rather than being created from the perspective of the media or Swedish people.

The image of the three-year old Syrian boy lying dead on the beach in Turkey had enormous significance, but people continue to die in the Mediterranean on a daily basis. Our history is no longer written through history books. Future generations will learn about what happened in Syria and the rest of the world through films and video clips put out on the Internet. I am extremely grateful that what happened in Yarmouk has been partially documented and that there are people in the camp who were prepared to lose their lives to secretly pull out their phones and film what journalists were never given the opportunity to document. Film is the greatest tool we have to document the world we live in. Film is history. ■

Dean, age 43

1973–1979 Birth and childhood, Glenfinnan, Scotland
1979–1999 Studying and working, Bristol, England
1999–2011 Working, London, England
2011–2014 Working, Norrköping, Sweden
2014– Working, Stockholm, Sweden

“GOING BACK WOULD HAVE FELT LIKE A DEFEAT.”

I was born in Scotland, and grew up in a small town in the Highlands. It's so small that it hardly exists on the map, but it's become famous for its long railway viaduct that was featured in the Harry Potter films. When I was six years old, we moved to Bristol in England.

I was a creative child. I played in the school orchestra and wrote short stories when I was just four years old. Writing has always been important to me, and I initially dreamt of being a journalist, but a degree in economics felt like a more sensible choice. I studied English literature at college. Later on, I studied IT and economics at university.

When I was 23 years old, I started working for the British government. The work involved combating the illegal trade in endangered animals. It was an interesting job that involved travelling all over the world.

Five years later, I moved to London. I went from having my own flat to sharing a house with 15 people. It was probably the best time of my life. I had good friends and a well-paid job. I worked in the public sector for the first few years, and then I got a job at Tasco, a private-sector company, as head of e-commerce. Going from the public sector to a job within industry was something of a shock. Everything had to be done yesterday. And I was responsible for a budget that was so big it could hardly fit on the display of a pocket calculator.



After a while, I got a job offer to work in Norrköping for six months. But I ended up staying there for three years. I loved the country, and I wanted to stay to challenge myself. I wanted to learn the language, learn to drive on the other side of the road and become part of Swedish society. Going back would have felt like a defeat.

After my time in Norrköping, I got a job in Stockholm and moved there. The difference between the two cities is amazing! In Norrköping, I had lots of friends. In Stockholm, you need to be admitted to an inner circle of friends before being invited into someone's home – it's much harder to make friends here. If I'd moved to Stockholm straight away, I probably wouldn't still be in Sweden today. Stockholm is just like any other capital, and you can't experience a country just by visiting the capital. If you go to London, you haven't seen England – you've just been to the capital.

I've travelled extensively around Sweden and discovered its hidden beauty! I love visiting Skåne and Norrland, and I've bought a summer cottage on the island of Öland. I've seen more of Sweden than my Swedish friends have, and I'm almost more Swedish than they are.

One thing I love about this country is the Swedish winters. I love the cold and the fact that it's light for so few hours during the day. The contrasts fascinate me.

When I first moved to Sweden, I found some things to be very static. Maybe it's because I moved to a smaller town – from London to Norrköping – but not much that was new seemed to happen. Rather, it was like living the same year over and over again. When I lived in London, different things were always happening such as new festivals or arts events being organised. But in Norrköping, the same things happened every year: fireworks at the end of the summer, a bonfire on Walpurgis Night... When I came here and saw that the shops were closed even though it didn't seem particularly late to me, I wondered at first if it was a public holiday. But no – it was just a regular Monday. Sweden is much more old-fashioned when it comes to opening hours. In the UK, shops are open pretty much all the time. I miss the convenience.

Many people see Sweden as a wonderful country where life is a bed of roses. But it's actually tougher than many people believe. Everyone I know who has moved here has

had to fight for things and challenge themselves in completely different ways compared to what they had to do in their home countries. Even though many outsiders see Sweden as a utopia, I don't think the country makes an effort to market itself. The attitude is more a case of "Visit us if you like, but if you don't want to, that's fine".

I've made my choice and I won't leave Sweden – not ever. England will always be my home, but when I go back there I see so much negativity in the form of racism and stereotypical attitudes. Sweden is a much more open-minded country.

I now live with my girlfriend, who's a manager at the Kicks cosmetics chain. In my spare time I write a lot of poems, including for christenings, weddings and funerals. The next big step in life will be to buy our own home.

I made a conscious choice to move here. I didn't roam across Europe under terrible conditions. But I'm also a migrant. There are some very fixed impressions of migrants from various parts of the world. For example, that those who come from Romania are beggars. But I have colleagues from Romania.

In autumn 2015, when large numbers of asylum seekers came to Sweden, I found that society became extremely polarised. There was the Refugees Welcome movement on one side, and the right-wing populists on the other side who didn't want immigrants here. There was no middle ground. I believe that a much more open debate about migration is needed in Sweden today. We don't talk about how much impact migration has on society, and what it means when there are more pupils in schools, more patients for doctors to treat... It's mostly people who have come from other countries themselves who talk about these issues. Compared with England, I find that people talk less about migration in Sweden. I believe that the media has made a conscious choice not to write about things that are too controversial.

The discussion on migration should deal more with integration. In order to be successful, people need to learn from each other. I went to school with Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Rastafarians. I learnt to respect people from an early age, and I believe this is something people need to learn when they're young. ■



Sawi, age 30

1985–2003 Birth, childhood and studies, Ismailia, Egypt
2004–2013 Working, Hurghada, Egypt
2013 Ties, Malmö, Sweden
2014– Working, Norrköping, Sweden

“I WAS A GENTLEMAN IN EGYPT, AND THAT’S WHAT I WANT TO BE HERE, TOO: SOMEONE WHO RESPECTS OTHERS AND IS RESPECTED HIMSELF.”

My parents loved each other, which is something I saw throughout my childhood. They both worked as English teachers. In Egypt, most women are housewives and when I visited friends I saw that their dads had all the responsibility and all the power. In my family, things were different.

I got excellent grades at school and could have chosen to study at any faculty, but the decision wasn’t mine alone. My uncle worked in the tourist industry in Hurghada, and my dad and my aunt thought I should follow in his footsteps. I wasn’t happy with their choice. I had top grades and wanted to go to the best university, but I started studying tourism anyway.

After having studied at university for a couple of years, my uncle arranged for me to come for an interview for a job as a tour guide in Hurghada. Before I went, my dad told me to make him proud, but because my English wasn’t good enough I didn’t get the job. My dad and my uncle were disappointed, and I felt that I had to learn English. So I started reading song lyrics and listening to English songs, and I forced my dad to buy a satellite dish so I could watch the BBC. My uncle didn’t dare to arrange another interview for me, but I went to Hurghada of my own accord. This time, things went better. The moment that I got the job was the greatest moment of my life. After the interview, I had to put on my uniform straight away and proudly went to see my uncle. I’ll never forget how proud he was.

I continued to study at university, and I worked during the summer holidays. I loved my work. I made many friends from different countries who helped me to understand other cultures.

In 2011, the revolution came to Egypt. My boss called to say that it was no longer safe to stay in the country. We had to evacuate all the tourists, and after three days the streets were empty. Two days before President Mubarak fell, I went home to my family. I was terrified. Just a week earlier, I’d been walking round in my shorts and flip-flops. Now I sat with my suitcase pressed tight against me, hearing the sound of gunshots as I thought about my family.

When the tourists began to return, I went straight back to Hurghada. One evening I was sitting at a bar when

some guys started making fun of a drunk girl. Suddenly another girl stormed in, told the guys off and rescued the girl. In my eyes she was an angel. She'd done what I wished I'd done. Her name was Louise, a Swede who worked at a travel agency. And it was because of her that I moved here.

Before I began Swedish for Immigrants classes, Louise encouraged me to study Swedish myself for eight hours every day. I sat and sang along to children's songs. In the evenings, we practised together. The feeling was the same as when I learnt English and didn't want to disappoint my dad. Now it was Louise whom I wanted to make proud.

I passed my Swedish for Immigrants course in three months. If you pass it in under eight months, you get a bonus of 12,000 kronor. I've met people who've been in Sweden for several years but can't speak the language. I don't want to be like that. I was a gentleman in Egypt, and that's what I want to be here, too: someone who respects others and is respected himself, who works, smiles at others and takes responsibility.

I'm now working at a newly opened hotel in Norrköping. In the future, I'd like a large family. I want to work hard and make friends. The biggest problem I still have after two and a half years is not having any friends. One disadvantage with Sweden is that people are quite reserved. It's hard to become friends with someone if you haven't gone to the same school as them or worked with them for several years. I don't have anyone I can confide in. In Egypt, I had lots of close friends.

You read that so many asylum seekers are coming every week and that various countries are affected by war, but it doesn't feel as if people care much about the people who come. People don't even have relationships with their own neighbours. They sit on the same bus and see each other at the supermarket, but they don't have any other contact. Those of us who have moved here have plenty of stories to tell. If you take a few minutes to ask us about our experiences, you can have interesting conversations. Dare to do it!

I think it would be good if there were more projects to help people learn more about those who have actually moved here. Have they become part of society? If not, what can we do about it?

Documentaries and biographies can teach us about other people's lives. They should make a documentary about two people who have met and find out how things went for them. What dreams did they have about life in Sweden? How did things turn out in reality? It might be interesting for others to hear what people think before they come here. They could also have a page in the newspaper where new inhabitants can tell their stories, with someone different every week. New stories are always fascinating! ■

Caitlyn, age 24

1992–2010 Birth and childhood, Vancouver, Canada
2010–2012 Studying, Ottawa, Canada
2012–2013 Studying, Växjö, Sweden
2013–2014 Studying, Ottawa, Canada
2015– Ties, Gothenburg, Sweden

“I KNEW THAT EQUALITY WAS IMPORTANT IN SWEDEN, AND THAT I WOULD HAVE TO PAY MY SHARE ON A DATE.”

My dad was one of the many thousands who emigrated from Hong Kong in the 1970s. Like many others, he saw Canada as a place for new opportunities and a brighter future. He also found love there. It was in Vancouver that he met my Canadian mother, but they split up when I was very young. That had a big impact on the rest of my life. The time I spent with my mum gave me a ‘normal’ Canadian everyday life, but when I was with my dad and his relatives I had to spend my time doing typically Chinese things instead. For example, every Saturday we went for a family dinner at my grandmother’s. The food was prepared and served in the traditional Chinese way, with the whole table filled with various small dishes that everyone tucked in to. Dim sum, as it’s called in Cantonese, means “touch the heart”, and it’s just as much about *what* you eat as it is about *how* you eat.

My Chinese origins characterised much of my child-

hood. My school friends regarded me as a white girl, but I still wasn’t ‘one of them’. It was only later on that I came to appreciate my dual nationality, and I now feel a sense of pride when I can tell whether Chinese food is authentic, for example. If I see chicken balls on the menu, I know it’s not a restaurant worth visiting...

My Chinese background also helped me to realise early on that there’s a world beyond Vancouver where I grew up. As my dad works for an airline, I also had the benefit of being able to travel cheaply and thereby discover many new cities and countries. Until I turn 25, I only need to pay the flight taxes. The idea of having to start paying the full price for plane tickets soon is almost traumatic...

My first real move was to the Canadian capital, Ottawa. I wanted to get away from my family and be able to do exactly what I wanted. The freedom of standing on my own two feet and the feeling that anything was possible whetted my appetite. So during my third year at university in Ottawa, I took the opportunity to do part of my studies abroad. The actual location was less important – I was ready to try anything at all. My choice came down to three universities that offered a year of exchange studies: Sweden, Barbados and Senegal. From cold to hot. I got my first choice: a master’s programme in peace and development work at Linnaeus University in Växjö. I didn’t know much about Sweden, other than that equality is important, that I would have to pay my share on a date, that many Swedes are tall and blue-eyed, and that IKEA and Abba are both Swedish phenomena. It’s often said that the Nordic countries provide the most development aid, so I was particularly interested in being able to get a Swedish perspective on development issues.

After my studies in Växjö, I couldn’t see how anything positive could come out of me getting involved in peace and development work. To me, it seemed like a new form of colonialism. What I’d learned made me cynical about the whole world order and global structures. I found it difficult and sad coming to terms with the fact that what I had previously believed in and wanted to work with was no longer relevant. What had I actually devoted four years of studying to? What would I do with the knowledge I’d



gained? I'd become disillusioned, and I felt like a hypocrite. But after my exchange year in Växjö and having returned home to Ottawa, I still moved back to Sweden to live with my boyfriend whom I'd met during my studies. To begin with, I didn't have a plan or a sense of direction. I went from job to job, including as a substitute teacher and a waitress. So one day a Canadian couple came into the restaurant, which led to my current job as a writer for the monthly magazine Swedish Press. It gives Swedes in North America a window onto what's happening in Sweden, and the digital edition also reaches others with an interest in Sweden around the world. I focus on integration issues, which suits me very well. The international context is too broad and abstract. What I'm doing now is based on a local context, which is concrete, interesting and above all, it feels meaningful.

On a personal level, integration – such as finding a social context and good friends – has been a challenge. Although I've been in Sweden for more than two years, I don't actually have any real Swedish friends – they're all from other countries. It's strange, because I'm an outgoing person and I'm fun to be around, but that says a lot about how hard it is to integrate here in Sweden. I sometimes think about how miserable it would be if I had children and was forced to stay at home alone in the flat, with only my boyfriend for company. In any case, I'll get out and travel during the next few months – I need to make the most of my remaining discounted flights before my 25th birthday! Then I'll take stock and think about what I actually want to do in future. Hopefully I'll decide to move back to Gothenburg and do a master's degree there, and with any luck I'll regain my motivation.

The news rarely focuses on student migration, only on refugees. It would be interesting if student organisations helped Swedes to understand what taking part in an exchange programme involves. That might encourage more people here to study abroad for part of their studies. I think it's important to talk about these issues. For example, what are the benefits of student migration to Sweden? I don't think many people know what the actual situation is, as there are so many other issues within migration that

get more attention. Exchange students should also discuss things more with each other. For example, what do they think about Swedish education? I don't feel that the universities ask for international students' views and opinions, which is a shame. It would be in the universities' interests to inform the public about why international students choose to study at their institutions and what the positive effects can be. ■



Louisiana, age 31

**“MIGRANTS WITH
DISABILITIES DON’T HAVE
A VOICE IN SWEDEN.”**

1984 Birth, Sydney, Australia
1984–1997 Childhood and studies, Penrith, Australia
1997–2013 Childhood and studies, Blue Mountains, Australia
2013– Ties, Västerhaninge, Sweden

I came to a children's home in the Blue Mountains when I was 12 years old. I moved away from there at the age of 17, and eventually started to study music in Sydney. I play several instruments, particularly the harp and the violin. I sang in choirs, wrote songs for my band Griffchen and volunteered at a radio station that played world music. But in the end I grew tired of not being able to find a proper job, so I started studying in order to work with young people instead.

I met my husband Johan on an international dating site. He sent me a simple message. "This is me", he wrote. "I'm a 47-year-old divorced man living on an island near Norrtälje with my cat." He seemed very honest.

I didn't tell him about the problem with my eyes for a while. When I did explain, his reaction made me even more interested. He was extremely patient and understanding. And above all, he seemed to like me!

Time passed and we talked often, sometimes for eight hours a day. I'd already planned a trip to Norway, and I suggested visiting Sweden as well. When we met, it was as if we'd known each other forever.

We chose to live in Sweden, as it would be best for the family we wanted to have.

But moving here was a lengthy process. Things became complicated when I couldn't tell the Swedish Migration Agency where my mother is, and I don't know whether I have any siblings. Eventually I had to call social services in Australia to ask them to help me prove that I had been taken into care as a child.

I was glad to be able to leave my old life behind me and start a new life in Sweden. I prepared in advance by taking Swedish lessons, and I made contact with Swedes both in Australia and online. Via Facebook and other websites, I contacted visually impaired Swedes who could tell me what it's like living with a visual impairment in Sweden.

Coming here involved a major adjustment. I moved from somewhere I knew like the back of my hand. When I came here, I had to learn everything all over again.

And then there are other things that are good. The eye-sight clinic has been absolutely invaluable. We've also had

an assistant for 40 hours a month, who can help me take my daughter out to the park or for walks.

I'm currently studying Swedish for Immigrants and looking for work. If I could, I'd like to work with music full-time. I love Swedish music, and I learnt Swedish by listening to Kent. I also like First Aid Kit and Weeping Willows. And I love Melodifestivalen and Eurovision! I even submitted a contribution to Melodifestivalen called *Candles*, but it wasn't accepted.

I'd really like a job, at least part-time. That's what my family needs. In Australia, I trained as a social worker and wanted to work with young people, but I can't use my training here in Sweden.

Even if I don't find a job, I have a lot here. I never could have been a parent in Australia. Here, I've met a man with an open outlook. I have a daughter. With the help of society, I can look after my family. I long to become a Swedish citizen. Australia never made me feel so at home.

Migrants with disabilities aren't particularly visible in Sweden. It's asylum seekers who are most visible.

In a way, it can be hard here for people with disabilities, and the struggle doesn't attract much attention. There's not much help available for migrants with disabilities. No one told me there's a special Swedish for Immigrants school or support from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. And there's no information about mobility services in English – they have to be booked in Swedish. It wasn't a problem for me as I knew Swedish, but what if I hadn't?

I'd like there to be more of a focus on people with disabilities in general. We don't really have a voice in society. ■



Kenia, age 32

1984 Birth, Santa Clara, Cuba
1984–1999 Childhood, Güira de Melena, Cuba
1999–2002 Childhood, San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba
2002–2010 Studying and working, Havana, Cuba
2010– Ties, Karlstad, Sweden

**“I DO THINK IT’S HARD
GETTING TO KNOW PEOPLE.”**

Both my parents are dentists, and they worked at a clinic in the little town near Havana where I grew up. I often used to visit them there as a child. Many years later, when I first tasted mulled wine in Sweden, the smell reminded me of the disinfectant that my mum and the nurse used. I think it’s the smell of cloves... I like mulled wine now, but it took me two or three years.

We lived in an apartment in Güira de Melena. I didn’t have any brothers or sisters, but two of my cousins who lived in a nearby town are like sisters to me. I used to spend a lot of time with them in the summers.

When I was six years old, I started borrowing books from the library, even though I wasn’t supposed to as the minimum age was eight. I read a lot during my childhood, and I was fascinated by maths and by school in general. When the time came to attend upper secondary school, I applied to a school that specialised in science, and was accepted.

At that time, virtually all upper secondary schools in Cuba were boarding schools. It was a fun but challenging time in my life. I learnt a lot, both academically and in terms of relationships with my friends. To begin with, it was a little hard being away from my parents at the age of 15. But that was just the way things were, and I was happy to have got into the school.

They placed high demands on us pupils. In order to pass, you needed to score 85 percent in the tests otherwise you weren’t allowed to continue. That meant that we had to study very hard. In Sweden, the attitude seems to be that everyone has to pass and progress, but in Cuba you might have to re-do a year if you don’t pass.

It was during my time at upper secondary school that I first met Erik, my husband. A socialist organisation in Norrbotten, in the far north of Sweden, had sponsored a class trip to Cuba so that the pupils could learn Spanish and find out more about Cuban culture. We spent a lot of time together, and when he returned to Sweden we started writing to each other. We stayed in touch for a couple of years, but eventually we lost contact. The Cuban postal service is terrible, and the letters didn’t arrive.

After upper secondary school, I studied at university in

Havana where I took a master's degree in computer science. The student accommodation was centrally located in Havana, in a 20-storey building right next to the water. The rent was paid by the state. Coming to the big city from a small town was exciting. The course was tough – half the students didn't complete it, but my friends and I still had time to hang out, go to the cinema and eat a lot of ice cream in the sweltering heat. During that time, Erik also resumed our contact.

Most of those who study in Havana want to stay in the city after graduating as that's where most of the job opportunities are. But it's not always as simple as that. In Cuba, once you've finished your education the aim is that you should go back to where you came from as Havana is so overpopulated. But I couldn't imagine going back to my old town. Despite the fact that it had 36,000 inhabitants and would be classed as a city in Sweden, it was only a town by Cuban standards. And they don't invest anything in these towns. In order to stay in Havana, I had to rent an apartment on the black market.

Education is free in Cuba, but after your studies you have to pay the state back through a period of work. Under 'servicio social', as it's called, you don't get to choose your workplace and you earn less than the normal industry salary. And you also weren't allowed to leave the country during that time – I don't know if that's still the case.

I did my social service at a company that works with IT security. I enjoyed it and had good internet access, which wasn't common. The state wanted to limit information so that people wouldn't have access to anything other than state news sources.

Thanks to my good internet access, Erik and I were able to keep chatting with each other. I thought that getting to know someone by written word was something that only happened in films. But we were able to learn to identify emotions via instant message, and to understand whether the other one was tired or angry, depending on whether we used exclamation marks or emojis.

When Erik had finished studying to become a dentist, he visited me and we became a couple. He stayed for two weeks, and six months later he came back. We travelled

around the country, visited my relatives and hung out on one of Cuba's nicest beaches. But we also spent time at my place, playing backgammon and cooking. We wanted to try living together.

We started discussing our options for the future. As Erik is a dentist, he wouldn't have been able to get a job in Cuba. The level of dental care and healthcare is extremely high, and foreign qualifications often aren't recognised. With my IT training, we thought it would be easier for me to move to Sweden – and so we did. As I needed to apply for a permit to leave Cuba, we decided that I should move to Sweden straight away without having visited the country first.

When I came to Sweden, it was November. It was dark and cold. People have asked me what that initial period was like, but I don't actually know as I lived in my own bubble. I remember being excited – I was looking forward to being with Erik.

I got a job quickly, and within my industry. I never had to take a less qualified job just to earn money. Because Erik had a steady income, I never felt the pressure to do that. After a month, I started sending my CV to various employers. I went door-to-door to different companies, and was invited to a couple of interviews. Support from the Swedish Public Employment Service meant that it was cheap for a company to employ me.

I now work for another company as an IT consultant, and I'm very happy there. Sweden is my home now, and almost four years ago we had a daughter. We have a house, and my husband has opened a clinic. My biggest worry is what I'll do if my parents fall ill – they're starting to get old, and I'm their only child.

When I moved here, I started a blog in Spanish about Sweden: 'Suecia, mitos y realidad'. Through my blog, I've made contact with people from Spanish-speaking countries who want to move here. Sweden has an international reputation as a good country to live in, and lots of people think they'll be better off here than in their home country. I get asked whether it's hard to get to know people and find work. I do think it's hard getting to know people. Even if you have really nice colleagues, the relationship stops at

work – you don't see each other at weekends, even if you're the same age and have a similar living situation.

Asylum immigration is the biggest issue right now. I don't think it's good that this form of migration gets so much attention, as there are also other aspects. But lots of people are worried about asylum immigration, so I can understand why it's what people talk about most. However, I wish the media would also report on what life is like for people who've come here for other reasons. Lots of people are happy here, and are doing well. Highlight good examples! Many immigrants contribute towards society and succeed, but you never read about them.

I think integration should be highlighted, rather than the question of how many people we accept. It would be more interesting to ask what happens to those who are here, and what the authorities are doing to ensure that people integrate and find jobs. ■



Igor, age 29

1987–2010 Birth and childhood, Lisbon, Portugal
2010 Studying, Helsinki, Finland
2010–2013 Working, Madrid, Spain
2013– Working, Nyköping, Sweden

**“THERE’S NEVER BEEN A
BETTER TIME IN HISTORY
THAN TODAY.”**

I lived an active student life before I moved from Portugal. I ran a lot, and I played the guitar. For a while, I studied classical music at the National Conservatory of Lisbon. I also played for a traditional student band in Portugal, called Tuna. We did a lot of gigs, but it didn't last long as the music and all the partying got in the way of my studies. It was a fun time, and my memories from that period make me happy.

I studied for four years as an orthopaedic technician, with a work placement in my final year. In 2010, I had the opportunity to do my dissertation in Helsinki through the Erasmus exchange programme. I accepted the offer immediately. Finland was fascinating. There were a lot of differences compared to Portugal. Drinking milk with your food is common there, which surprised me. Can you really do that?

After my studies, I got a job offer as an orthopaedic technician at a large orthopaedics company in Madrid. It was a good position, so I took it. As there are relatively few orthopaedic technicians in Spain, I had the chance to travel to places like Bilbao and Granada to meet patients. I learnt a lot more about Spanish culture, and I feel that I developed as a person as a result.

It was love that eventually led me to move to Sweden. My girlfriend at that time was working in Portugal while I was in Spain, so I commuted a lot between the two countries. To resolve the situation, we tried to find a place where we could both live and work together. She suggested Sweden, and my positive experiences of Finland and the Nordic culture made it sound like a good alternative. There are lots of job opportunities for orthopaedic technicians in Sweden, and I got a job straight away. But she stayed in Portugal, and after a lengthy long-distance relationship we decided to break up.

I didn't have particularly high expectations when I came to Sweden. I had hoped that the job would be good and give me the opportunity to develop professionally. The language was a challenge that I looked forward to mastering, but I was mostly concerned about how my relationship with my girlfriend would go.

Things were a little tricky for me when I arrived in

Nyköping. Ideally, the Bologna Process – an arrangement for educational cooperation within the EU – should have made it easier for me to be employed in Sweden. But it took a full year for me to get my authorisation to work as an orthopaedic technician. I think I must have been the first orthopaedist from Portugal, so it was a bit of an experiment. Now I'm trying to help three Portuguese colleagues who will also be moving to Sweden to arrange their authorisations.

I'm currently working a lot. I have two jobs – one with the county council and the other with a business. I also teach orthopaedics online via an educational organisation called Human Study. In my free time I try to run and play the guitar, but unfortunately I don't get the chance to do either as often as I'd like. I've promised myself to work less once I turn 30.

Scandinavians have a reputation for being a little cold, but I don't think that's true. It's hard to generalise, as there are always exceptions. I appreciate the fact that Swedes generally respect people, and that there's a high degree of tolerance. For example, nurses can have tattoos and pink hair and still be treated with respect. Swedes are also good at giving praise.

I never noticed any racism in Portugal – there, I was a white man. But here in Sweden I'm not as white, and I feel like a migrant. So in some ways I can relate to other foreigners who might have experienced racism.

In Sweden, I miss the sense of mysteriousness that you might find in Latin countries like Portugal. Here, I just experience things 'as they are'. Things feel more practical here. I miss the cultural tales and the magic, the stories behind everyday phrases. I think that the word 'lagom' sums up Swedish culture. It's fantastic that the concept exists and that you can't really translate the word into other languages. Portugal has a similar word – 'saudade' – which has to do with longing, and that in turn sums up Portuguese culture. Lots of traditional Portuguese ballads are about that feeling, and they can come across as depressing, but they're also enchanting.

I met my partner here in Sweden, and she's taken courses to learn Portuguese. It's important for both of us that we

learn each other's languages so we can communicate with each other's families.

I'll be moving to Stockholm soon to start my new job as a clinic manager at Söder Hospital's orthopaedics department. There, I hope to develop my professional skills. Later on, I plan to continue my studies and do a master's and a PhD in orthopaedics. But right now I'm happy in Sweden and I'm prioritising work over studies. One day I'll move back to Portugal, but I don't have any clear plan at the moment.

I'm a philanthropist. I believe that people are good, and that the world will improve. There's never been a better time in history than today. Things are so good that we're surprised when something negative happens. That's why the headlines are the way they are. My experience is that there's a lack of facts in the reports – real facts that put the events into context. It seems that the media is trying to outrage readers rather than informing them. If the media had illustrated events from a broader perspective, I think there would be more empathy for asylum seekers. Maybe it would also lead people to take an interest in the reasons why various situations arise. For example, what drives people to commit crimes? I don't think crime has anything to do with ethnicity – it's more about economic vulnerability. Unfortunately, as I see it, migrants are at a greater risk of experiencing financial difficulties. The Government needs to give people the tools they need to cope. It's also important to raise the issue of work opportunities. The more people who have jobs, the more people who can pay tax and thus contribute towards a better society. For example, if the process for obtaining professional authorisation were simplified, migrants could start working faster. ■

Perwin, age 19

1996–2001 Birth and childhood, Aleppo, Syria
2002–2009 Studying, Rajo, Syria
2009–2011 Resident, Aleppo and Rajo
2011–2012 Displaced, Turkey
2012– Need for protection, Borgholm, Sweden

“SO ONE DAY I SAID TO MYSELF: NOW YOU NEED TO START LIVING YOUR LIFE. I REALISED THAT I COULDN'T GO BACK.”

In a single moment, we decided to leave our home. We're going now. No more details. I didn't know where we were going, or exactly why. We travelled to Turkey.

And I left my heart in Syria.

I had everything. There was no freedom, but we lived the way we wanted to. They called me the leader, because I brought the neighbours to the place we called “behind the house”. A few minutes before it was time, I used to run up the hill and shout out loud: “It begins at five o'clock!” I had power! From the afternoon until late evening, we all spent time together. Neighbours, family, friends and babies. We played music, games and football. And volleyball, too. We made nets by plaiting plastic threads and winding them around sticks. We drank coffee and tea, and we had picnics. All kinds of different foods. Spaghetti and figs straight from the tree, if I could choose. The sweetness is indescribable... Life was at its best “behind the house”.

But we went from freedom to war. It was summer when



we left Syria and the depths of winter here in Sweden when we arrived in December 2012. I was absolutely freezing, and I'd never even heard of a country called Sweden. At home, I had the foundations for everything. Here, I had nothing. When you're forced to start again in a new country with a new language, you can't even start from the foundations – you have to start from scratch again.

I cried every day in the beginning. All my thought began with “Why?” So one day I said to myself: Now you need to start living your life. I realised that I couldn't go back.

Everything changed with school and learning the language. When I realised that you won't get anywhere by being shy, things started to happen. Going to school gives you a future and that means everything. After all, without a future what's the point of living?

Now I have freedom. A different type of freedom. The freedom we all gain is the greatest: To be able to think what you want.

Some things haven't changed. For example, I still want to be an engineer. In Syria, I used to help my dad with three-dimensional drawings. He's a welder. There, the same job that he does here paid twice as much. Two weeks there were the equivalent of a whole month's wages here.

Now, my focus is on completing my upper secondary school studies. But my dream is that the war will end and I can return. Then I could help to rebuild the cities and the buildings.

I also have another dream: To stand on a stage and sing in front of a large audience.

I don't read as many newspapers as before. It became too much for my brain and my health. I didn't want to live anymore. When I hear the news, I almost start crying. The Syrian media focuses on the number of children dying, but there no one makes a big deal of it. Here, the pictures aren't of children dying in Syria. Instead, they show dead children being dragged from the Mediterranean. They shouldn't show these pictures at all – they terrify children.

Why would they kill young children? Children should be thinking about their school work, but today children

in Syria learn about different weapons. When they hear a bomb or artillery fire, they know the name of the weapon that the ammunition is coming from. This generation will either flee or be killed. Many people are also starving in Syria, as the war has made food extremely expensive. You don't see much about that here. And you don't see about the violence women are subjected to. We talk about five lost generations...

When I read about people setting fire to asylum accommodation, I wonder who would do that and why. Do they want to start a war here, too?

It means a lot when a country welcomes you. The focus should be on the fact that people who move here want to help the government to improve things, not contribute towards destruction, but 'refugees' are often singled out and grouped together. Since the Charlie Hebdo attack in France, things have been worse.

Living in asylum accommodation was tough for me. We lived in a cottage with four beds. Journalists came to write about the accommodation, but they only talked to the people in charge. They didn't come to talk to us or to hear how things were for us. Weren't our experiences as asylum seekers interesting enough?

Someone should write a biography of a person who has fled from Syria, showing their life before and after. Or maybe a stage play on the same theme. That could help and inspire others to see and understand what it means to start all over again. ■

■ Claes, age 53

1963	Birth, Limhamn, Sweden
1963–1966	Childhood, Melbourne, Australia
1966–1969	Childhood, Gothenburg, Sweden
1969–1974	Childhood, Mumbai, India
1974–1975	Studying, Kodaikanal, India
1975–1982	Childhood, Gothenburg, Sweden
1982–1983	Military service, Naval bases in Sweden and at sea
1983–1985	Studying, Gothenburg, Sweden
1985–1986	Travelling around the world
1987–1988	Working, Hong Kong, China
1988–1989	Studying, Gothenburg, Sweden
1990–1991	Working, Lausanne, Switzerland
1991–1995	Working, Budapest, Hungary
1995–1997	Working, Lausanne, Switzerland
1997–1998	Working, Toronto, Canada
1999–2000	Working, Vancouver, Canada
2000–2002	Working, Gothenburg, Sweden
2002–2013	Working, Vancouver, Canada
2013–	Ties, Gothenburg, Sweden

“SUDDENLY, I WAS SUPPOSED TO DANCE AT PARTIES, PLAY FOOTBALL AND WATCH INGEMAR STENMARK SKI.”

As the only Swedish pupil, I stood out at my school in Mumbai. I never felt discriminated against, but during lunch breaks I did feel like a bit of an outsider. When the other Indian children went to the school canteen to eat, I sat down with my lunch box and ate the sandwiches that my mother had made me that morning. She wasn't very keen on Indian food. When we went back home to Sweden in the summer, we went to the supermarket and ordered food that would be sent to us in India later on. Twice a year, a box full of Swedish classics arrived: fish roe spread, herrings, salami, chocolate, jelly rats and candy laces... They were all strictly rationed so they would last the year. Our Indian chef also had to use curry powder from Sweden because my mother found the Indian version too strong... Of course, he thought she was completely mad!

As a manager at SKF, my father had various overseas postings and the family simply moved with him to the different places where he was posted. After attending an Indian school in Mumbai, I then went to the Swedish boarding school in Kodaikanal in southern India. Before India, we'd spent a few years living in Gothenburg, and before that in Melbourne, Australia. We always knew in advance that we would be spending three or four years in the new place, and I thought no more about it – that was just the way things were.

Despite moving around and living abroad, I had a secure and stable upbringing. In many ways, it was also a *Swedish* childhood. My mum ensured that we spoke Swedish at home and that we didn't lose our connection to Sweden. During the summer, which we spent in the Gothenburg area, there was always a set programme. For example, we would meet relatives and go to the rocks by the sea as there were only beaches in India. I particularly remember the freedom that awaited in Sweden. In India, child kidnappings were common which limited our freedom of movement for my siblings and me. Suddenly being able to go cycling without a nanny or going to the shops on our own was a fantastic feeling. But by the same token, there were aspects of my childhood in India that I wouldn't have wanted to miss out on. For example, I was able to see the



difference between extreme poverty and wealth at an early age. There are contrasts in India that don't exist in the same way in Sweden, but which gave me a sense of humility and an understanding of people's different circumstances and living conditions. This in turn has helped me to be able to relate to other people.

After India, we moved back to Gothenburg. I had to learn how to behave in Sweden... Suddenly, I was supposed to dance at parties, play football and watch Ingemar Stenmark ski. In India, I had learned to play cricket. There was no way I was going to catch up with my classmates' football skills, so I learnt to skate instead and became good at table tennis. My military service came around in due course, and after 15 months in the navy and two years at Chalmers University I did what so many others have done – I went travelling around the world. The Trans-Siberian Railway, China, Nepal, Thailand... As I approached the end of my travels, I realised that I wanted to work abroad.

After another year at Chalmers, I managed to organise a job at Electrolux in Hong Kong and went there to sell vacuum cleaners. I also did my degree project in China, and then eagerly took a job as an international trainee for Tetra Pak in Lund. I was soon transferred to Lausanne, and moving to Switzerland marked the beginning of what turned out to be more than a decade of 'Tetra Pak moves' and a life divided up into two-year cycles – not entirely unlike the path my own father had chosen in life. New overseas postings, new moves, new home towns... I was well aware of both the pros and cons of the lifestyle. No matter how good life is as an expat, I'd seen how hard it was for my father to move back to Sweden and readjust after a long foreign career and years spent in India where he had 'ruled the roost' a little. I was painfully aware of what it cost him, but nevertheless I still set off...

A good team of colleagues started at the same time at our new workplace in Lausanne. It felt great starting to earn my own money, and everything was exciting. I sold milk and juice packaging. I grew increasingly driven to become a business executive, with the career goal of managing a subsidiary. Thoughts of starting a family also took root. I was in a long-distance relationship with a woman

I'd met in Hong Kong while completing my degree project there. We decided to get married, and after our wedding in Hong Kong she moved to Lausanne. Soon afterwards, we moved to Budapest. Eastern Europe was in the ascendant, and Tetra Pak was building a factory in Hungary which presented an ideal opportunity to further my career.

During the 1980s, I had visited Vancouver as a tourist and had visions of living there one day. So I was delighted when, in the late 1990s, Tetra Pak offered me the chance of a posting in Canada with the possibility of ultimately becoming company manager. Moving there was a real step forward! For the first time, I was able to work in a language that I had a good command of, and both my wife and I felt that Canada was a country we could imagine living in. My job was based in Toronto, but we didn't give up on the idea of Vancouver. We realised our vision with my next posting and move: we were finally able to settle in Vancouver. However, the good times came to an end two years later, when my job was terminated. As my wife and I only had work permits in Canada, we couldn't stay even if we wanted to. We decided to move to Sweden, thereby beginning a whole new chapter: life beyond Tetra Pak.

But it didn't take very long before we felt that living in Sweden wasn't quite what we had imagined. The idea of returning to Canada grew more attractive, and two years after leaving Vancouver we were back. And that's where we lived and worked for the next ten years.

I'd seen how my grandmother had been left alone in her old age, with her failing health. People and your own family members who can't cope on their own shouldn't be abandoned to their fate. When my own mother back home in Sweden started to grow increasingly frail, I wanted to be able to be there by her side. I was also offered an exciting new job that made the prospect of returning home both feasible and possible.

So we embarked on our new Swedish phase. Workwise, things were tough. After two jobs, I started a consultancy firm focusing on renewable energy and innovative energy solutions. As none of my old contacts or professional relationships were in Sweden, it was a matter of starting from scratch. And on a personal level, I had reason to be sur-

prised. Interest from old friends was cool to say the least, as if they still regarded me as being absent. My experiences from more than 20 years abroad weren't of much interest. If anything, it was the non-Swedes whom I'd met in Sweden who were curious and interested.

My return could have been smoother, and I certainly could have been welcomed more warmly and been given more mental support by those around me. But it was the right decision to move back and stay here in Sweden as long as my mother is alive, not least for purely compassionate reasons. It's also been good for our children to get a better feeling of Sweden. And I'm glad to have had the opportunity to experience the historic migration period that began with the crazy autumn of 2015.

In terms of work, I want – and need – to stay here, but socially, mentally and in terms of values I could imagine moving on. Sometimes I think that my next move will be to a Latin country. People really know how to live there! Sweden is good at many things, but in my opinion there is a lack of spontaneous human warmth that's needed for day-to-day happiness.

In my own personal circles, I find that there's only limited interest in migration issues. Only one person has raised these issues and actively chosen to discuss them with me. The level of interest in migration doesn't even compare with the level of interest in the US presidential election.

What really stood out on the migration front was the political about-turn in autumn 2015. In my eyes, no real explanation was ever given as to why the change was pushed through. What actually happened? I'd like to know the facts and the basis for why things swung towards closed borders, as well as the actual analysis and thoughts on whether we did the right thing.

What I see and hear about migration in the news comes across as people endlessly whining at each other. There's always someone who's accused of something, and someone defending themselves. Can't we just talk about how things actually are? Figures are often taken out of context and bandied about. The other people involved in the discussion often have different figures and facts. What do these figures actually show? What's the situation during the asy-

lum period? Can people study Swedish for Immigrants or not? What action has been taken, and what activities have been planned? This is the type of information I'd like to see more of.

The only type of migration I hear about is driven by the need for protection – people who flee here. Sometimes I wonder whether there's even any other type of migration to Sweden.

Something I'd like to hear more about in the migration debate is students. Sweden wants to position itself as a nation of education with the Nobel Prize as its crowning glory. We want and need students from all over the world. How can we attract them? And those who have come here to study – how did things go? What are their thoughts now? How long can they stay here on a student visa? These questions should also be part of the migration debate. It would also be worth spreading good news stories that show how foreign students can boost trade between Sweden and other countries.

Age is another important aspect of migration to Sweden. Studies show that if you come here after the age of 50, you only have a 50 percent chance of getting a job compared with those who come at a younger age. This means that half of those who come here in that age group won't ever work in Sweden. ■



Marcia, age 39

1977–1983 Birth and childhood, Jaguarão, Brazil
1983–1994 Studying, Jaguarão, Brazil
1994–2001 Studying and working, Pelotas, Brazil
2001–2012 Working, Florianópolis, Brazil
2012– Ties, Kristinehamn, Sweden

“I’VE BEEN LUCKY — MY CASE OFFICER WAS INCREDIBLY SUPPORTIVE.”

I was born in the south of Brazil, in a small town not far from the Uruguayan border. The town was roughly the same size as Kristinehamn. I was an only child, and my parents separated when I was around seven years old. My dad had a bakery and my mum had a clothes shop. I had a happy childhood. I was able to play outside and cycle. You can’t do that now in Brazil – there’s too much violence.

I’ve always wanted to work with social issues, to be able to help people. We came into contact with many people through the bakery, and both my parents wanted to be able to help people who had difficulties. For example, if someone didn’t have any money they might have to sit and wait all night to see a doctor.

Later on, I started to think about becoming a lawyer. I had a cousin who was a lawyer, and I wanted to follow in his footsteps. But I discovered that the legal process here is so incredibly slow, and I abandoned the idea. So I moved to another town and began training as a sociologist when I was 17 years old. But this was also not right for me. It was so politicised, and had too little to do with solving people’s problems. I felt a bit cheated – it all just seemed to be about politics. I started studying culture and anthropology instead – and I enjoyed it! So I continued at university and studied a little psychology, too. I got a project placement at a hospital in a large town, and I’ve worked extensively within healthcare administration since then.

Work has always been important to me, and I’ve worked hard. A female friend from my home town moved in with me because she didn’t have a job or anywhere to live. One evening we went out dancing, and there she met her future husband: a Swede who was working in Brazil. He only spoke a little Portuguese, but they understood each other well enough anyway. I was sitting between them when they met. But when the company he worked for closed down after a few years, he was forced to return to Sweden. She followed him after a while, and they settled here in Kristinehamn.

My friend pestered me to come here for several years. I said that I wanted to, but it was hard to get away. Anyway, I was exhausted – I’d been working for two years with-

out a holiday. And I'd just bought an apartment. Then something horrible happened: a man came up to me and put a gun to my head. He took my money and wanted to force me to go to the bank to get more money, but I told him I didn't have any money in the bank. After that I was scared, and I was always glancing to the side when I went into town. That's when I decided that I wanted to go to Sweden. My friend said that all I had to do was to buy a ticket. "Come here!" That was in February. But I liked it, and we travelled around Europe a bit. During my last week here in Kristinehamn, my friend said we should go to a pub in the evening. But I didn't want to. I didn't have any nice clothes, and it was minus 22 degrees. A Brazilian woman doesn't go out in the evening without fixing her hair and make-up and dressing up! But they really wanted me to go with them. So I borrowed some clothes from my friend – the first decent outfit we could find. No make-up or anything.

At the pub, I ended up at a table and noticed a man who looked nice. I thought at first that my friends knew him. We started to talk, even though I didn't know any Swedish and my English isn't particularly good, unfortunately. We carried on talking for a very long time, and then we arranged to meet up the next day. It felt like I'd known him all my life. We were so close.

I had to go back to Brazil and I asked him if he had Messenger. He didn't, but he signed up and we chatted every day. When the time came to leave Sweden, he gave me a lift to the airport. We talked all the way there. I asked him to come and visit me some time. And he said: "Yes I will – next month!" So he came and met my family and my friends all over the country. He saw how I lived in Brazil. But shortly afterwards he had to return to Sweden, as he has two children and a business here. That felt hard. I hadn't planned to leave Brazil, but I had never met someone like him. What should I do? He said that summer in Sweden was wonderful, and that I could come here for three months and see how I felt. And so I did. I was also tired of my demanding job, and I no longer felt safe after the traumatic mugging.

So I decided to travel to Kristinehamn and visit my

Tore. He had his own Venetian blind company, but he also co-owned the restaurant where I work now. At my suggestion he bought out his ex-wife's share of the business, and now I run it and look after the guests. It wasn't easy for me to begin with. I've always lived in large towns, and things are so quiet here. And it was particularly tough not being able to speak the language. My case officer at the Swedish Public Employment Service was fantastic – he helped me so much. He showed me the way, he asked me what I wanted to do, and he sat with me and listened. And Swedish for Immigrants classes have been great – and completely free! I couldn't have managed without this help. But something that's missing for many people who come here is psychological support. I was lucky, because my case officer was also a psychologist. But others haven't had such good support as me.

I usually say that my guests at the restaurant are my medicine. Because I have to meet people, and that's not so easy here in Sweden. The culture is so different compared to Brazil. But I'm adapting – I have to. This is my life now. And Tore and I have a three-year-old son together.

I get worried when I think about what's happening in the world. Sweden might not be the problem, but it's problematic when people just tumble down into a new country, don't know the language and don't have any goals or a plan for the future. It's dangerous. You can't build a future if you're not at ease with yourself. ■

Jovana, age 33

1983	Birth, Belgrade, Serbia
1984–1989	Childhood, Baghdad, Iraq
1989–2006	Childhood and work, Belgrade, Serbia
2006–2008	Working, Nicosia, Cyprus
2008–2009	Working, Thessaloniki, Greece
2009–2010	Working, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
2010–2012	Working, Belgrade, Serbia
2012–2013	Working, Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic
2014	Working, Belgrade, Serbia
2014–	Working, Stockholm, Sweden

“MY PARENTS GAVE ME INSPIRATION, BUT IT WAS MY TRAINER WHO MADE ME FALL IN LOVE WITH SPORT.”

Sport and exercise have always been part of my life. When I was just over a year old, my family moved from Belgrade to Baghdad as my dad got an overseas posting there. When he wasn't working he practised tennis, and my mum played basketball. She was the first non-Iraqi to play for the national team. That inspired me and proved that when someone has extraordinary talent there's scope for changing the rules. My eyes were also opened to other cultures during my childhood in Iraq. My parents' social network included people from all around the world: Malaysia, France, the USA... They spent time together and shared recipes. I learnt to try new things, and I now use the cake recipe that my mother got from her French friend.

I was 11 years old when I started basketball lessons. My

parents gave me inspiration, but it was my trainer who made me fall in love with the sport. He taught me to understand the game and to feel that I was improving with every session. I was devoted to my training, and I enjoyed pushing myself to the limit. An extra push came from my family. If I ever thought “I'll just take it easy today”, it didn't take long before I saw my dad doing up his running shoes and then I couldn't help heading out with him...

My training efforts produced results – when I was 17, I had the opportunity to continue playing basketball as a professional. My dad had to sign the contract, as I was still a minor. I seized the chance, and since then I've made my living from basketball. For the first six years, I played for the Serbian club Partizan. I didn't even consider any other clubs. All my family are Partizan supporters, and even my grandfather was a big fan of the team. My first foreign contract took me to Nicosia on Cyprus, followed by Thessaloniki in Greece. The sun, the warmth, meeting new people and the opportunity to combine playing with discovering a new country and culture were fantastic. As an elite player, you're treated accordingly. It brings advantages, and your association ensures that you are well looked after. At the same time, there's also an expectation of results and you always have to do your best. It sometimes surprises me when people don't seem to understand that you have to work extremely hard when you play at elite level. It's not like a nine-to-five job! Sometimes you have to get up at five in the morning to travel to a game, and you don't get home until after midnight. You can't go out drinking on a Friday night, or eat half an hour before training.

I've played in lots of places around the world, but when it comes down to it there's not much difference between playing in one country or another. In principle, I could move pretty much anywhere. If you told me somewhere had crocodiles and snakes in the streets, I might hesitate, but there's nowhere that would be an absolute no-no.

Two years ago, I was faced with a choice between an offer from the Swedish club Akropol BBK and a contract in the Middle East. You learn from experience, and when choosing between moving further north or further south



I found myself in a position where I wanted to be sure that things would work smoothly. I therefore felt that Sweden was the best alternative in terms of offering a safe and secure existence. I knew there was an efficient welfare system, that things are orderly and the people are calm. I was attracted by the prospect of trying life in such a country and exploring the northerly part of the world, so I took the chance to play here.

I felt at home right away with Akropol in Rinkeby. The club has lots of international players, which is a strength. Having too many similar ideas and attitudes results in mental blockages. I appreciate the fact that sport has a strong social dimension here in Sweden, but you can't get carried away with the fun elements – such as when someone goes for a slam dunk. Here in Sweden, there's often a focus on your own needs and what's fun for you as an individual, but the good of the team has to be at the centre. It's important to think about performance and results at individual *and* team level. This requires everyone to be included and to be guided to play together. I'm a patient player and I always put the team first. So it was a real sign of recognition when I was the first foreign player to be made captain of the team. I was highly honoured.

News spread fast in the sporting world. My playing style and my leadership led to an offer from the Djursholm Indians Norrort club. After 15 years of playing professionally, I decided to focus on leadership and coaching with them. The club's focus on development and breadth is fully in line with my own way of thinking. Being with them gives me a fantastic opportunity to coach the youth team and the senior team for women, and to help them develop individually and as team players.

My husband came with me from Serbia, and we'd like to live in Sweden for a long time. He's a football coach for the Bromma boys' team, and it would be good for us both to continue building our lives here. But life can also take you in unexpected directions. For example, if my husband got a good job offer somewhere else, I would have to be open to the option of moving. Then it would be my turn to follow him!

Serbia is a basketball-playing nation. Lots of people

are passionate about the sport, and we certainly know the game. All the same, not many Serbian players get the chance to sign a contract with a Swedish club. More attention should be paid to the question of who can have a professional career here. In practice, it's not a question of skill and talent – it's a case of the club's finances, citizenship and gender. The federation here in Sweden can recruit and sign contracts with two or three non-EU citizens, but in reality who has a chance of getting these contracts? If the clubs recruit from an EU country instead, they don't have to worry about issues like salaries and insurance. This is a disadvantage for professional players from non-EU countries who want to come here and work.

Never before in my professional career have I come across a minimum wage requirement like here in Sweden. The reasonableness of this should be discussed. As a professional player, you often get other benefits and sponsorship, from travel cards to food and accommodation. Another question that I would like to see discussed is why I as a professional player can't earn any income other than through sport. If I had the option of spending a few of my spare hours doing another job, what would be the harm in that?

I'd also like to see more sportswomen in the media. There's a need for role models who can inspire and show that it's entirely possible to be a professional basketball player, help your team climb the league, and also look after a home and a family. Nina Baresso is one such person – she's been a big role model for us all. We need more examples! ■

Maryann, age 31

1985–2011 Birth, childhood, studies and work, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2011– Ties, Stockholm, Sweden

“WHEN I INJURED MY LEG, I HAD TO FIND A NEW DREAM.”

I was born in Malaysia, a relatively young nation that gained its independence in 1957. Everyone comes from different countries. One of my grandfathers was from India, and the other one was from China. My dad’s native language was an Indian dialect and my mum spoke Cantonese, so we spoke English at home.

When I was a teenager I wanted to be a professional tennis player. We’ve had a number of national tennis and badminton champions in our family, including my dad. I was a junior in the national team and I trained every evening after school. I’d set my sights on Wimbledon and the Australian Open, but when I was 14 I was jumping off a rickety old bus when I injured my right leg. They called an ambulance, and my tennis dreams were in tatters. I had to find a new dream.

In Asia, many people want their children to become doctors or lawyers, and maybe that’s an Indian trait. My grandfather was from Kerala, where even the bus drivers usually have a university degree. When I went to university, I decided to study economics, finance and accounting. During the summer holidays I did an internship with an estate agent who specialised in luxury housing.

To begin with, I had thought about becoming a management consultant. But the more I learnt about it, the less certain I was that it was the right career for me. I was standing at the crossroads, and eventually I made my choice. I applied for a job back at the estate agent. The company ar-

anged smart apartments and houses for large companies. We had excellent contacts with wealthy landlords, and I was able to match them with tenants. I was 23 years old when I started, and after a year I trained as an estate agent.

I’d had a boyfriend, Jeffrey, since I was 17 years old, and now we’re married and living in Stockholm. We met at the university where my mum was a manager. He was a student, and I was standing in the reception selling tickets for a party. I needed to go to the toilet so I asked him to help out for a moment, and when I came back we started talking. We became friends to begin with. I liked the fact that he was unusually down to earth and straightforward. He didn’t come from Kuala Lumpur – he came from a small town. We got married in February 2011.

We had planned to keep the wedding fairly low key, but we still ended up having 300 guests. Once we were married, Jeffrey said he had been offered the opportunity to move to Sweden and work for Ericsson. Sweden, I thought... IKEA and Volvo, that’s all I knew about Sweden.

We flew to Stockholm in April for a viewing trip, as he hadn’t accepted the job offer yet. Jeffrey’s future boss and his wife were lovely, and we stayed for lunch and dinner. It was cold in Sweden, and I only had my summer dresses with me, but the impression we got was still good. Everything was clean and the air was fresh, which is important to me. Jeffrey and I had never lived together, but he accepted the job offer and we left home in July. I got a permit to come to Sweden due to close family ties. It all went quickly, and the paperwork was very simple.

The company had found an apartment for us on Kungsholmen. It was nice, but very small – certainly by my standards, being used to the enormous luxury houses in Kuala Lumpur. And I thought it very strange to share the bathroom – as far as I’m concerned, there should be a bathroom right next to the bedroom. But there wasn’t room for two bathrooms in a 43 m² apartment...

Jeffrey worked all day, and I was alone for the most part as we didn’t know anyone in Stockholm. One day I started crying and couldn’t stop. Jeffrey wondered what was wrong – did I want to move back to Malaysia? But I didn’t want to make any decisions while I was feeling like



that. It was just that everything had happened so quickly. There were several unexpected challenges. We'd been told that we would be able to get by without speaking Swedish, but that isn't true – at least, it wasn't when we came here in 2011. But we're survivors, and Ericsson gave me a little money to use for a language course. So I started intensive Swedish lessons and I liked the language.

I hadn't planned to work in Sweden. The plan was to apply to the Stockholm School of Economics and continue studying. I'd intended to study for a doctorate in finance. The property market here is extremely interesting. I did another intensive language course, Swedish for economists, lawyers and social scientists. Here, I learnt about the language used in my field: turnover, profit and so on. My teacher thought I should register with the Swedish Public Employment Service. I hadn't intended to apply for a job, but eventually I did so. I got an internship at the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce and really enjoyed it. I now work as an account manager for the Nordic region for a British company that researches the design of workplaces and the effect on employees' productivity.

Almost nothing has turned out the way I expected. I haven't done a doctorate, and it doesn't seem like I will. But Stockholm is my home, and we're part of a church community here. Home is where the heart is.

It often sounds as if it's all about the fact that Sweden should help migrants to become part of society or to build a new life. You very rarely hear about what migrants can contribute in economic or social terms with their knowledge and experience. Migrants – both asylum seekers and those of us who come here due to close family ties – should be treated as individuals. I like watching the *Welcome to Sweden* TV series that shows the various challenges and the happiness experienced by migrants who come to Sweden due to close family ties.

When you first come here you're a visitor, but then we should treat migrants as guests. When I say 'guests', I'm thinking in terms of traditional Asian hospitality which involves making people feel welcome and at home. And then – if they've decided to stay here – we should treat them as family and not just as guests. ■



Antonio, age 38

- 1978–1997 Birth and childhood, Brindisi, Italy
- 1997–2006 Studying and working, Modena, Italy
- 2006–2008 Working, Swindon, England
- 2008 Working, Grottaglie, Italy
- 2008 Working, Tel Aviv, Israel
- 2008–2010 Working, Surrey, England
- 2010–2011 Working, Älmhult, Sweden
- 2011–2012 Working, Basel, Switzerland
- 2012 Working, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2012–2013 Working, Älmhult, Sweden
- 2013–2015 Working, Bucharest, Romania
- 2015– Working, Älmhult, Sweden

**“I’M PASSIONATE ABOUT
CARS, RACING AND SPORT.”**

I have happy memories from my childhood in Brindisi, a port town in southeast Italy. The people there are extremely warm, and there's a real sense of solidarity. From the end of May until the beginning of September, my friends and I used to hang out on the beach. We never needed any money to have fun, and I grew up with the attitude that holidays are something that just happens – not something you have to plan.

As a teenager, I was obsessed with cars. I got my first Vespa at the age of 14. I enjoyed mechanics, and I was always trying to make improvements to the engine. Just like many other people from southern Italy, I chose to move north to study engineering. My idea was that if I studied at university in Modena, I might get a job at Ferrari – one of the most prestigious companies for an engineer who loves cars. I'm passionate about cars, racing and sport – in combination with high technology. And I wanted to learn from the best.

I was 18 years old when I moved to Modena to study mechanical engineering. It's a beautiful city. It's completely different to Brindisi, and is famous for food, cars and Pavarotti. Modena is a university city where there are high standards of welfare and the people have plenty of money. The lifestyle there is much more expensive than in the south of Italy. My engineering studies lasted for five years, and my parents supported me during that time. I studied hard in order to get a good job, and in my final year at university I managed to get an internship at Ferrari thanks to the company's cooperation with my university. At that time, many of my classmates chose to study abroad, but I wanted to stay in Modena in the hope that Ferrari would discover my potential.

After graduating I was offered a job at Ferrari, working with fuel consumption simulation and making comparisons with competitors' cars. I was over the moon! The work was very intensive, and involved more than just regular eight hour days. I started at half past eight in the morning, and worked late into the evening.

Of course, going from being an engineering student to working for a well-known car manufacturer was a big change. I had a new status, and I started to build my ca-

reer. Life was full of surprises. I was moving in new circles where I was sometimes surrounded by celebrities, and it wasn't always easy to know how to behave or what to say. There was great pressure on us as employees, and everything had to happen immediately. There was always someone hassling us, saying: "We need it now! NOW!"

I had fantastic colleagues – intelligent people with incredible energy who were all driven by the same dream. We spent a lot of time together after work. As Italians, we love long, noisy dinners where you sit down to eat at eight thirty and stay there until midnight. We don't plan much – we phone a friend on Saturday and ask if he fancies a coffee. There's a completely different kind of spontaneity in Italy. It was a culture shock for me when I came here and tried to take the initiative. I found out that it could be seen as flirting if I asked someone if they wanted to go out for a coffee, or if I offered my colleagues a drink. People looked strangely at me, as if they couldn't understand why I was asking.

After five years at Ferrari, I uploaded my CV onto the internet in the hope of finding a job abroad. I was interested in improving my English and learning more about a different management culture. Things were very hierarchical at Ferrari – the style was extremely direct and straightforward: "That was useless. Do it again!"

I got a job offer from Honda in Swindon, England, and I moved there. I saw the opportunity to learn more about Japanese culture and to improve my English. Whilst being curious about other countries, I'm also a proud Italian and the older I become the more I miss my home country. So I wanted to return to Italy after a couple of years. But my new job with Boeing in southern Italy, which involved being stationed in Tel Aviv for a few months, wasn't really what I had imagined it would be. So I moved back to England to work for the car manufacturer McLaren.

Because I'd uploaded my CV online, I then received an offer to work at IKEA in the southern Swedish town of Älmhult. It wasn't entirely clear what the job would involve, but I really liked the people who interviewed me. I was impressed at how effective they were when we met – they were highly professional, and they sold themselves

well. I got the impression that they cared about people – and that if you surround yourself with good people, you'll do well wherever you are. So I took the step and moved to Sweden.

Because I like cities, I moved from Älmhult to Malmö after two months and started to commute from there. The time I spent on the train resulted in new friendships, and I also met a woman who later became my wife. After having taken part in an exchange programme at IKEA that involved working in Switzerland and Denmark, my girlfriend and I moved to Älmhult. But it didn't take long before I was offered another overseas job, this time in Romania. I'd begun my international career, and it felt natural to accept. My girlfriend came with me, and we got married in Italy. When she became pregnant, we moved back to Sweden where our son was born. We've since separated.

As a migrant from Europe, I feel privileged. When I came here, I was impressed by how quick the bureaucracy was – everything was dealt with very efficiently, and I got help filling in all the necessary paperwork. I've had a very positive experience as a migrant. What's sometimes been hard is that I haven't been spoken to when, for example, my ex-wife and I have met with healthcare workers. When we took our son to the dentist, the nurse turned to my wife and spoke Swedish even though she knew that I spoke English. That wasn't the only time I felt that staff would prefer to speak Swedish with my wife rather than speaking English with both of us. It's frustrating for me as a dad that I can't always keep up with conversations about things that are so important to me. I want to understand and be able to ask questions so I can make the best decisions for my son. In Italy, parents meet doctors more often than here and you have more things explained to you.

When I think about the future, I mainly think about my son – his wellbeing is the most important thing for me. I want to spend time with him, and I want to be happy in my work. In my spare time, I teach judo and do running training. Every year I take part in a new marathon somewhere in the world. So far, I've taken part in six.

In the longer term, I'd like to work somewhere else in Europe where I have the opportunity to develop. I want

my son to grow up as a European, and not just see things from one perspective. In view of what the world is like today and how it's changing, I think it's important for us to learn more from each other.

I don't see much on Swedish TV. Instead, I read Italian newspapers and watch international news. I'd like to read more about migration in a European context: What can migration do for Europe?

Sweden has a shortage of doctors, and many of the people who come here are doctors. Does Sweden make use of this expertise? What are highly trained people who come here offered? ■



■ Maher, age 16

1990–2015 Birth, childhood and studies, Damascus, Syria
2015– Ties, Vänersborg, Sweden

**“IF I’M NERVOUS OR SAD,
I WRITE A SONG. THEN I CAN
SLEEP SOUNDLY!”**

In 2012, the war reached the small rural village outside Damascus where I grew up. It became a dangerous area to live in. Every night we heard shooting, and every morning we woke up and went to school as normal. Sometimes I saw blood on the ground. After a while, the planes started dropping bombs on the area. That’s when we moved to an apartment in the old town of Damascus.

To begin with, it was hard starting at a new school because I didn’t know anyone. But after a while I began to make new friends. I spent my spare time listening to music: Eminem, Ice Cube and Tupac. I looked online for hip hop in Arabic and found a rapper from Saudi Arabia whom I started listening to. Sometimes I would sit in my room and try to write songs. I wrote songs about politics, social issues and life in Syria, and I rapped at various venues. I feel good when I’m involved in music. If I’m nervous, tired or sad, I listen to music or write a song. Then I can sleep soundly.

At the end of 2013, my dad moved to Sweden. I stayed with my mum and my brothers. Because my dad travelled abroad a lot with work, I was used to him being away from home. But this time it was different, because I knew he would be crossing the sea. We didn’t speak to him for four days. All kinds of thoughts run through your head: Where is he? Why doesn’t he call?

While the war was raging, we were all scared deep down. But because there was nothing we could do about it, we tried to live our lives as normal, going to school and meeting up with friends. On New Year’s Eve at the end of 2014 I was doing just that – trying to live my life as normal – when I was hit by a missile that injured my leg. One of my best friends died. We were just a group of friends who’d been out together, singing and chatting. My mum was in the house. She heard the sound of missiles and called out: “Maher, are you out there?” My brother ran out and looked for me. Later, he found me at the hospital. The first operation took ten hours.

During the period after the operation, I felt a great sense of desperation. I thought I had lost my foot, and that I would never walk or play football again. But just a few months later, I performed in a wheelchair in front of thousands of people on a large theatre stage in Damascus.

Six months after my injury, I left Syria. I left my girlfriend, my friends and my brothers behind. I left my whole life. When I came to Sweden, I was driven straight to the hospital where I met my dad. He came with pizza and we hugged each other.

For the first two months in Sweden I lived in asylum accommodation, and those months were the most difficult time in my life as I didn't have anything to do.

Today, life is both good and bad. I believe that being here will be good for my future. I can get a good education and be what I want to be: an eye doctor. But I have three brothers in Syria, lots of friends and many memories.

I don't think it would be good if it became more difficult for families to be reunited. There are many people waiting for residence permits to see their families. There are people who maybe have a wife and three children in Syria, living right in the middle of a war. They must be able to move to Sweden. It's very hard for young guys who might have lived with their families for 17 years and are now living here alone. I don't think that's something you can understand if you haven't been through it yourself.

I rarely read the newspapers myself, but when I performed at the town hall here in Vänersborg they wrote about me in the paper. I'd rapped in Arabic. It felt great being written about, getting recognition for something positive. When I look at the photo of me, I think: "What am I doing there?"

Lots of people in Vänersborg have recognised me, and I like that.

I feel that the other pupils at my school are a bit scared of those of us who come from other countries. I don't know why.

But old people like talking with us. The old people are very nice. Because of my injury, I limp a little when I'm out walking. When old people see me they start talking to me – and they ask about my leg. They ask if I've hurt my leg, and I tell them how I was injured in Syria. That often leads to more questions. It always makes me happy when I see an old Swede. They have such positive energy. ■

Tomoko, age 44

- 1972–1975 Birth and childhood, Tokyo, Japan
- 1975–1991 Childhood and studies, Chiba, Japan
- 1991–1992 Studying, Tokyo, Japan
- 1992–2007 Working, Tokyo, Japan
- 2007–2009 Voluntary work, Sierra Gorda, Mexico
- 2009–2011 Working, Mexico City, Mexico
- 2011 Working, Umeå, Sweden
- 2011– Working, Stockholm, Sweden

“VOLUNTEERING IN A MEXICAN MOUNTAIN VILLAGE MEANS I NOW FEEL CONFIDENT ANYWHERE.”

When I was three years old, my family moved to Chiba, a fairly large suburb of Tokyo. I was an active child. I loved singing, acting and playing football and baseball. I also learnt kendo, a Japanese martial art. And I swam before school and in the evenings, after dinner. My mum was very loving and played a lot with me and my little sister. My dad was more old-fashioned and reserved, and kept himself to himself.

I worked as a model alongside upper secondary school, and I then began acting, both on stage and in films. I had hoped to get into an American college, but it wasn't to be. Instead, I continued with acting. My roles included a Filipino, a spaceship pilot and a transwoman. I even played a murder victim in a TV crime series. But eventually I reached a point where I started to feel my limitations. I couldn't really get into the roles anymore. I was 27 years old, and I had to think about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.



So I started working in sales for a large multinational company, and during my first year I won the award for top salesperson. However, after around three years tensions emerged between me and my boss, and my old dream of the USA was reawakened. I'd lived in Tokyo all my life, and now I wanted to get away. One day I was on a train and I saw an advert for an aid organisation where you could work as a volunteer if you completed a training programme first. One of the alternatives was to help poor people in Mexico to support themselves. I got the assignment!

My journey took me to a remote mountain region, Sierra Gorda, which was different in every way to everything I was used to. There was no electricity, no petrol, no radio and no grocery shops. There were only 60 to 70 people living in the village, and they were almost all women as the men had gone to the USA to work illegally. For those who were left behind, life was mostly about survival. I had a kind of carpentry job that involved teaching the locals to make souvenirs to sell to tourists. The aid project also involved teaching the locals about environmental awareness and not cutting down forests or damaging nature in other ways. When my voluntary work was over, I returned to Japan but I didn't want to stay there. I wanted to head out into the world again, and I found a job at a travel agency in Mexico City. I was happy there, but after a year I had a jet skiing accident. I hit a tall wave and flew up about four metres into the air. I landed badly, crushing my back and injuring myself. I was confined to bed for more than a month, which gave me plenty of time to think about the future. I loved cooking, and I'd held lots of parties with a focus on food. As well as Japanese cuisine, I'd also learnt to cook Indian, Chinese, Korean and Italian food. By now, I had also learnt about Mexican cuisine. Until then, cooking had been a hobby but I wanted to try becoming a professional chef.

I started applying for jobs at restaurants around the world, and eventually I was offered a position as a chef at a restaurant in Sweden. In Umeå! It didn't matter to me which country I worked in – my experiences in the mountain village in Mexico meant that I now feel confident anywhere. I was interviewed by the restaurant owner

in Umeå via Skype, and I travelled to Sweden. It was fine to begin with, even though there weren't many guests in the summer. I'd been given a one-year temporary position, but it was terminated after just two months. The restaurant hadn't done well, and I was very disappointed. I didn't want to stay in Umeå, but as my work permit was valid for two years I was able to look for work in Stockholm. I was really impressed by my first visit! What a beautiful city – I wanted to live and work here. I found the Blue Light Yokohama restaurant via a blog about Japanese food. The owner and I quickly hit it off, and I got a job here in October 2011. The manager made me a good offer, and I've also had the opportunity to develop my skills. This last year, I've started up the restaurant's catering operations, and I'm responsible for sales, budgeting and all the planning. I now have a good foundation if I wanted to open my own restaurant, but the competition here in Stockholm is tough and it's hard to make a profit.

My parents still live in Chiba, near Tokyo. They haven't said anything about the fact that I'm not married and don't have children, but if I was still in Japan they might be a little concerned. My younger sister already has three children, and the normal situation in my home country is to marry and have children relatively young, although things have started to change a little.

The discussion in Sweden reminds me of what's happening in the UK. Lots of people want to keep immigration down, but I believe that things will stay roughly the same in Sweden. I myself don't feel like a migrant – perhaps because I have a job and I live here. I don't feel Swedish, either, but I rarely think about it. Perhaps I take a slightly different view of these things.

I don't know that many Swedes – I haven't learnt Swedish, and that's my own choice. I'm a member of a few societies for expats in Sweden, and when we meet we speak a combination of English, Spanish and Japanese. I have lots of Japanese friends here in Stockholm, but I'd like more Swedish friends. But it's not a problem for me – I'm a positive person and living in Sweden is good. I love my friends and my job. But I don't like the cold... ■



■ Jörn, age 72

- 1945–1967 Birth and childhood, Katrineholm, Sweden
- 1968–1972 Studying, Uppsala, Sweden
- 1972–1974 Working, Banjul, Gambia & Slanchev Bryag, Bulgaria
- 1974–1983 Working, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1983–1988 Working, Uppsala, Sweden
- 1988–2003 Working, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2003–2009 Working, Melsungen, Germany
- 2009–2012 Working, Vienna, Austria
- 2012– Returning, Stockholm, Sweden

“AS A SWEDE, I FOUND IT EASY TO FEEL AT HOME — I FEEL PRETTY MUCH AT HOME ANYWHERE!”

Migration was hardly a concept that meant anything to me when I was young. What I knew was that there were other countries and other people. Other than perhaps some Finns, there were no foreigners in my little home town of Katrineholm. It was only in the early 1970s, when many people fled to Sweden following the military coup in Chile, that migration came to my attention. My first extended period abroad came after studying French in Uppsala – I had the opportunity to study in Provence for my final semester. In France, my fellow Swedish students and I decided to speak only French with each other. Our French friends helped, and our six months in France were both fun and successful. We spent a lot of time with the other students, which brought us into close contact with the culture of the south of France. I myself came to love everything French, and have often returned to France.

I spent a few seasons in the 1970s working as a travel guide. I was stationed in Gambia, and during the summer season I worked in Bulgaria. My experiences in these countries and my encounters with other cultures certainly made me take a more humble approach to other human beings. As a Swede, I wanted to believe that Sweden was the best at everything. Today, I believe that people are just as good and bad as each other – whatever their country, religion or gender. However, different conditions and circumstances in one’s home country have an effect in terms of the adversities and successes you experience.

For the last 25 years of my working life, I was fortunate enough to work for the German pharmaceuticals company B. Braun Melsungen AG. I worked for them during an exciting period when the company was setting up a subsidiary in Sweden. To my great delight, I had the chance to work internationally at their head office in Germany for the last few years of my career. The timing was ideal, as my daughters were about to leave home – I only had to sell the apartment and go. Moving there went extremely smoothly. I simply registered my departure with the Swedish Tax Agency and discharged myself from Sweden. In Germany, I registered with the local municipality and received a little ID card as proof of my citizenship. There were no complications.

Moving to Germany was an old dream of mine. I joined an international team with a fantastic mix of marketing managers and product managers. We complemented each other with our experience from our respective home countries. My work took me to many European countries. My contact with the management of our subsidiaries was incredibly stimulating. Having the company as a common denominator made our communication easier. We were able to learn from the differences between our backgrounds, and we focused on identifying smart solutions.

In my free time, I often travelled around Germany. Living in central Germany meant that the surrounding states and cities were within easy reach. I've really come to admire Germany for its people, its history, its beautiful countryside and its political successes. One tradition that's typical of northern Hesse, where I lived, is the habit of sweeping outside their front doors every Saturday – they're incredibly meticulous about doing it. Cleaning is important to many Germans, and as I travelled around I noticed how clean everywhere was. Even the farms out in the countryside were neat and tidy.

After turning 65, I could no longer work in Germany since retirement age is stipulated by law. Instead, the company offered me a position at the Austrian subsidiary. I thought this was an excellent solution. A new job with new challenges! In autumn 2009, I therefore moved to Vienna and soon felt at home in Austria. Although there are linguistic differences and obvious cultural differences, I didn't find these so great that things felt foreign. Europe is fairly homogeneous in that way, although the World Values Survey shows that people in Europe have different values when it comes to social issues and religion. As a Swede, I found it easy to feel at home – I feel pretty much at home anywhere!

In June 2012, I moved back to Sweden. I'd been in a long-distance relationship with a woman for just over a year, and we'd talked about moving in together. I've always assumed I would live in Sweden after retiring, so when the contract in Vienna came to an end I returned. Suddenly, working life was over. On my way back to Sweden, I thought about all the things I never got around to

but would now have time to do. Read books, spend my days doing leisure activities, go to lectures and seminars, and travel wherever I liked. I would have 24 hours a day to use however I wanted!

Today, I live on my own but I enjoy my life in Stockholm. My family and close friends are here, and I appreciate having a wealth of nature and culture to explore. The city has an expansive future mapped out, which I also like. I won't move anywhere else – life as a pensioner in Sweden is just too good.

Immigration is high on the political agenda. It seems to engage and affect almost all Swedes. In retrospect, it's easy to criticise the Swedish Government and Parliament for the chaotic way in which asylum seekers were received in autumn 2015. The situation seems to have stabilised with time, but there's still a great deal to do. Many migrants find things hard, and their situation doesn't seem to improve for a long time. From my perspective, integration issues should be prioritised and there should be more discussions on how we can bridge the gaps between cultures and social structures. I don't think the Government has succeeded in getting the message across to new arrivals about how the Swedish system works. A multicultural society is all well and good, but everyone has to be on board. It's important to discuss how new inhabitants will learn Swedish and find out about Swedish values. We need to talk more about how society works in Sweden, and create an understanding of the culture here. You often hear reports about murders and cars being set on fire, but it's also important to highlight the vulnerable situation of women in segregated areas.

Sweden has been criticised abroad for not putting the interests of its own people first. Something that needs to feature more in the debate is how our tax money is spent. I feel that the quality newspapers report on how much money is spent on migration, but scope is still left for speculation. The Government needs to make it clear how much it costs to deal with asylum seekers, and *why* the money is spent the way it is. That way, there can be a more concrete discussion. ■

■ Jaana, age 39

1977–1996 Birth and childhood, Skövde, Sweden
1996–1998 Studying, Gothenburg, Sweden
1998–2002 Working and studying, Malmö, Sweden
2002–2011 Working and studying, London, England
2011– Returning, Malmö, Sweden

“THE SITUATION WITH THE ÖRESUND BRIDGE IS A NIGHTMARE.”

I’ve never felt 100 percent Swedish. Maybe it’s because my dad used to talk about “those Swedes”, as if he wasn’t talking about us, but about other people. He was born in Finland, and my grandfather on the other side of the family came from Germany. I think this affected me in that I never felt tied to any national identity.

As a teenager, I dreamed about leaving Skövde as soon as possible. Immediately after finishing my studies, I moved to Gothenburg. I lived there for two years and took a few courses at the university, including philosophy and literary history. I then felt the urge to spend some time abroad. I got a job at a spa hotel in Bavaria, where I worked at the bar with other people from different countries.

When I came back from Germany, a friend and I decided to move to Malmö. I’d visited the city previously, and thought it seemed like great fun there. Malmö wasn’t like any other Swedish city I’d been to. The rest of Sweden felt quite dull by comparison. I signed a contract to rent a sublet apartment in the city’s Möllevången district without even having seen it. Then I took the bus to Malmö without really knowing what I would do there. I started working as

a postwoman, but then I took a few other casual jobs and did a course in Arabic at Lund University.

During my second year in Malmö, I discovered the Alexander Technique, which teaches us to become more aware of ourselves and our habits. I’ve always been interested in different philosophies, and when a close friend found a book about the Alexander Technique my interest was piqued. The technique teaches you to notice tensions in the body and what you can do about them. We’re usually unaware of what we’re doing. If we’re stressed, for example, we might hold our breath or tense up without thinking about it. Being aware of our habits and behaviours allows us to make deep-seated changes, and that fascinates me. It felt as if I’d finally found something that seemed to make sense, something that I could actually practise and wasn’t just theory. It was too interesting not to look into it further.

My partner and I started studying the Alexander Technique in Copenhagen, but when we heard that one of the best teachers was based in London we moved there. In order to support ourselves, I took a job as a waitress at a hotel. I went to classes in the morning and then worked until late in the evening. Once we’d finished the three-year course, my partner and I started teaching the Alexander Technique in the gyms at various government authorities in Whitehall. Civil servants could turn up and do a lesson. We also taught privately at our home in Notting Hill.

The best thing about living in London is that you feel like part of the world in a completely different way to living in Sweden. There’s so much to see and do! I practised Zen Buddhist meditation with a teacher who had studied with a leading monk in Japan. I would never have had that opportunity in Sweden. Whatever you’re interested in, whether it’s meditation or opera, you’ll find some of the world’s best practitioners in London.

The downside of London is that you have to compromise on accommodation when it comes to price, size, location and standards. I had to wear a hat and gloves in the kitchenette in the winter, and my partner kept walking into the furniture as it was so cramped. Because people left their rubbish out on the pavement, mice came into the houses. Living there was a trial in many ways.



During our last year in London, we had twins, which came as a surprise. We lived on the fifth floor without a lift, and we realised that we would have to move. Finding child-friendly accommodation would mean being forced to leave London. So we decided that we might as well move back to Sweden, as we would have family there who could help us with the children.

There were several advantages to moving back. For example, we have a better social life here. Still, moving back felt like I was giving something up – as if I'd been part of something bigger and was now limiting myself. I like how relaxed things are in Sweden. It's safe, and the standards are high, but at the same time it was fascinating being part of a bigger reality – it offered new perspectives.

In London, I'd started an engineering course in computer technology via distance learning, and I completed the course after we'd returned to Sweden. I then started working as a game producer and project manager at my husband's company, Divine Robot. A year ago, I became the company's CEO. In the future, I hope that the company will continue to grow and that we'll have a lot of exciting assignments. We're currently working with virtual reality, which is absolutely fascinating. I don't think we'll stay in Malmö forever – we might move to Stockholm where there are more jobs. Professionally and socially, it would be interesting to be part of something bigger again.

In practice, the introduction of ID checks between Sweden and Denmark feels as if the politicians have closed our bridge. And it's an issue that has generated a major debate here in Skåne. The situation with the Öresund Bridge is a nightmare. I feel sorry for those who have children and work on the other side: What will they do if they don't manage to get to daycare in time? The difficulties moving around the region are something that people talk about a lot here. Two of my friends have started the Öresund Revolution, a social media campaign to show what closing the bridge actually means for those of us who live and work in the region, which the rest of the country doesn't seem to have noticed.

When the media reports on migration, it's mainly about asylum immigration. I have many opinion-formers in my

network, so most of the discussions I read about on social media are about the stricter legislation for asylum seekers. People talk about how the Social Democrats went from a welcoming attitude to closing the borders.

It would be interesting to find out how people who come here perceive us and our country. What happens to our image of ourselves when we hear about their experiences? For example, I think it's interesting when people who have migrated here say it's hard to make contact with Swedes. We generally think that we're quite pleasant, polite and kind, so I think it's useful for us to see a different image of ourselves sometimes. This particular lack of politeness shocked me after having lived in England. Even though it's not intentional, we Swedes can sometimes be embarrassingly rude. I was in a café once in London, and I overheard the staff discussing Swedes – the way they always have to work things out to the very penny when splitting a bill!

Since returning to Sweden, I've noticed how we Swedes often seem to see ourselves as morally superior, and how we see it as our duty to export our 'values', almost like missionaries. And I've reflected on how important the image of Sweden is to us, in other words what other people think of us. Nothing causes us to light up quite so much as hearing that Sweden is the best country in the world to live in. Assertions such as "Swedish healthcare is the best in the world" might no longer be held in such high regard as absolute truths in the Swedish consciousness, but I've lost count of the number of times people have looked shocked when I've described the expertise and availability of English healthcare compared with Swedish healthcare. Few people seem to realise that it's free to visit the doctor, and that there are drop-in care centres everywhere. ■



Rasha, age 33

1982–2012 Birth, childhood and studies, Damascus, Syria
2012 Displaced
2012– Need for protection, Stockholm, Sweden

“IF YOU WANT TO SUCCEED, YOU HAVE TO CLOSE YOUR EARS.”

I used to watch German cartoons and dream about studying in Germany one day. I also became familiar with the country through my father having worked there periodically. When he was at home in Syria, he was keen for us to visit and get to know all the places that had made up our own history. I wish that everyone had the opportunity to see and understand the significance of ancient cities like Palmyra and Ugarit. The first time I visited the northern part of Syria, I thought I had been transported back to the Middle Ages. There were no roads, no electricity... Everything was so different, and seeing all these places taught me about the history of Syria and my own history. It has a meaning when you work with people like I did. I had studied journalism at university in Damascus, but I applied for PR work. I enjoy writing, but I have ideas and opinions that aren't entirely welcomed by editors... If I'd worked as a journalist, I wouldn't have recognised the articles I'd written by the time they'd been edited. There was no democracy in Syria in terms of being able to express yourself how you wanted, but I still lived an open life. I travelled with my boyfriend, and I didn't wear a veil. In some ways, I lived more openly in Syria before the war than I do now. If I go out with my friends here in Sweden, I don't dare to let myself go completely as I have to get home to Fittja by myself. What would I do if something happened along the way? I don't know the system well enough to feel confident about dealing with any problems that arise. Just

understanding the financial system in Sweden is a world of its own. Nothing can be resolved by meeting people face to face. Conversations have to be held by e-mail, and everything is dealt with using dongles, apps and the net. No one takes responsibility during phone conversations or visits in person. Instead, you're directed elsewhere and forced to go round in circles, often ending up in the same place where you started. My happiest day here in Sweden was when the Swedish Enforcement Administration informed me that they had cancelled a demand for payment that they'd imposed on me for not having understood the invoicing system and missing a payment. The dispute dragged on and on for a year...

I came to Sweden by myself and I've benefited from being forced to be responsible for every aspect of my own life. In Syria, I wasn't even responsible for my mobile phone. However, trying to learn Swedish through Swedish for Immigrants classes was a waste of time. I'm learning Swedish more effectively through my current work placement. I've started planning for the future and having dreams again. That's healthy. If you don't have dreams, you don't have hope or energy either. Now I don't even think about the bad weather in the morning anymore – I see it as normal. I get involved in life and I feel I have something to contribute to the situation here. Not least through my work with unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. I know what it's like to come here on your own and to start again.

I have a rule for my life. If you want to succeed, you have to close your ears. People say so many things that can drag you down, but none of it is based on what is real and important to you. I'm not comfortable with the descriptions or the images that are spread of asylum seekers and displaced people. Once I had made it to the Swedish Migration Agency to apply for asylum, I cried a lot. I didn't want to see myself as 'an asylum seeker'. Today, I meet many asylum seekers through my work placement, and I see the same thing: that everything is new and strange, but that asylum seekers don't have a loud enough voice in society. There don't seem to be any platforms or forums for new arrivals to make their voices heard. More should be done to involve asylum seekers in culture and cultural activities, such as theatre, music and museums. This can be a way of learning more about society. ■



Shawn, age 38

**“NOW I HAVE EVERYTHING I
WANT. THE AMERICAN DREAM
IN SWEDEN!”**

1978–1981 Birth and childhood, Seymour, USA
1981–1996 Childhood, Philadelphia, USA
1996–2001 Studying, Pittsburgh, USA
2001 Working, Washington DC, USA
2002–2007 Working and ties, Pittsburgh, Jacksonville, San
Francisco, Los Angeles, USA and Karlskrona, Sweden
2007–2008 Studying, Pittsburgh, USA
2008–2010 Working, Stockholm, Sweden
2010– Ties, Stockholm, Sweden

I migrate. For much of my life, my migration has been largely about searching. Searching, perhaps, for the stability and the happiness that were not part of my early childhood. I've searched for community – a place where I feel I belong from both ideological and cosmopolitan perspectives. The different cities I've lived in have appealed to me for different reasons. San Francisco is full of creative, driven people. It was mainly love that motivated my move to Los Angeles, but there too there are lots of passionate entrepreneurs and a creative environment that I threw myself into. However, frustration soon caught up with me. There was always something that wasn't good enough, so I looked for a new change. Today, I can see that I was projecting what was wearing away inside me onto my surroundings.

Being able to contribute towards building society has also been an important driving force for me. I therefore turned to politics as a way of building the ideal society. When I wanted to take a break for university studies, I heard about a specific programme in strategic management and social sustainability, which felt exactly right for me. The fact that it happened to be taught in Sweden was of no actual significance at the time, but that's how I came to meet my partner. We shared office space and started going out for coffee breaks together. After completing my studies in Blekinge, I moved back to the USA. I suggested that she should come and live with me to continue our relationship, but things didn't turn out that way.

I'd given Sweden a try. There, I'd found love, stability and creativity. It was an equation that balanced out. I decided to move to my partner in Stockholm, gaining a Swedish family with an international outlook in the process. I'm about 95 percent happy with my life here. Everything works. The infrastructure, the system, people following the law and respecting each other. I've made an effort to get involved in the local scene, and I now have a group of Swedish and international friends. I sing in a choir, and I love my two children, my family and being so close to our summer house in the archipelago. Here in Sweden, I've also found my professional identity in social entrepreneurship.

For the first time in my life, I've found all the elements that I imagined I would want in my life. I've never expe-

rienced a better place to bring up children than here in Sweden. Not feeling that I need – or want – to move on is a completely new feeling for me, but a wonderful feeling. Now I have everything I want. The American dream in Sweden. Or “the Swamerican dream”, as I like to call it!

There's a lot of talk about reducing immigration, and from a systems perspective I can see the need. Society's resources are stretched. But I'm a human being, and from a humanistic perspective I believe that parents and children should have the right to be reunited with each other. The nuclear family needs to be together.

In recent months, I've noticed that the tone of the media's reporting on migration has changed a lot. But the media is only one aspect. Private conversations are also becoming more sceptical. I've noticed that among friends and acquaintances. The humane narrative that used to be Sweden's narrative and image have disappeared. It seems that people have gone from a sense of humanity to counting figures, and that their trust in outsiders has vanished. It's as if an idea has spread of new arrivals taking advantage of Sweden's generosity.

I believe that when people think about migrants, what springs to mind is the people who come from the Middle East as we often hear stories from asylum seekers and refugees from that part of the world in the media. Angry young men get a lot of media attention. It would be good to also highlight those of us who have come here through love and the fact that thanks to Sweden's policy we can start a family and continue our professional lives here. There should also be more discussion about why this form of migration is important for Sweden. There are TV shows and comedians who approach love immigration through satire. They certainly spread information and the message gets across, but it's often rather clichéd.

During the last election in Sweden there was a great deal of focus from both the left and the right on “what we're not”, for example that we're not racists. Why not talk instead about what we actually *are*? I've thought a lot about how a campaign should be able to highlight the positive and show Swedish diversity. ■



Jan Henrik, age 57

1959–1982 Birth, childhood and work, Västerås, Sweden
1982–2009 Studying and working, Uppsala, Sweden
2009–2015 Working, Aberdeen, Scotland
2015– Returning, Löttorp, Borgholm, Sweden

**“IT FELT AS IF SWEDEN HAD
BECOME A XENOPHOBIC
COUNTRY THAT I NO LONGER
RECOGNISED.”**

I spent my first few years living in an apartment in Västerås, and then in a terraced house and eventually in a detached house. It was my father who was socially mobile: a butcher from Falun who trained to become an engineer and then climbed the career ladder at the electronics company ASEA. In many ways, my upbringing was quite idyllic. I was a Scout, and we spent a lot of time in the countryside and camped all year round. My brother and I both became keen bird watchers at an early age.

When I think about my childhood in the 1960s, it feels more modern than contemporary Sweden. New technological innovations were appearing, workers were given more holiday and new opportunities were opening up – in particular, the faith in the future that my dad and his generation had was contagious. People thought that things would work out. Today, society has become so conservative that old-fashioned ideas have made a return. Social differences have become greater. There are poor people in Sweden again, and not everyone can afford to go to the dentist. It feels like we’ve regressed to the pre-war era from a social and economic perspective.

When I was little, I wasn’t interested in school at all to begin with. But I liked playtime and being with my friends. My idols were the Native Americans, and they didn’t go to school – so why should we have to? It was only when I started studying humanities at upper secondary school that things changed – suddenly, I found going to lessons and doing my homework fun.

At secondary school, I started listening to music a lot. My brother had found a radio programme called More Blues, and it opened up a whole new world to me. Blues music was so honest and authentic. After buying a Peps Persson record, I became so obsessed with the harmonica that I bought one and taught myself to play it.

After my military service, I played in a blues band in Västerås and we toured the area around Lake Mälaren. I worked during the daytime and rehearsed in the evenings. At first I worked in a preschool and thought about becoming a preschool teacher, which was a particularly popular choice in the 1970s. But all the women I met in the profession seemed to want to make it clear to me that preschools

were their domain, and that guys had no business working there. So I figured I would do the same as all the other men in Västerås – start working for ASEA.

A few years later, a friend convinced me to start studying in Uppsala. I found out that I could study archaeology, which seemed perfect for me. I would be able to take my interest in nature and put it into a historical context. I liked the combination of theoretical studies and the opportunity to be out digging in the field.

I wrote my dissertation on Iron Age villages on the island of Öland, and I was then accepted for a doctoral degree. My thesis was about settlements on Öland from the 3rd century AD to the 14th century. However, a serious cycling accident meant that it took me a long time to complete my thesis. I defended my thesis in 2006, and three years later I was awarded a postdoc position in the Scottish city of Aberdeen.

Someone I knew at the University of Aberdeen said my expertise was in demand there. Thanks to a research grant from the Swedish Research Council, and then funding from the university, I was able to work in Aberdeen for almost six years. I spent the first year living there alone, and then my partner moved to Aberdeen.

The idea of living and working abroad had never occurred to me before. But as soon as I moved to Scotland I thought it was the best thing I'd ever done, and I still think so. Aberdeen is an old port city with large shipping lines based there – a typical industrial city that now has two universities. It feels like a combination of Gothenburg and an academic town, which is a strange mix. My research in Aberdeen involved comparing the development of Iron Age villages in Scandinavia and the British Isles, and I was able to draw fantastic parallels. The people in Sweden and Scotland must have been thinking the same way when they organised agricultural land, and they must have had the same ideas about everyday life. Every single day I thought: "This is so much fun!"

I found working at the Scottish university much more enjoyable than the slightly fusty Swedish universities. I was happy enough in Uppsala, but Scotland was much more international. All the people working at our depart-

ment came from different countries, and it was the same at all the other departments.

In Aberdeen, there are many highly educated people from Africa and lots of Poles and Italians. Integration seems to have worked much better there than in Sweden. Here, everyone who comes from abroad is grouped together in a few individual locations where there's never any encounters between new and existing inhabitants. In Scotland, there are natural meeting places everywhere. I met people from every culture imaginable at the university, in the pub and out in the countryside. People greeted each other and chatted, and there wasn't the same fear and shyness as in Sweden. The way people spend time together is simpler in Scotland – people from different social and cultural backgrounds go out to the same places. And people socialise across the age groups in different ways compared to Sweden.

The position in Scotland was a fixed-term position, which is why we came back. We found a house to rent near Böda. I've always wanted to live on Öland, but still it felt rather sad moving from Aberdeen. It felt as if Sweden had changed during the time I was away. Or had I just gained new perspectives on my country that meant I was seeing it with fresh eyes? What struck me most was the political discussions. It felt as if Sweden had become a xenophobic country that I no longer recognised. There seemed to be a sense of uncertainty, a general fear, that I don't remember being here before I moved abroad. It was as if Swedish society had become more restricted.

Although I'm happy living on Öland, I still miss Scotland sometimes. And if I got a job offer in Aberdeen, I'd jump at the chance. I miss the academic environment, the seminars and my colleagues. I'm currently applying for research grants. I'm also involved in a documentary film project and doing a few odd jobs for the county administrative board. I train guides, and I've helped to make signs for ancient remains. I've got used to living like this and applying for research grants. I might not get a permanent job before I retire, but with a little luck...

When I was in Scotland, I used to watch Swedish TV on catch-up. Listening to the debate, I soon noticed that

dear old Sweden had quickly become a xenophobic nation where people were afraid to help those in need. That's not how I saw things in Scotland. When I arrived there and started working, I was entitled to all benefits straight away – free healthcare, free dental care and free prescription medicines. I was entitled to all that because I lived in Scotland and paid tax there. It felt wonderful compared to the debate being held in Sweden about which people should get these social benefits.

We mostly talk about refugees – about people who migrate due to war and social deprivation. There's less talk about the other forms of migration, although since Brexit there's been a debate about another form of migration and the consequences of leaving the EU, for example for Swedes working in the UK. That's something I think we'll talk more about in future.

The restrictions introduced by the US are another example of how significant barriers to freedom of movement have been set up. It'll be harder for people to move across borders to work, for example, or to visit someone – and this is something that I think will definitely be reflected in the public debate about migration. Perhaps this is the question that will dominate the future debate. ■

Ayesha, age 29

1987–2014 Birth and childhood, Bengaluru, India
2014– Ties, Stockholm, Sweden

“NEITHER OF US HAD EVER CONSIDERED SWEDEN.”

Bengaluru is sometimes called the green city. As a child, we played in the streets because there was hardly any traffic. Today, that would be impossible. A great deal changed when India opened up to the outside world in the 1990s. With the IT boom, Bengaluru became home to a growing number of international businesses and was transformed into an industrial city. The TV became a window onto the world, and a more global lifestyle emerged. At the same time, there had always been a cosmopolitan outlook in my home as both my parents grew up in larger Indian cities. Trying to understand different approaches is also something I got used to at an early age. Just 15 minutes from where I grew up, living conditions were very different. There, people lived more traditional lives. For example, the women were still expected to stay at home to look after the family and the household.

My two sisters and I had a lot of fun together, but when we became teenagers life became more serious. The pressure of academic performance weighed heavily on my shoulders. In India, your success at school is seen as an indication of how well you will manage to progress in life. Your status and your position are extremely important. I went with the flow and chose business studies instead of the humanities – not out of interest, but in view of a particular level of income and position later on. At the same time, the school system worried me. I saw how the pressure to perform had a negative impact both on the actual



learning and on young people's need for an adult to talk to. As a result, I switched to studying psychology. I wanted to become a school welfare officer, and that's exactly what I did. I began working for a voluntary organisation called the PATH Foundation which works to raise awareness of health-related issues among school children. I saw my future in India, where I could contribute towards the development of society. I never even thought or hoped about working abroad, but sometimes life takes an unexpected direction...

Arranged marriages are still very common in India. However, many people are slowly opening up to the idea of finding a partner themselves. The concept of dating is becoming increasingly common, but in many cases couples still end up in arranged marriages. In my case, I had the privilege of being able to marry the man I dated, Peter. We both grew up in Bengaluru and had known each other for a couple of years before we started dating. I fell for his personality and his way of making me laugh. We decided that we wanted to spend our futures together, but to both of our surprise he was offered a job abroad within the IT sector. Even more unexpectedly, the job was based in Sweden. For many Indian people who set their sights on overseas careers, the choice is mainly countries such as Australia, the UK and the USA. Neither of us had ever considered Sweden, but we decided to go ahead and discover this northerly country. He moved here in 2012. I followed two years later, and we got married.

It was summer when I came to Stockholm, which was a good start. The actual migration process also went smoothly, but continuing our lives here hasn't been without its challenges. If you've had a good education in India, it's fairly easy to get into the job market there. However, facing the job market situation here in Sweden has forced me to fight hard for what I want to achieve. On a personal level, it's been informative and challenging.

Whether or not Sweden becomes our permanent home remains to be seen, but we'll certainly be living here for the next few years. I want to study, work as a teacher and maybe even start a career in research. In the long term, I'd also like my skills and abilities to benefit the society I grew

up in. I don't want to be someone who just moves abroad without giving anything back.

It's easy to get the impression that people only come here to seek asylum. Obviously, those of us who move here to be with a partner or a family member aren't as newsworthy, but it's a reason why many of us come. People talk about an immigration crisis. However, those of us who come for family reasons also experience challenges and difficulties fitting into society and finding work. Sometimes I feel as if no one pays attention to us and our situation.

When families move from India to the USA, there's plenty of literature and information designed specifically for their situations and needs. I think there should be similar information aimed directly at all families who move to Sweden.

When it comes to families from India, it's traditionally been the woman who follows the man. What has it been like for other women, making the tough decision to give up their career in their home country and leave their family to move with a partner who already has a job in the new country? What challenges have they encountered, and what has it been like bringing up their children without having their parents and relatives around? It would be interesting – and important – to hear more women talking about these issues.

Sometimes I hear about stereotypical images of Indian migrants. Many Indians move here to work in the IT sector or academia, but not everyone from India is a computer engineer and only has expertise within IT! There are also many Indians who work within art, culture and the media, for example. I wish that Swedes would be more open to the idea that there are many different professional profiles among Indians. The same is true of views of India as a nation. The representations are often a little simplistic. India is portrayed either as somewhere exotic and glamorous, or as a country of poverty and difficulties. In reality, things aren't so black and white. Every region has its own unique character, and there are many different peoples with great linguistic and cultural differences. It would be good to share more stories about people from India in order to highlight these variations. People aren't a certain way just because they come from the same country. ■



Marc, age 33

- 1983 Birth, Palma, Spain
- 1983–2000 Childhood and studies, Sa Coma, Spain
- 2000–2000 Studying, Madrid, Spain
- 2000–2001 Working, Sa Coma, Spain
- 2001–2002 Studying, Girona, Spain
- 2003–2005 Studying, Tarragona, Spain
- 2006–2008 Studying, Barcelona, Spain
- 2009–2009 Studying, Leeds, UK
- 2009–2009 Free movement within the EU/EEA, London, England
- 2010–2012 Studying and working, Barcelona, Spain
- 2013–2015 Free movement within the EU/EEA, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2013–2015 Working, Barcelona, Spain
- 2013–2015 Working, Sa Coma, Spain
- 2015– Working and studying, Stockholm, Sweden

“MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LEAVING SPAIN.”

I grew up in Sa Coma, a resort on the east coast of Mallorca. My parents have always worked in tourism, and we lived in among the hotel complexes, just a five minute walk from the beach. That’s where everything happened, where we celebrated birthdays and spent time with friends. On Sundays, my family took tables and chairs to the beach and set out food so we could spend all day by the sea.

I’ve always enjoyed drawing. At upper secondary school, I chose to specialise in aesthetic subjects and studied art. At that time, my dream was to work in advertising as it’s a highly creative industry. So at the age of 17 I moved to Madrid to study advertising and PR. To begin with, it was very exciting. A friend and I took the boat to the mainland, and then drove to Madrid. But once I had settled there, it didn’t take long until I wanted to go back home. I think I was scared. It was a five year course, and the idea of being there so long frightened me. I was too young to move away from home.

When I came back to Mallorca, I worked as a swimming instructor. Swimming was one of my main interests. But I decided to resume my studies, and moved to Girona to study advertising and PR again. After a year, I transferred to the state university in Tarragona which was harder to get into but much cheaper. During my course, I started to rethink my career. I realised that I didn’t like PR. It was too business-oriented – it was all sell, sell, sell! I wasn’t interested in that.

I started to specialise in media and transferred my studies to Barcelona, where there are more job opportunities. I spent one year studying literature in Leeds in the UK, and then hoped to get a job in London. But after trying without success for a few months, I moved back to Barcelona. My first job was in TV production, and I stayed working in the industry for several years, sometimes as an editor.

The media industry was hit hard by the economic crisis in 2008. Some newspapers and TV channels closed down. I was lucky and still had a job. But the situation grew worse and worse. New TV series were cancelled after just a few months instead of being broadcast for several years as had previously been the case. It reached a point where those of

us working in the industry couldn't choose what we wanted to do. It was more a case of keeping our heads above water and being grateful to have a job, whether we enjoyed it or not.

Despite the bad times, I managed to start my own TV production business. This was just as social media was starting to become popular, and my job included getting people to watch TV shows online. To save up some money, I also did some work for the production company I'd previously been employed by. So I stayed there for a while before deciding to try my luck in Sweden. My brother lived in Stockholm, and I'd been to visit him several times.

To begin with, I didn't really know what I would do in Sweden. I lived with my brother and sent my CV to various employers without success. Some of those who replied wondered why I'd left Mallorca for this cold country and suggested that I should come for a coffee once I was used to the weather. But I never did it. Dropping by at a business just to drink coffee seems to be normal here, but it felt strange to me. You never do that kind of thing in Spain.

The initial period here was tough. My savings started to run out, and without a Swedish personal identity number it was hard to get a job. I travelled back and forth between Barcelona and Stockholm for a couple of years. I worked on various projects in Spain and looked for work in Sweden. After a while, it felt as if I lived neither here nor there... I eventually decided to give Sweden one last chance. I started my own video editing company, then I went to the Swedish Tax Agency and said: "Now I work here, and if you don't give me a personal identity number I'll pay tax in Spain." That hurried them up! It didn't take many days for them to issue my personal identity number.

I worked freelance for a while, and then started a master's course in digital data strategy at Hyper Island. I'm now doing an internship at a company that works in this field.

Life in Sweden is OK. For me, the biggest problem is the housing shortage. I share a house with ten people, but I would rather have my own apartment or share with one or two people. Socially, things aren't entirely easy either. I find that Swedes stay at home quite a lot, and it's really

hard to get to know people. But on reflection, I suppose that if I lived in Barcelona I wouldn't hang out with people from countries other than Spain...

When it comes to the future, I hope to be able to find a good job. If so, I'll stay here. Otherwise, I'll move somewhere else. My accommodation situation will also play a part in my decision. Because I don't know how long I'll stay here, I want to take the chance to see as much of Stockholm and Sweden as possible.

When it comes to the public debate on migration, there seems to be a focus on two issues: Roma beggars and the situation at Swedish asylum accommodation. I believe that such a narrow focus will make people think this is what migration is about: beggars and asylum seekers. I feel that the media usually prefers to report on issues like these which generate emotions rather than presenting facts.

Last year, I saw a photo exhibition about refugees at the Fotografiska museum here in Stockholm. They were the same type of images that you always see of refugees: a young child all alone in a street. And of course, that's one image of reality. But it's only one image out of many. So why is that the only thing they show? What are they trying to achieve? The reality is much more complex. Many people who come here as refugees are highly educated and of working age – they should also show that, particularly in view of Sweden's ageing population. I wish we could see a broader picture of the people who come here, not just the crying child.

Migrants are also depicted in a very stereotypical manner on film. You never see a Netflix series where a Mexican guy plays the role of a CEO at a company. It's much more likely that he'll play the villain.

Many young people are leaving Spain, looking for work and a better life. There's a lot of talk within public debate in Spain about a brain drain, and that the Government has invested in young people's education but been unable to reap the benefits. And that's something that's often portrayed by the Spanish media. For example, there's a comedy series about two people who've moved to Germany to continue their lives there. Almost every day you see something on TV about young people who've moved abroad because they can't find a job. ■



Burak, age 25

1990–2007 Birth and childhood, Adana, Turkey

2007–2013 Working, Alanya, Turkey

2014– Ties, Sölvesborg, Sweden

**“THEY SHOULD REPORT
WHAT’S HAPPENING IN
TURKEY THE SAME WAY THEY
REPORT ABOUT BRUSSELS
OR PARIS.”**

When I was 17, I left my home town and moved to Alanya, where I got a job as a beach boy. We hired out sun loungers and parasols, and sold food and drink on the beach. It was perfect! Working in tourism is great fun. The sun is shining, and everyone’s happy. I worked from early morning to late evening. We weren’t paid by the hour; we earned a fixed monthly wage, but when you’re young you don’t care much about money – you just want to work.

During the first year I couldn’t even speak English, but I wanted to learn in order to make friends from other countries. I taught myself by talking with people, and I had a book in which I wrote new words and then studied them in the evening. I also learnt German. Not perfect German, but enough to be able to speak with customers.

It was there on the beach that I met my wife. The first time we only made eye contact, but three years later she came back and I recognised her. I believe it was fate that brought us together. When she went home, we stayed in contact via Facebook and then she visited me several times. We lived together in Turkey for nine months and got engaged. We wanted to start a family, and we thought it would be better for us to do so in Sweden. There’s no equivalent of Swedish for Immigrants classes in Turkey, so my wife didn’t get the same help I’ve had here. She wants to be able to work and not just be a housewife. I also felt a degree of uncertainty about my job. My boss rented the beach from a hotel, and there was no guarantee that we would have access to it the next year. Also, tourism wasn’t doing as well in Turkey as before.

The initial period in Sweden was quite hard. In Alanya, all the Swedes I met were happy and friendly. They’re friendly here, too, but they’re also a little reserved. Many of the people I met thought I came from the nearby asylum accommodation and looked at me a little suspiciously. For the first few weeks I didn’t want to go out. I didn’t like the way people looked at me, as if they were thinking: “There’s another one from Syria.” Things were different when people found out that I’m Turkish. My mother-in-law is a teacher, and many people know her in the village. When they found out that I was with her daughter, I gained their approval.

I got a work placement in the local grocery store, and I now have a job there that I enjoy. Life is great. I have a job, a car, a house, a wife and children – just like a Swedish family. When I think about the future I think about children: I want more kids. And I want to be able to go on holiday several times a year. It will be easier for me to travel with a Swedish residence permit, and especially when I eventually get Swedish citizenship. I want to go everywhere and see the world.

When Istanbul was attacked by a suicide bomber, there was only a small article in the newspaper. But when similar attacks were carried out in Paris and Belgium, there was enormous coverage. I usually put out the headline posters at work, but when something happens in Turkey it never makes the headlines. Bombings happen everywhere in the world, but they aren't reported on – perhaps because they tend not to happen in Europe. Since July last year, more than 200 people have been killed in bombings in Turkey. They should report what's happening there the same way they report about Brussels or Paris. If I ask people whether they know what's happening in Turkey, they say that they don't.

Initially, people around us thought that I would oppress my wife, force her to wear a veil, or take the children and run away. They thought these things based on what they had read. It doesn't happen anymore, but they thought this type of thing to begin with when they didn't know me.

When people find out I'm Turkish and not an Arab, they treat me differently. They become more talkative and tell me they've been to Turkey on holiday.

When you see the media reports about the PKK – the Kurdistan Workers' Party – and terrorism, it's easy to assume that the entire country is affected. But that's not the case. Terrorist attacks don't happen everywhere. ■

Baraka, age 32

1984 Birth, Bombo Barracks, Uganda
1985–1997 Childhood and studies, Kampala, Uganda
1997–2015 Working, Kampala, Uganda
2015– Ties, Stockholm, Sweden

“I STARTED WORKING IN CONSTRUCTION AT THE AGE OF 13, BUT DANCING IS MY THING.”

I was born at Bombo Barracks in central Uganda, but I grew up in Kampala and lived there as long as I stayed in the country. My dad worked for the Ugandan army, and my mum was a housewife. I had a younger brother who died when I was nine. Three months later, my mum died too. So I became an only child, with no mother, and my dad was away most of the time. I struggled on as well as I could, but four years later I was orphaned when my dad died of AIDS. It's hard to describe how I felt then, but I stopped going to school and began a new chapter in my life.

I began working in construction even though I was only 13 years old – what choice did I have? For me, it was a matter of survival. When I wasn't at work, I watched films at a hut-like cinema known as the movie shack. It was my breathing space. The only time I spent in the room I rented was when I was asleep. I thought it was like a house of horrors. Work was everything to me.

I wanted to deal with this alone. Of course I had relatives, but I didn't dare to trust anyone. You could say that I skipped my teenage years and went straight into adult-



hood. I longed to do things that other teenagers did, like playing PlayStation or football, but I couldn't live that life. I never asked myself why all these things happened to me when I was so young. Instead, I asked myself this: What do I do now?

When I was 15, I signed my first construction contract of my own for a single-storey house. I employed fifteen men to carry out the building work. I was the youngest. I saw the construction workers as my big brothers. I was good at what I did, and I paid my workers well.

However, there was also something else in my life: dancing. When I was 10 years old, I won a Lingala dancing competition. All the competitors lived in or near a ghetto area. Later on, dancing would change my life.

Building houses paid well, although that wasn't what mattered to me. For a while, I devoted myself to both construction and dancing. However, I realised that I would have to choose eventually. And the construction industry became dangerous for me. I moved in shady circles and ended up in threatening situations where I could just as easily have died. In the end, I made the choice I had to: I didn't want to be killed by a bullet in my head.

So I focused on competition dancing again. When I was 20, I joined a dance group in Kampala. Dancing was both social and fun. I gradually became a professional dancer, even though there was much less money to be made. I had to cut down on my spending and move to a cheaper home, but it was worth it. I found a dance partner who also became my girlfriend, and I felt safer and happier. I felt calm and free.

Now, dancing was my life. A few years later, I met a Japanese woman who was working in Uganda and had also been a competitive dancer. I had longed to meet someone who was as dedicated as I was, and that's exactly what she was – or, at least, what she became. And we became a couple. When we got married, I had something that I hadn't had for many years: a family. And when my wife was then given a new overseas position, the only thing to do was to move with her. She got a job in Sweden, and I wanted to give my 'new family' a chance. And so the Swedish chapter of my life began.

I don't actually have any plans for my life – I plan as it happens. I grew up with a sense that things are possible. What determines my choices is whether I think something feels meaningful. I've joined the Swedish Dancesport Federation, because it's fun. I've recently started freelancing as a photographer, and I'm thinking about specialising in advertising images – ideally art-related. I also take photos as a way of preserving memories, particularly from dance competitions. I don't own a single photo of myself as a child. The oldest photo I have of myself is from when I was 21 years old.

Sweden is a slow country compared with where I come from. It's not boring – it's slow-paced and serene. You have time to think. One thing that doesn't feel right is that my wife provides for me. I'd like to work and earn my own money. It feels like a limitation. But my wife is the most supportive person I could ever hope to meet.

I'm an optimist. That's a common theme of my life. I'm not afraid of what will happen, whether it's good or bad. I've met lots of Swedes who seem to lack hope and to be unhappy. If I can get someone else to have hope in some way, to encourage them to survive, to dare to dream and to see their value and their abilities, then I will have achieved what I want to do above all else.

Migration is often depicted as involving people who end up in difficult situations and conflict. It's common to associate black people with violence, so in this way I feel a little stigmatised. These generalisations affect me in my everyday life and how I interact (or don't interact) with others.

For example, if I'm at the gym I might be the only black guy there, and I don't feel entirely comfortable. If there's a group of white guys training, I wait until the others have finished before I fetch the weights. It's not only in Sweden that this happens. It's hard to explain to anyone who hasn't experienced it. ■



■ Johanna, age 44

1973–1990	Birth and childhood, Stockholm, Sweden
1990–1991	Working, Fresno, USA
1991	Studying, Stockholm, Sweden
1991–1992	Studying, Santa Monica, USA
1992–2010	Studying and working, New York, USA
2010–2015	Working, San Antonio, USA
2015	Working, Amman, Jordan
2015–	Working, Stockholm, Sweden

**“MY ROOTS ARE IN SWEDEN,
BUT CULTURALLY AND
PROFESSIONALLY I’M A
NEW YORKER.”**

What do young people do when they’re 17? They want to get out and see the world! When I was that age, I moved to California because Sweden felt restricted. It may also have been a less dynamic place to live back then. For example, Sweden hadn’t joined the EU yet, but it was mainly because I was young and adventurous. At that time, most people went away and came back after a short period abroad, but it took me 25 years to return.

I often joke that my mum started a 25-year campaign to get me home. She sent job adverts from Sweden to tempt me back. When I came back to Sweden in the early 1990s, it was only to sort out everything I needed before moving permanently to California. I applied for a visa and registered for courses and programmes at various universities.

When I first went to the US as a 17-year-old, I worked with children in cotton plantation California – the area between San Francisco and Los Angeles. I worked during the day and went out with my friends in the evenings – every evening! I don’t know how I managed it. The second time I moved to California, it was to Santa Monica in Los Angeles. There, I studied music and life was very different. After classes, all the students went to the beach and studied. Santa Monica State Beach breathed the spirit of rock’n’roll, and we lived for the day there. It was in Santa Monica that I bought my first car, a second-hand Chrysler LeBaron Turbo. Pearl Jam had just released their “Ten” album, and I listened to it as I drove around Brentwood Hills and felt absolutely free. Those were fantastic times.

I love California and had no plans to leave, but when I was offered a place at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City I couldn’t say no. I had a boyfriend in California and I thought I would move back, but one day I emerged from the Subway and realised that New York was my home. The city really does have a way of consuming you like that.

I was very goal-driven, and I knew exactly what I wanted: to be able to work with music – my great passion – one day. After completing my degree in music, I supported myself through music for a few years and coached private students on the side. With time, that became my main employment.

It was very hard to leave New York in 2010 when my husband joined a start-up in San Antonio, Texas. Looking back, I can see that the cultural differences between Texas and New York are greater than between New York and Sweden. San Antonio is a very traditional city, and is politically conservative. There were internal political conflicts when we lived there, including a debate on the right to bear arms in public.

To begin with, I fought against the cultural differences. I was used to openness in the city, but the Texans are more stoical and don't just share their problems with anyone. So I tried to see it as an extended holiday instead, and to focus on the positive aspects. We still made lots of friends in Texas, and our twins were born there.

When the time came to leave Texas, we drew up a list of potential places to live which we sorted according to the pros and cons. Silicon Valley, Jordan and London were some of the possible places on the list. Stockholm was an attractive alternative, as we had children and knew that Sweden offers good conditions for family life. The stress level is lower, and society is more open to children's needs. It was important for us to have more family time with the option of taking longer holidays. It was family life, not work, that motivated us to move.

I'd left Sweden a very long time ago, and I was concerned that the country would feel like a small place again. But when I talked to my dad about it, he said that I'd left Sweden because it felt restricted but was coming back to Europe – not just Sweden. And he was right. Today, it's much easier to move across borders. Sweden isn't as small anymore.

It came as a shock when we heard that we would have to wait three months to get a place at nursery for our children. We managed to solve the situation by hiring a childminder, but there was a lot to learn about how childcare, social security and banks work. I was particularly confused by the little blue envelopes they send with codes for various functions. I can laugh about it now, but at the time it felt like the scene in Harry Potter when all the letters from Hogwarts came swarming to the Dursleys' house. Now it feels like I've sorted out a daily structure and I have a much

better understanding of how society works in Sweden.

After spending so many years in the US, and particularly in New York, I see how the culture there has influenced me. My roots are in Sweden, but culturally and professionally I'm a New Yorker and adjusting to the pace of work here hasn't been entirely easy. As a consultant, I've noticed major differences in the work process. In the US, it takes around three to six weeks from meeting a client to signing a contract. In Sweden, the same process can take three to six months.

Migration has always existed, and we can't expect everyone to stay in their own countries. People simply move around. Migration needs to be seen from a bigger perspective. I think that way because I've moved around myself. My husband, our children and I have three passports each: one Swedish, one American and one Jordanian. Many of my friends in the US are a mix of nationalities, and I've taken the best of all cultures with me. I'd like to see more of a focus here in Sweden on how intercultural encounters can enrich.

Imagine how it would be if you could reverse the attitude and see migration not as a problem but as an opportunity. Stockholm could become a new city of global citizens – a Swedish New York. Just think how exciting it could be if Sweden took that kind of approach to diversity. If you only see problems, progress will be hampered.

Migration is extremely complex, and it's not reasonable to expect Swedes with their busy schedules to drop everything and get involved in migration issues. But it's important to take the time to treat new inhabitants with kindness and to have an understanding of the demands placed on someone who's new to Sweden. I believe that anything can be solved with good communication. A campaign with high visibility in society that makes people feel welcome and included could engage society. ■

John, age 33

1983–1986 Birth and childhood, Richmond, USA
1986–2001 Childhood and studies, Phoenix, USA
2001–2008 Studying, Tucson, USA
2008–2012 Working, San Francisco, USA
2012–2013 Studying, Phoenix, USA
2013– Working, Stockholm, Sweden

“I FELL IN LOVE WITH SWEDEN, AGE KLARNA AND ELIN.”

I’ve been lucky to have a family like mine. We’ve supported each other, and I grew up with an optimistic, cheerful outlook. I have two siblings: a little sister and a little brother. When I was three years old, we left Richmond on the east coast of the USA and moved to Arizona in the west. My father is a plastic surgeon and was just beginning his career at that point. Phoenix was a good place to start a business – it was a growing city where it was cheap and easy to buy a plot to build on, and there was a lot of optimism for entrepreneurship.

As a young boy, I was almost always outdoors and we travelled a lot. My dad and I used to go on fishing trips for several days. I was an Eagle Scout, and sometimes we travelled to Canada to go canoeing in the wilderness. I was an elite-level swimmer and competed often, and in Phoenix everyone has a pool in the yard to cool down in. I had a great childhood, but I got into plenty of mischief, messed around and did things I really shouldn’t have done. Fortunately, though, I never got into trouble.

When it came to the future, I had no idea what I wanted to do or be. But I started studying at university in Tucson at the age of 18. That was a big change. Freedom... Spreading my wings and living the student life. I took a

few courses in economics to see if that was something for me. My dad had taken me to the hospital when I was little and showed me the operating theatres and everything, but I wasn’t interested in that and he actually encouraged me to do something else – to develop my entrepreneurial side, start a business and do deals.

After college, I took a job at a venture capital company in San Francisco, where I learnt a lot about developing business concepts and running companies. My world vision was broadened. The climate in San Francisco is tough and intense. I worked day and night, and it got to a point where I was starting to get tired. Working in finance was all well and good, but it wasn’t my passion. So I went back to studying and did a master’s degree in business economics which involved doing an internship over the summer. At that same time, my friend Philip moved to Sweden to work for the IT company Klarna, which quickly became successful within digital payment solutions. Philip nagged at me to come and work for Klarna, too. “Try something new, see if you like it!” That was 2013 and I was single, so I said OK. I’ve always been like that. I like to try new, crazy things. I believe that if things don’t work out how you intended, you can always deal with it.

At Klarna, I became a product manager. My job was to bridge the gap between the technology and product side of things and the sales side. Working in Sweden went surprisingly well. I was lucky, because Klarna is a very international company and they helped me to sort out things like a work permit.

The plan was to return to the US after a while, but I fell in love with Sweden and Klarna. I also fell in love with Elin, my then future wife, so there were three things keeping me here. We’re now expecting our first child!

I left Klarna last year to start my own tech and finance company. It’s been hard, but very rewarding. I’m really enjoying it, as I’m getting to do it together with my closest friends.

It wasn’t hard to start a business here in Sweden. But in contrast to the US, there’s not much venture capital in this market. It’s hard to find investors for a start-up company.

Before getting this opportunity, I’d been working hun-



dred-hour weeks for three years. My life had no balance. But here in Sweden, I discovered the balanced mentality when it comes to work and leave. It was a real eye-opener. I've been much happier since moving to Stockholm. I can't imagine a better place to start a family. It's an excellent system. You can build a career, and it's also absolutely fine to be at home when you really need to be.

When it comes to business opportunities, Sweden's a bit like a test market because it's so small. People come here from all over the world, and you need a mixture of very different people in order to succeed in creating fantastic products. Nothing's more important in the technology industry, but there's a big problem: the waiting times for work permits.

I only have to look at my own example: my work permit has expired, and I applied to renew it in May last year in plenty of time before it was due to run out. The only answer I get when I call or log on to the Swedish Migration Agency's website is that my application is "being processed". It's been "being processed" for 17 months now, which is frustrating. This makes it awkward for me to leave the country. I get questioned by the border police when I can't show papers to prove that I have the right to be here. It feels like being shut in a box. It's as if Sweden doesn't care that I can't get a new permit, that I'm not important. And this slow process also means that I can't employ software specialists at our company – it simply takes too long to get work permits for them. It wouldn't be taking jobs away from someone else – there's a real demand for these skills. These highly trained specialists are available in other countries, and it would be so much better if they worked here with me. But I can't afford to pay a consultancy company to deal with all the paperwork involved in fast-tracking applications. So I hire workers who work from abroad instead. I need them to be working now – not in six months or a year's time.

I'm happy here in Sweden, despite these problems and my frustration. It's fascinating just walking along the street and seeing the people you meet. Stockholm has become a very international city with restaurants everywhere and lots of "ethnic" food – which is exactly what I loved about San Francisco.

Just the other day I was sitting at a café on Kungsträdgården when the Royal Horse Guards came parading past. Mounted uniformed musicians playing their wind instruments and drums – it was wonderful. Just to think that they still exist! I love Stockholm, and I feel safer here than in San Francisco.

Everything is all about just a few of the people who want to move to Sweden – refugees and economic migrants. But you never see the workforce with an average or high level of education in the media or public life. Those of us who come here to work aren't particularly controversial – this is what the world is like today, and it's not so politically charged. Sweden should do all it can to enable us to come here for economic reasons, because it benefits the country. These are people who are ready to start working straight away, who have training, who want to produce, and who will start paying tax immediately, contributing towards the economy, business development and society. But employees from other countries are more or less invisible in the public debate, so they get overlooked. In order for welfare to work, around 80 percent of the adult population needs to be working and paying taxes. Of course, asylum and safety are important, but from a business perspective I find it surprising that the immigration of workers with an average or high level of education is overlooked because there has been such a high level of asylum immigration. The entire system is now organised for that aspect of migration, at the expense of all the others. ■



Iman, age 52

1964 Birth and childhood, Yarmouk, a refugee camp for
Palestinians in Damascus, Syria
2014— Ties, Mölndal, Sweden

**“ALL I WANTED WAS THE
MOST NATURAL THING IN
THE WORLD: A MOTHER’S
DESIRE TO BE WITH HER
CHILDREN.”**

belong to the first generation who was born and grew up in Yarmouk refugee camp for Palestinians in Damascus, the capital of Syria. Those of us who were born in the 1960s and the 1970s had a single goal: a good education. My father always used to say: “One day, all the Palestinians will be thrown out of Syria. When that day comes, all you will have to fall back on is your education.” He constantly reminded us that we had to get good academic grades, and we listened to him. My seven sisters, two brothers and I all got degrees. I studied literature and languages, and trained as a teacher. Literature is something I’ve loved from an early age. When I was 14, I read Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. That was my first taste of world literature.

If the first part of my life was all about studies, the second part was all about hard work. I had four sons and fought to give them safety and security – both financially and socially. I taught English and progressed in my career, which ensured financial security. For twenty years I set aside all my own social relationships to give my sons a good upbringing. It was important to me that they got what they needed and that they should go to the best schools. But it was just as important to build up their own inner security and self-esteem. I encouraged them to play sports and to do voluntary work. I did all I could to ensure that my sons would learn to take responsibility and stand on their own two legs. When my oldest son graduated as a computer engineer, I was the happiest woman in the world. That’s how it is when you really love someone – you’re prepared to do anything for that person to do well, and you care about everything that happens in that person’s life.

After my oldest son had completed his compulsory military service, he found it hard to get a job. To avoid the risk of him being called up for the army, I left my job to travel to Egypt with him. After five months, I returned to Syria and my son set off in a boat for Europe. I didn’t hear anything from him for ten days. I didn’t sleep a wink. Finally, he called to say he had arrived safely. It was an incredible relief, but at the same time my other three sons’ lives were still at risk in Syria. Chemical weapons had started to be

used in the conflict, and the mosque near us – which provided a home for internal refugees – was hit by a bomb. That terrible memory of broken bodies, blood and parts of the mosque floating around in a horrific bloodbath still comes back to me like in a nightmare. Even the sound of them shooting against the water tanks outside our home still rings in my ears.

In December 2012, we fled to the UN refugee camp in Damascus, but my sons still weren’t safe there. Young men in particular were kidnapped or seized. I couldn’t let this happen to them. We went together to Egypt so that they could make their way to Europe. Once again, crossing the Mediterranean was the only way to escape. I wouldn’t have survived the boat journey myself, so I was forced to wave them goodbye. How can a mother leave her children to the fate that awaited them? There’s the story of Moses, but the reality was even harder: the likelihood of my sons dying if they stayed in Syria was one hundred percent, but if I let them set off in a boat for Europe they had a fifty percent chance of surviving. With those odds, the choice isn’t hard for any parent. To begin with, I wanted my youngest son to stay with me, but my other two sons said it would be better if he came with them, too. When we were separated, they had to force his hand from mine. It felt like they were tearing my heart out.

As soon as my sons left, I started to think about our reunion. I travelled back to Syria, and a year later I went to Lebanon where my sisters were living. There, I began the application process to be reunited with my sons, who had survived the journey to Europe and been given protection in Sweden. I visited the embassy every day to find out how my case was going. They said that they couldn’t work miracle. But I didn’t want anyone to perform a miracle – all I wanted was perhaps the most natural thing in the world: a mother’s desire to be with her children.

I waited for two years to be reunited with my sons. Those years broke me down. I was disappointed, and I felt hopeless. My sons were my life, my everything. I had heard about freedom in Europe, but life there is completely different to everything they knew from growing up in Syria. How would they cope? My worries and my longing for

them ate away at me from the inside. Having to be apart from each other was a form of torture.

Eventually, I was able to come to Sweden. When I left my youngest son, he was shorter than me. By the time we were reunited, he had grown a good few inches taller than me. The joy at seeing them and being together again is indescribable. Our family is all we have left from our lives before we fled. Although I regret the fact that my sons have missed out on so many years of studying and young life, they are moving forwards and achieving their goals, and that means everything. I only wish that people here in Sweden would accept us as we are. I would like to teach again, and to provide for myself and be independent – just as I always have done. But the question is whether I will be allowed to work as a teacher because I wear a hijab. Sometimes people look strangely at me, as if I was a terrorist, and they avoid sitting next to me on the bus.

Having twenty years of teaching experience but having to start again is a strange situation, but I will continue to look for the way ahead and try to achieve my goals.

I think more attention should be paid to the question of differentiating between those who come here because they need safety and protection and those who have other reasons. Another issue that there should be more of a focus on is all the young people who have taken refuge here. There are children who have often been away from their parents for a long time. Young people change quickly, and how will they change in the absence of their parents? All the children who don't know their fathers – and relationships in general between displaced children and their parents – are important issues that should be talked about more. There's a proverb that says "Being kept far apart makes the heart grow dry". What happens to someone whose heart has grown dry? ■



Christine, age 35

1981–2001 Birth and childhood, Stockholm, Sweden
2001–2007 Working, London, England
2007–2014 Working, Barcelona, Spain
2014– Returning, Stockholm, Sweden

“FOR MANY PEOPLE WHO LEAVE SWEDEN, THE IDEA OF RETURNING HOME IS SOMEWHERE AT THE BACK OF THEIR MIND.”

When I was seven years old, I learnt Persian dancing. I grew up in multicultural Kista, and many of my classmates had foreign backgrounds. Now, as an adult, seeing how much it has enriched my life, I see my multicultural encounters as an incredible advantage. They made me more open to other cultures and curious about other people.

I've always enjoyed travelling, and came to love anything to do with England at an early age – I'm a real Anglophile! When I was 15, I went there on a language study trip and five years later I visited a friend who was training to be an opera singer in London. That's when the idea of moving there came to me. I wanted to work with music, but wasn't having any luck applying for jobs in Sweden. I thought Stockholm was boring, and the nightlife around Stureplan didn't interest me at all. It felt like the right time to move to London. The chances of getting a job in the music industry were also better there than at home.

Moving to another country by yourself is a big step to take. The idea of sharing an apartment with other Swedes gave me a certain sense of security. Through the Church of Sweden, I found a room in a two-room flat where six other Swedes were living. It was terribly hard living with so many people in such a small space. The first time I came back to Sweden for the Christmas holidays, I did nothing but sleep.

Mentally, I had decided that I would spend a year in London, but shortly after moving there I got a job at a big recording studio. That led to other jobs in the music industry, and suddenly that one year had become six. When the office I worked for in London closed down in 2007, I got in touch with a Swedish company in Barcelona. At that time, I'd had enough of London and wanted to do something else. I'd studied Spanish at weekends and travelled frequently to Spain. With the new job I would be working in an international market, giving me the opportunity to travel to London. So I didn't have to shut the door entirely on my old life.

Barcelona is a beautiful and fascinating city with a real buzz, and the climate had a positive effect on my mood. At the same time, I never really felt at home there in the same

way that I had in London. There, I was in a melting pot of people from all over the world, and I felt like a Londoner.

In Spain, I felt more like a foreigner. I spent most of my time with friends from other countries and didn't feel fully integrated – it was hard to get into Spanish groups of friends. Things might have been different if I'd had a partner from Barcelona or worked at a Spanish workplace.

At the same time, my years in Barcelona were incredibly enriching in many ways, not least culturally. I got to know lots of people from Latin America, and I met my current boyfriend who comes from Argentina. Things are less materialistic than in London – it's more about enjoying life, rather than making money and building a career. I loved strolling around the block and greeting all the familiar faces. At one of the cafés, there was often an old lady who used to sit next to me and chat over a cup of coffee.

For many people who leave Sweden, the idea of returning home is somewhere at the back of their mind. As I was so young when I moved abroad, I'd never lived in Sweden as an adult. When my mum fell ill in 2011, I began to think about Sweden more and more. Shortly afterwards, I also lost my job in Barcelona and was unemployed for the first time in my life. After two years and the death of my mum, I decided to move back home to Sweden. I had job offers from companies in both Stockholm and London, but moving back to England didn't feel right.

When I returned home in 2014, Stockholm felt more international than it had done when I left more than a decade previously. Lots of people had moved to Stockholm from other parts of the country and from abroad, and at the same time the suburbs felt more segregated than before.

I love Sweden in many ways. It's a stable nation, which shouldn't be underappreciated or taken for granted, and the job market is growing. I work in digital music production at a start-up and often travel for work to countries like the USA, but to begin with it still wasn't easy to get used to Swedish working culture. In London and Barcelona, people had more individualistic goals, sharper elbows and less team spirit.

Culturally and socially, things are more closed off and

age-fixated here – I feel older now than I did in either Barcelona or London. If you go out in Barcelona in the evening, you'll see younger and older people out in the bars and nightclubs. But here, I sometimes feel like someone's mum... A lot of things are built up around age, and there are clear ideas about what you should do at the different stages of life.

I don't think I'll live in Sweden for the rest of my life, but for the time being and as long as I'm happy here, I'll stay. If I were to have children, I would want them to grow up here.

On the whole, you don't hear much about people who are returning home, but that's only to be expected as we're coming here under different circumstances. If you haven't made that journey yourself, it can be hard to understand what you bring back with you, but it could be discussed more and there could be more interest in how better use can be made of the skills, knowledge and experience that those returning home have to offer. The question of what you go through on a purely personal level is also important. Lots of people think it's very hard to come back. So it would be interesting to hear from others if they, like me, need to be in contact with others who are returning home. You turn to people who've had similar experiences, as they're more likely to understand. Luckily enough, there are now some good groups on social media where you can share your experiences.

Because I grew up in an area with lots of immigrants myself, I think it's important to think about and discuss integration more. One of the biggest challenges is how to avoid greater segregation. People need to feel acknowledged, and that they are part of society – not living alongside the rest of the country in a parallel society. Noting how many people have come here is one thing, but what happens next? It's important to follow up on how things are going for these people, ten and twenty years from now.

It would also be interesting to hear from people who have lived in Sweden for twenty or thirty years. For example, the people who came here from Iran in the 1970s and the 1980s. How are they doing today? What are their views of society? How do they think things work today

compared with when they came? What can be improved? What was there before that no longer exists today?

Today, there's a sharp focus on migration and problems, but with many issues you need to really show what it's all about. If equality is discussed, for example, show how things work in other countries compared with here. What's the policy in the workplace, for example? What does showing respect for others mean there?

I'd also like to hear more from unaccompanied minors. There are reports suggesting that some of them are doing very badly, and things have been so bad for a few of them that suicide has been the only way out. These people are portrayed in a certain way, for example in the media. I think it would be useful to hear these people's own stories, so as not to see them as a group but as individuals. In this way, we would also find out more about what they've been through. ■



Jenny, age 40

- 1976–1997 Birth and childhood, Södertälje, Sweden
- 1997–1998 Working, Saint-Julien-en-Genevois, France
- 1998–2005 Working and studying, Geneva, Switzerland
- 2005–2007 Studying and working, Esserts-Salève, France
- 2007–2014 Working, Farges, France
- 2014– Studying and working, Stockholm, Sweden

“WE’RE HAPPY IN SWEDEN.”

Being born and bred in Södertälje, I’ve lived alongside other cultures all my life. At school, I had lots of classmates from other backgrounds. So I’m used to multiculturalism and I find it easy to build relationships across borders. I myself have links to Finland – my mum was born in Haparanda and her grandmother is from Finland. They moved to Stockholm when she was twelve. She has often told me how tough it was moving here from Haparanda. Both she and many of her relatives speak Finnish, but I didn’t learn the language as a child. My dad comes from Västerås and has relatives in Värmland, where we often celebrated Midsummer.

When I moved to France in 1997, it was mainly because I wanted to learn French. Learning to be independent and discovering the wider world were also driving forces. Once I had decided to move there, things went quickly. I answered an advert for an au pair, and within a week I had a job working for a family in southeast France, near the Swiss border. I bought a one-way ticket and headed off. The plan was to work there for a year and then return to Sweden to study French at university. But things didn’t work out that way. I was so happy in France that I stayed for another two years. I came to appreciate the social context. In France, people often socialise across the age groups – everyone is included, and people support each other in a different way compared to Sweden. If you see someone waiting for a bus in the countryside, you’ll offer them a lift almost as a matter of course. It’s open and generous, but life in France wasn’t always a bed of roses.

Working as an au pair was exhausting. The working weeks were long, and I cleaned, looked after the children and made sure they had something to eat during their lunch breaks. School dinners are rare, and even today lots of French and Swiss kids come home to eat lunch. My work schedule was strict, even though I was treated like one of the family. Culturally, things were challenging. To begin with, for example, I found it hard getting used to the French way of greeting others by kissing on the cheek. Now it’s the other way round – I find it strange not greeting people that way!

After three years in France and Switzerland, I wanted

to do something new. I decided to move to Spain to brush up on my Spanish, but it wasn't to be. I met the man who's now my husband, and after a cycling holiday with Swedish friends I moved in with him. It was a speculative decision, as we hadn't known each other very long. But one thing led to another. We got married in 2005, and went on to have two children together. I felt firmly rooted in France. We lived in Farges, a little town in the east of the country, and worked in Geneva in Switzerland. The school system in France is very different to the Swedish system. There were lots of problems in the village school with large classes and strict teaching. We enrolled the children at a private Montessori school that we were happy with, but we were forced to work full time in order to pay the school fees and we weren't able to spend much time with the children. After a long period of consideration, we reached a decision in 2013 to move to Sweden.

Returning to Sweden was harder than I'd expected. I didn't understand the Swedish welfare system, as I'd lived in France and worked in Switzerland for so long. The processing times for the Swedish Tax Agency and the Social Insurance Agency were extremely long, and the administrative processes were long-winded. For example, I was forced to travel back to France to get a document that was needed in order to register with the Social Insurance Agency.

The fact that I hadn't been a registered resident in Sweden for a long time and didn't have a Swedish income history made the process even harder. This meant that I couldn't take out a subscription for a mobile phone or an internet account, which in turn made it difficult to contact the authorities. I was constantly referred to websites and specific telephone hours, and ended up in a catch-22 situation. Eventually, my dad took out an extra subscription for me so I could deal with my applications and get out of a never-ending vicious circle.

Initially, my daughter didn't get a preschool place and was negatively affected by not being able to make friends or be part of a social group. In France, she had already started school and she couldn't understand why she didn't have the right to do so here. She had to stay with her grand-

parents while her brother went to school and I struggled with our applications and my studies. I don't know how I would have coped without the support of my parents. It took almost an entire year to get into the system and to understand society and my rights here. I lived on the poverty line for nine months as I didn't have any income. It was hard studying full time and working with two children. I fought hard, and now at least I know I can stand on my own two feet. I'm proud to have made it into Swedish society and to have found a job and a home, while also coping with my studies and ensuring that my children have various activities.

Today, both children are at school and I'm continuing my studies. We're happy in Sweden, and my husband hopes to be able to move here full time soon – he's still working in Geneva and commuting between Sweden and Switzerland.

I think attention should be drawn to the issue of the children of returning Swedes. Having seen how much my own daughter was affected by moving and the transition to living in a new country, I understand just how important it is to take children's situations seriously and that they get the support they need. It can be traumatic suddenly coming to a new country and having to adapt to a new culture, while at the same time not being welcomed into society. We need to discuss how best to look after children and give them opportunities for activities that make it easier to integrate. This would also help them to learn Swedish.

We need to dare to talk about the difficulties that can arise for Swedes who come back to a 'home country' they don't recognise, and who don't know about Swedish society or the support systems that are intended to help them. ■

Vitali, age 25

1991–1998 Birth and childhood, Stavropol, Russia
1998–2001 Childhood, California, USA
2001–2008 Childhood, Stavropol, Russia
2008–2009 Studying, Vancouver, Canada
2009–2012 Studying, Montreal, Canada
2012– Studying, Stockholm, Sweden

“STUDENTS ARE A SOCIETY’S FRESHEST BLOOD.”

In the same way that a bird has to fly free and discover wide open spaces, I’ve always seen the whole world as my playing field. My parents grew up in the Soviet Union and were keen for me to see other parts of the world – something they weren’t able to do when they were young. Their attitude, and the fact that our family travelled a lot, meant that my eyes were opened up from an early age to the international arena and the fact that it’s natural to cross borders.

The first time I moved with my family was from Stavropol to California in the US. After a few years there, we returned to Russia. Once I’d completed my upper secondary school studies, I set off on my own. I chose to continue my studies in Vancouver, Canada. For the first two years I wrestled with the question of whether I’d actually made the right decision – although I’ve never chosen to limit my life to one country, I wondered whether I might prefer to be closer to the people I’d grown up with in Russia. As time went by, I found my feet and grew more enthusiastic about the opportunity to explore other parts of Canada. And that’s what happened. I moved onwards to Montreal, which I’ve found to be the most multicultural, most European city in North America. Once again, my studies

became a way to discover a new environment. It was the combination of the social opportunities, the urban environment and the education that attracted me, rather than a specific university.

It was during my time in Montreal that I really understood I’d done the right thing – living independently in a new place contributed towards a level of personal development that I wouldn’t want to have missed out on. I also realised that studying wasn’t the best alternative for me, and that I would get more out of working. I’m proud of my decision to stop studying and start freelancing as a graphic designer. After around a year and a half, however, I felt it was time once again for a new challenge. That’s when Sweden came onto my radar. I’ve always been curious about Sweden, but what prompted me to move here was finding out about a training programme at Hyper Island that offered exactly what I was looking for: a programme where the focus was on practical matters and professional experience rather than theory, and on developing as an employee within a team and learning from each other rather than from a teacher. I spent three months preparing my application. When I heard my application had been successful, I was incredibly happy and the programme itself met my expectations. Today, I run a design studio together with some of my coursemates from Hyper Island. We have offices in Montreal, Copenhagen and Stockholm, and we’ve built up a network of international clients. In doing so, I’ve been able to join together several of the threads from my years spent in various parts of the world.

Sweden’s business culture and design world have always fascinated me, as have brands’ behaviour and the honesty of their offering here in Sweden. Whether it’s a service or a product, you usually get what you pay for so there’s no need to oversell things. The same is true of work performance – people who do a good job let their work speak for itself, rather than wasting time bragging about their merits. This is a form of discretion that I’ve encountered throughout the Nordic region, and it’s based on very similar values to those held by my family. In my eyes, the so-called Law of Jante – emphasising collective achievements, rather than individual success – is a fantastic foundation



and model, especially when this is enhanced a little by providing the scope for flexibility.

This is currently my fourth year in Sweden. According to my original plan, I was going to move to Brazil after two years. That's not how things worked out, but I've established a circle of Brazilian friends here and I feel that I'm continuing to be challenged and to develop every day, both personally and professionally. Sweden is a bit like the Japan of Europe – it's part of a wider region, but it develops according to its own agenda to some extent.

Stockholm feels like the right place for me to be right now, but I'll need to spend some time surrounded by nature soon. I need something to counter what's dominated my life in recent times. Contrast is something of a motto for my life. I'm driven and inspired by opportunities to experience extremes, and I simply ensure that I create contrasts in my life. So now I need complete tranquillity, for example like what I experience at my family's rural retreat in the Russian mountains. There are no telephones or internet there, and not a single person within a 20 kilometre radius. The counterpart to that could be indulging in a big city's rich offering of entertainment and activities. Like the time I was in Tokyo. All the new impressions and my fascination with the city meant that I couldn't sleep for several days. I didn't want to miss a single minute of the experiences on offer there!

Equal opportunities for education is an issue that I'm passionate about. I think it's important to pay attention to the effects of introducing tuition fees. There's a risk that this will create a kind of exclusivity and commercialisation which means that opportunities for higher studies are influenced by financial resources rather than a desire to study and talent. I worry that Sweden is heading towards a system like the one in the USA, and that introducing study fees could spread and become a regional phenomenon.

It's extremely unfair if people who can't afford an education aren't given the chance to carry out higher studies. That's why it's important to find solutions, for example scholarship programmes or student loans. However, the educational institutions should have more of an influence within the process. An individual shouldn't be able to lose

their opportunity to study thanks to scholarships because, for example, they don't have enough money to support themselves in their own bank account. I wish that the social debate on these issues gave a voice to more people from countries outside the EU. Many people have worked hard to save up the funds to pay for exchange studies, and then they work hard to complete their studies in a new country. In my experience, foreign students take their studies extremely seriously, while those who don't need to pay anything often take the opportunity to study for granted. This creates a sense of frustration, and it would be worth highlighting this. Students are a society's freshest blood. If you give young people an opportunity to study, they'll always give something back and inspire others. ■

Ion, age 29

1987–2012 Birth and childhood, Chişinău, Moldova
2012 Free movement within the EU/EEA, Munich, Germany
2012– Free movement within the EU/EEA, Stockholm,
Sweden

“WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU MAKES YOU STRONGER.”

We lived right on the approach to Moldova's capital, Chişinău, in one of the two skyscrapers that are usually called 'the Gateway to the Capital'. The whole city was spread out in front of my eyes from our apartment on the twentieth floor: the green parks and all the buildings. You could see when localised rain showers stained the streets dark, and which areas had escaped the wet weather. Even to this day, I still miss the incredible view.

My parents used to warn us children not to look down from the balcony. Our relatives got dizzy and scared when they looked down, but it wasn't a problem for me. I only felt giddy when the tower really swayed... The first time I was woken in the night by an earthquake, I started to cry. Over the years, I grew used to the sudden sound of screeching metal and the sight of swaying ceiling lights... It was just a matter of trying to sleep or getting back on with whatever I was doing. Since Moldova is located in an earthquake zone, the cities are built to withstand the quakes which are usually weak and rarely cause any damage.

The early nineties, when Moldova won independence from the Soviet Union, were an uneasy time with widespread gang violence. It didn't feel safe going beyond our immediate neighbourhood, although I did have a certain degree of protection from my older brothers. They went to

a Russian school and spoke Russian at home, while my sister and I went to a Romanian school and spoke Romanian. My brothers also had more of a Russian mind-set, whereas I took more of an EU approach. We sometimes clashed as a result, and disagreed with each other. I learnt that there are certain things you just don't talk about with family, such as politics...

Having to stay in the limited area of our immediate neighbourhood was tiresome. Even as a child, I was curious and wanted to know what was around the corner. Through football, and later on through upper secondary school, I was lucky enough to get to discover other parts of the city. Otherwise, the forest near our home was somewhere I enjoyed spending time, and I was fascinated by going to the countryside with my mother to pick mushrooms. I've always had a passion for nature and animals – I'm an outdoors person at heart. Right from an early age, I thought that animals shouldn't be killed and wanted to be a vegan, but that wouldn't have been possible. People would have looked at me like I'd joined a cult. It's also hard to think 'differently' about other issues, such as equality and feminism, in Moldova. You risk being threatened, criticised, abused or raped if you stand up for your opinions that differ from the views of the majority of society.

In addition to my Moldovan citizenship I have a Romanian passport, but I usually say that I come from planet Earth. From my perspective, a more global approach is needed – things need to be seen and dealt with as a whole. Living the way much of the population lives today won't be sustainable in the long term. You can't just look after your own interests and deal with problems by burying your head in the sand. Free movement within the EU is good – it contributes towards the economy as a whole. And if it hadn't been possible, I would have been angry and frustrated! I wouldn't have been able to discover everything I wanted to and meet people from different cultures. After studying at university in Chişinău, I was able to do just that – get away and discover the world. I travelled to Munich in Germany, where my sister lives. After a couple of months, I set my sights on Sweden. I was attracted by the nature, the winter and the darkness... What are peo-



ple like in Sweden? I was curious, but I didn't have any real expectations when I came here. Maybe I would stay for a few months? Or maybe a few years? It's been four years now – and I'm now a vegan!

During the first few months in Sweden, I was a foreman at a construction company, but I felt more like a translator as I often had to help with the communication between clients and employees. I got bored, so I arranged an internship at another construction company and then got a job. I didn't have any problem finding work in architectural engineering, which I studied in Moldova. My language skills in Russian, Romanian, German and Swedish also made it easy for me to get a foothold in the job market.

I've been working for a few years as a quantity surveyor at a construction company, which involves calculating production costs for various housing or infrastructure projects. I like the fact that I have a lot of responsibility, varied tasks and the opportunity to influence designs. But for the first time in my life, I've experienced stress. People have to deal with so much in addition to their job all the time. If it's not something that needs to be done at home, they have to look after themselves and their family, or spend time with friends, or devote time to their hobby, or exercise, or take part in some project or other, or plan a trip... Something else that's new to me is the degree of focus and the level of detail here in Sweden. For example, I remember meeting a guy who was a real popcorn fanatic. His knowledge of seasoning and the actual production process was fascinating. It's a good thing that people get to the bottom of what they're interested in.

I'll probably move on within a year or two. My magical memories of nature in locations like Kiruna will stay with me, and that's something I'll miss, but there are so many other exciting places in the world to discover. I'd like to find out more about Japan – what are the Japanese mentality and psychology like? Another idea I've had is to spend a few years living in Africa, working to protect wild animals. I'm not interested in routines. I want to keep expanding my horizons, facing challenges and trying out whatever I can. If things don't work out, then so be it. Or things might work out. Why are people often so scared

of doing things wrong? What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

What's struck me when it comes to the discussion on streams of refugees is the question of infrastructure. In order to be able to receive large numbers of people who have fled from war and conflicts, resources need to be invested in effective reception, good accommodation for all and activities while waiting for a decision. All these things should have been put in place before so many people came from Syria, and the infrastructure should be prioritised more highly.

Why do people move within the EU? It would be good to highlight how free movement gives people an opportunity to get a good job with good conditions. If domestic conditions feature corruption and a lack of networks, such as in Moldova, it's hard to start and run your own business. Show how things work in other countries, and spread knowledge about background and culture that leads to people seeking other opportunities outside their home country.

It would also be interesting to hear more about the introduction of tuition fees. What have the consequences been, and what knowledge is being transferred? How do experiences in the new study country contribute or influence things in students' home countries after they return? ■



Andres, age 40

1976	Birth, Ceuta, Spain
1976–1982	Childhood, Marbella, Spain
1982–2011	Studying and working, Marbella, Spain
2011–2012	Free movement within the EU/EEA, working, Järfälla, Sweden
2012–2014	Working and studying, Lysekil, Sweden
2015–	Working, Järfälla, Sweden

“I HAD EVERYTHING, AND I LOST EVERYTHING. NOW I’M STARTING AGAIN.”

I’m Spanish, but I was born in northern Morocco in what was once a Spanish protectorate. My father was a police customs officer, based in the city of Ceuta. But my family comes from Marbella, which was where I grew up.

As a boy, I wanted to follow in my father’s footsteps and become a policeman. But it turned out that I wouldn’t pass the physical tests. Nevertheless, getting a job after school wasn’t difficult. I’ve always been a jack of all trades – a bit of a handyman, carrying out maintenance and repairs. I’ve also been a graphic designer, worked at a hospital and a warehouse, and been a bouncer at a nightclub. Several years ago, I moved into the restaurant business – a friend and I opened two restaurants and a coffee shop in Marbella and Malaga. They were doing well until the big financial crisis hit four or five years back. People stopped eating out, and all the restaurants started to struggle. I couldn’t pay my taxes or anything, the guests disappeared, and I lost my house, my car – everything.

What could I do? Suddenly, I had nothing. That’s when I thought about Sweden. I’d been there twice on holiday. My cousin was born in Sweden, and he’s always liked his ‘Spanish’ family. And I like Sweden. I like the cold climate. So why not live there?

I only had 300 euros when I moved here in October 2011, and I had to stay with my cousin who has a house in Jakobsberg near Stockholm. I sorted out the paperwork with the Swedish Public Employment Service and everything else, and started looking for work, but it was harder than I’d expected. It took seven months before I got my first job. When I came to Sweden, you couldn’t study Swedish for Immigrants classes if you came as an EU citizen, so I tried to teach myself Swedish. It was very difficult – I really needed to go to classes.

To begin with, I didn’t want to do anything. I didn’t want to listen to music, either. Seven months, winter, minus twenty degrees. I was tired and depressed.

But in spring 2012, I got the chance to work at a Spanish restaurant in Lysekil, so I moved there. At that time my Swedish wasn’t any good at all, and my English isn’t particularly strong either. But I was happy there. Lysekil is fantastic in the summer, but in the winter...

Then I got a second job at a hotel in Lysekil. It was only a part-time position at 40 percent hours, but in Stockholm I had nothing at all. I still didn't have a proper personal identity number, so I couldn't study. I finally got a personal identity number in August, and was able to start Swedish for Immigrants classes in Lysekil.

Then I began travelling back and forth between the west coast and Stockholm. For a brief period, I worked as a scaffolder at Stora Enso in Karlstad. Then I moved back in with my cousin and eventually got a job as a kitchen assistant. I'd done kitchen work training in Jakobsberg, where I now live. I worked at a property company at the same time, and for two summers I also worked at the Gröna Lund amusement park. I changed ventilation filters in the morning, and chopped salads and prepared food in the afternoon. At times, I had three jobs on the go.

I sometimes think about how my life was in Spain before the financial crisis. I had a good job, and a large house in Puerto Banus where wealthy people from Qatar and Dubai have luxurious villas. Now that I'm living in Sweden, I'm starting my life again. I've made new friends, and I have a new job at the Welcome Hotel in Barkarby, where I'm a chef. Lots of things are much easier now. When I started speaking Swedish, things improved. I have a girlfriend from Peru, and I usually say to her: "You shouldn't work – you should study and learn Swedish."

I'm more relaxed now. I want to stay at home more and work less. But sometimes I help out at a place called Classic Café, where I work as a sous chef. My next goal is to find an apartment, but you have to wait four or five years in Järfälla. I want to get married and start a family. In Spain, I had everything, and I lost everything. Now I'm starting again in my new home country.

If people want to come to Sweden to work, I think that's fantastic. But when they come and don't work, and just want to claim benefits and stay at home – well, I don't like that. People should pay their way. ■



Mariana, age 36

1979–2010 Childhood, studies and work, Buenos Aires, Argentina
2010– Ties, studies, Stockholm, Sweden

“THE MEDIA NEEDS TO GET ITS ACT TOGETHER AND STOP SHOWING THINGS IN BLACK AND WHITE, PORTRAYING MIGRANTS AS EITHER CRIMINALS OR WONDERFUL PEOPLE WHO DO EVERYTHING RIGHT.”

I'm a trained camerawoman. I was attracted to the profession because you need to know a bit about everything: the history of art, physics, optics... And you get to know a lot of people. Recording takes you to places you might not have visited otherwise.

I met my partner, who was an exchange student in Buenos Aires, at a friend's party eight years ago. Having visited each other in Stockholm and Buenos Aires, we decided to try living together. My partner had just qualified as an engineer and was offered a job in Sweden. And I wanted to try living abroad.

When you come to Sweden and learn the language, you also learn about Swedish culture, but in a fairly clichéd way. It's mostly about Pippi Longstocking and Christmas songs. Astrid Lindgren is fantastic, but I think Swedish culture is much broader than that. There's much more to read and hear. Here at university, for example, I've learnt that in Sweden you can study theatre technology, circus or music for film at degree level! I felt that we were treated a bit like children at Swedish for Immigrants classes, which was quite frustrating. You're longing to start working and trying to set up a bank account and get a Swedish personal identity number – and then you go to classes and have to sing about gingerbread men. I would have preferred more adult-oriented teaching. Perhaps you could practise doing job interviews or what you need to be able to say when visiting the bank or the doctor. It's not fun being treated like a child.

When we talked about work during these classes the focus was mainly on certain professions, such as child minders, nurses and taxi drivers. For example, a taxi company came and gave a presentation, but it was aimed mainly at men. I think it's best if you can continue your career path here in Sweden. A lot of knowledge and potential end up being wasted if you have to start again from nothing.

While I was learning Swedish, I worked as a freelancer on various recordings. Up until last year, I worked at a company that dealt with adverts, TV and films. Now I'm studying for a master's in film and media at Stockholm University of the Arts, specialising in documentary narrative. For me, continuing to study was a dream come true.

My future plans are to start a family and to work with something where I feel I can contribute towards society in some way. I'd love to work with teaching children and young people, which I did before, while also working on my own documentary film projects.

I feel that migration due to family ties is almost invisible in the media. The *Welcome to Sweden* TV series is the only example I've come across. It would be good if someone made a TV series that completely normalised relationships where one person has migrated, ideally one that wasn't American.

I think it's important to raise the issue of what happens when things don't work out. Amalia Alvarez's book *Five Undocumented Women's Stories* deals with questions such as what happens if you move here but the relationship ends. By law, you risk losing your residence permit if you split up within the first two years. I think the law needs to be reviewed.

Representations of migrants is something I think about a lot. The way immigrants are described sometimes makes me sad and angry. Working with films, I've watched lots of detective movies and the criminal is often from another country. We need to update this image.

The other side of the story is also slightly skewed. Like when you read in the paper that someone only came here a year ago, and he's already started his own business and passed all his Swedish-language courses. That's great for him, but not everyone has the opportunity to be this kind of model immigrant. This type of reporting can lead to performance anxiety. It's not unusual for people to feel physically ill during their first years in a new country, when they feel extremely isolated and inadequate. Learning a new language so quickly is almost impossible. It takes patience. I believe it's important that those of us who learn Swedish aren't afraid to expose ourselves and that people shouldn't get irritated at our accents – they should accept the way we talk. Those who listen also need to be patient and tolerant. Swedes aren't used to listening to their own language being spoken with an accent. Perhaps accent isn't that important to me. My native language, Spanish, is spoken by more than 400 million people and there are any number of variations.

Art can play an important role in conveying stories. When you hear someone's story and put yourself in their shoes, you also feel empathy and understand how they think. But the media also needs to get its act together and stop showing things in black and white, portraying migrants as either criminals or wonderful people who do everything right. There needs to be a more human, more nuanced middle ground. ■

Khaled, age 29

1987–1994 Place of birth and childhood, Sanaa, Yemen

1994–2013 Studies and work, Gaza

2013 Denmark

2013– Asylum, Gothenburg, Sweden

“MUSIC GAVE ME A SANCTUARY AND A WINDOW TO THE WORLD.”

Bombs are one of the first sounds I recall. The occupation and prison years are lodged in my memory – but so is the discovery of the importance of music. It began in my early teens. I was a young boy who didn't have much to do and whom no one knew anything about. The cartoons I saw on television gave me sentences and words to play with. The lyrics I created came out of nowhere, and over time their content became dominated by political circumstances. My friend Sammy and I had seen how people lose control in a war zone. We decided to try to make music a tool to make the unbearable bearable. After the first journalists discovered our work and word began to spread, we were pulled deeper and deeper into the musical world.

Later, when I was a PLO soldier in the army, I saw even more clearly how politics corrupted people. The reward for following the leader's orders – for example, to serve on the front line – was a military promotion, and soon people were sporting new epaulets.

It wasn't easy to understand what was happening around me. The siege of Gaza in 2008 brought a real culture shock. Music helped me to survive in the war zone and to open my mind. It gave me a sanctuary and a window to the world.



I heard that Sweden was a paradise, but for me there was, and still is, no such thing. But in my heart and mind, I still wanted to get to Scandinavia. The things I had learned about it gave me the idea that the people from those countries are kind and professional. And they are. Racism exists, but at a much lower level. For the Palestinians who have experienced the situation in Egypt, and for the Syrians who've been through the war there, and for all of those who would have died of bullets in their heads if they hadn't fled, the racism in Sweden is like dust on the table. Saying anything else is hypocritical. Making a fuss because you don't want to live in Norrland, in my eyes, is akin to whingeing. Complaining about the food you're served, when you didn't even have food in the conditions you left behind, is a bit rich... There's a saying that I should respect whatever is offered to me. Even if it's only bread, we should be thankful.

What we're seeing is in part a housing crisis – new people from all over the world are coming in, but the problem is so much greater than the numbers of people arriving. Where is the vision? What is the plan 10 years from now? How are these people going to be integrated? You have to be honest to the population. Sometimes I think that the way the situation is being handled reminds me of a well-meaning but stupid boy, and that stirs up rather than alleviates racism. Even Noah couldn't take everyone on the ark! The calculations and future plans must take into account existing resources. For many of those who come to Sweden, their reality is that either they're going to live or die. In Sweden, the reality is that you'll survive if you have a home and a job. You can't just be "taken in". New arrivals must get involved in the local community. There are a large number of good examples and positive stories, but they don't get any press. We have performers, artists and scientists with a lot to offer and who could promote change – if they were only given the chance to be seen. What do we see instead? What generates headlines? That a bus stops in the middle of the road because some children don't want to be sent to a certain refugee home. Pictures of food that asylum-seekers don't want to eat! Some of the media and other players in the ongoing migration debate

are mixing honey with poison, and they're framing things in such a way that people think the media are the only people with answers.

It would be good if more people with experience of seeking asylum participated in the public discourse. Everyone's experience is different, so we need encounters between different people. I think that kind of discussion is where we will find at least part of the solution.

You're born under the boots of the military, and suddenly you have freedom. Of course there's a risk of losing control if you're not a good person or if your roots aren't firmly anchored in education, ethics and respect for others. When I see large groups of men behaving in a certain way on the streets, I admit I become shy, but we need to stand up and say stop!

We need to understand and emphasise the importance of all the children who come to Sweden, who are curious and want to learn everything. It's the children, not the older generation, who build up a country for the future. ■

■ Michal, age 35

1981–2004 Birth and childhood, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia
2004 Working, Dublin, Ireland
2005–2008 Working, London, UK
2008–2011 Working, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia
2011–2015 Working, Bratislava, Slovakia
2015–2016 Working, Flatö, Sweden
2016– Working, Lysekil, Sweden

“IF I CAN UNDERSTAND SWEDISH, SWEDES WILL BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND ME.”

My home town of Banská Bystrica is located in the countryside, and is surrounded by mountains. It's a quiet town, and it's fantastic for family life. I enjoyed a good, secure childhood in Slovakia. I grew up during the transition from socialism to capitalism, which was known as the Velvet Revolution. I had fun, and I played a lot of basketball with my friends. As an active basketball player for eight years, sport was a big feature of my childhood.

This was followed by student life, with all it involves. During my teacher's training in Banská Bystrica, I studied subjects including philosophy and English. I wanted to improve my English, and hoped to be able to do so if I lived in an English-speaking country. So it felt right to travel abroad and get a summer job in 2004 after Slovakia had joined the EU. That summer, I worked in advertising distribution in Ireland. It was the first time I'd experienced another society and another culture. I took the opportunity to travel around the country, and found the landscape very different. That was a good time.

After graduating, I moved to London where I worked as a teaching assistant and a doorkeeper. As an EU citizen, there were no real obstacles to being able to live in another country. I was lucky enough to get a job when I moved, and to have friends there who could help me. I'm aware of Slovakia's history, and can appreciate the opportunities that the EU offers: being able to travel without visa requirements, and so on. Before Slovakia joined the EU, it wasn't as easy.

When I returned from the UK, I found it hard to maintain my high standard of living. Teachers aren't as well paid in Slovakia. In fact, they're among the lowest paid workers. In order to live in the same way that I had in London, I would have to take on more jobs. So my motivation to stay there wasn't particularly strong. After three years, I moved to Bratislava to work at a marketing company.

After four years in the job, my partner and I decided to move to Sweden. While working in Bratislava, I did a lot of business trips to countries including Denmark and Sweden. In Sweden, I'd noticed that Swedes work in a more relaxed way and that very few of them were stressed compared with Germany or Slovakia. I was attracted to the Scandinavian working climate.

In 2013, my partner and I took evening classes in Bratislava to learn Swedish and to prepare for the move. We'd also started looking at the job and housing opportunities. We had so many reasons to move to Sweden, so we drew up a list. Justice and equality were two of our reasons. Swedish society's view of women is better than in many other countries, and that was important to us. The balance between work time and family time was also a reason why we wanted to move. Compared to the UK and Slovakia, Swedes make sure that they enjoy their family time and relax so that they feel good. We were also attracted by Sweden's environmental policies and the opportunity for my partner to work as a landscape architect. We know that Sweden isn't perfect, but the progress made within environmental policies and equality are exemplary.

If you don't have any expectations, you can't be disappointed. That was my motto when we came to Sweden. In retrospect, I would say it was as hard as I had expected and



as good as I had hoped. I knew it would be hard, mainly because of the language, but also because my partner and I didn't have family or friends here for support.

To begin with, I worked part-time at a fish factory. Now, I work as a logistician and my partner works as an engineer. It's fantastic that we were able to get these jobs so soon, and that we can enjoy life. I didn't have any problems going from city life with a well-paid job to working in a herring factory on Sweden's west coast.

When we planned our move to Sweden, the idea was to live close to nature. We lived in the capital for the last four years in Slovakia, and although there was greenery there you can't compare living in an apartment to living in a house on the coast. In the relatively short time we've lived here, we've done better than we expected initially.

In just a year and a half, I've improved my Swedish and can now read books, but holding a conversation can still be a challenge. At work, for example, it's easy for me to make myself understood because we talk about things that we all know about. The difficulty comes when I try to explain something outside work. Then, it can be tricky to find the right words to explain what I mean. An example of this is when I go to buy a coffee and they notice my accent. They switch to English out of consideration to make things easier, but I continue to speak in Swedish so that I can challenge myself to improve. My favourite Swedish saying is "Ingen ko på isen". It translates literally as "No cow on the ice", and it means "There's no immediate danger".

Right now, my partner and I want to stay here on the west coast and start a family. We're happy here, and we love the surrounding countryside. Here in Bohuslän, we're only half an hour from the archipelago and the wild forest. If we want to visit the city and take in the architecture and culture, we can go to Gothenburg for the day. The idea is to stay here in close contact with nature, and maybe have a smallholding with free-range animals and crops, and be a little self-sufficient.

The future will be a voyage of discovery as we learn more about Swedish society. I feel like part of the working community, but I find it hard to know where to turn if I have questions about things like pensions or union rights.

Access to this type of information is important for integration and a good life.

Sweden needs to become better at encouraging migrants to learn Swedish. It's important to know the language in order to understand Swedish society and culture. My reasoning is that if I can understand Swedish, Swedes will be able to understand me. Swedish for Immigrants is an excellent initiative for integration, and it's something that countries like the UK don't have. However, the opportunities for language learning need to be presented more clearly.

When I talk to Swedes and list the good reasons for moving to Sweden, it's an eye-opener for them. This isn't something that Sweden gets across to its citizens or internationally. But I believe that it's one of the reasons why migrants from the EU come to Sweden. Thanks to the freedom of movement within the EU, it's easy to come and see how fantastic things are here, and the opportunities on offer. Sweden should focus on marketing itself as a country. ■



Zinica, age 27

1989–2012 Birth and childhood, Iași, Romania
2012– Free movement within the EU/EEA, Stockholm, Sweden

“I DON’T WANT OUR DAUGHTERS TO HAVE TO GROW UP IN POVERTY AND LIVE THE WAY WE’VE LIVED.”

I have one positive memory from my childhood: the occasions when I would work with my brother. We used to help the refuse collectors to sort through the rubbish. We were delighted by the opportunity to help them in their work and get a little bit of money for our efforts. Otherwise, thinking back on my life in Iași is tough. The people there weren’t nice to my family, because we’re Roma and because of the clothes we wore. Because the Romanian people look down on us. If we tried to go to the cinema, they slammed the door in our faces. If we were in the supermarket we were driven out, and it wasn’t uncommon for people to swear at us in the street. When we tried to meet the mayor, we were told that he wasn’t there or that he didn’t want anything to do with us. Things were even worse when my parents were young. They were driven away from their home town and told to “Go back to India”. India? Even my parents were born in Romania. We’re just as Romanian as anyone else, but what does that matter when the people in charge aren’t on our side and when the social services that do exist aren’t there for *everyone*?

My parents were very loving when they were at home. During the periods when they were travelling – to try to earn an income elsewhere – I had to look after the household and take care of my siblings. We didn’t have running water, sewerage or electricity at home. I had to walk to the well about six kilometres away to get water. Sometimes I had to go several times a day. I was forced to beg for money so that my siblings could have something to eat. I was five years old when I started begging. A few years later, when I was thirteen, my dad was involved in an accident which meant that he couldn’t work anymore. The entire burden was then on my mum, but I did a few odd jobs such as pig farming to help support us. I never went to school or played like the other children. Of course, I longed to learn to read and write, but I simply didn’t have the choice and there was no time for playing during my childhood. My only real friend was my brother. He’s in Greece now, trying to support himself and his family by selling balloons on the beach.

When I was 17, my mum told me I should get married. Graffian, who eventually became my husband, moved in

with us together with his grandmother shortly afterwards. She was the one who asked for my hand in the presence of Graffian's parents and my parents, who had agreed to our marriage. They ate and drank, and that was that. There wasn't much else to say – it was just a case of joining hands and turning up at the wedding, which was arranged a week later. And Graffian and I have been together ever since. Love is about more than just liking someone – you have to go through things together and be there for each other through the good times and the bad times. For me, that means wherever Graffian is, so am I. I sleep where he sleeps. We share the food on the table equally between us. Love is being together, and I'm happy that he has never mistreated me. The shawl with flowers that I wear is also important to me. It shows that I belong to him, that we're married and that I'm responsible for the household. It also shows that I'm a Roma and that I respect our customs.

Graffian and I have two daughters. The oldest, who is nine years old, is like Graffian and often takes his side. She's very helpful, and tries to look after her six-year-old sister. They're both children, but life doesn't allow them to have a childhood. I don't want our daughters to have to grow up in poverty and live the way we've lived. When they're older, we want them to have a good life. That means everything, and it's why we came to Sweden. We'd heard from others who had come here that you can get a job here and make a better life. We thought we could work here, earn a living and build a future for our children and for ourselves. One day, I want us to live in a real house. Back home in Iași, 13 people sleep on a mattress on the floor in a stone building that's half open to the elements. It's cramped and cold. No one has their own space. It's not worth living like that.

We thought it would be easier to find work here. Even though I'm prepared to take on any job at all, it's hard. We try begging and collecting tin cans, but the little money we do get doesn't go far. We had to get into debt to pay for the coach ticket here, and everything we manage to earn goes towards paying off the debt and to our family back home so they can have food on the table. It's incredibly hard being away from my daughters. If I only knew

that I could get a steady income, I would bring them here straight away. They want to come, but where would they live? Graffian and I have to sort out accommodation from day to day. Sometimes we sleep on the streets, and sometimes at a hostel. At other times, we've stayed with Swedes who have opened up their homes to us. We're so grateful to everyone who has shown us generosity and kindness.

When we first came here in 2014, something terrible happened that meant we didn't dare to stay in Sweden. One night, we were sleeping on the street in Kista when a man came and poured petrol over us. He was violent, and took everything we had. We were so shocked and scared that we didn't know where to go. Sweden paid for our travel home. When we saw our daughters again, we hugged them and wept with relief. Our children had come so close to losing their parents.

But we decided to return to Sweden anyway. That involved taking a big risk. To begin with we didn't dare to take a single step without looking around, fearful of being attacked and hunted down by the man from Kista again. We currently have somewhere to live and I'm performing in a play at Folkoperan, which provides a little income. That was thanks to my grandmother, who also lives here in Sweden. One day, a woman came up to her on the street and asked if she wanted to be in a play. It turned out that the woman, who works in the theatre, had seen my grandmother walking around barefoot and had had an idea for a play. Since my grandmother is now in hospital, I was asked instead and I agreed to do it. I don't actually know what I do on the stage, really – I do what I'm told to do. I sit on a chair, bend over and take off my sandals. On a plasma TV behind me, I can hear my grandmother talking about her life. I don't understand what's said in the play, but people tell me that I perform well. I must be doing something right, as the audience applauds. One day, I started talking about my children on the stage and then I started to cry. Apparently, the whole thing had been filmed. I don't mind if they show it on TV. If they do, people might understand our situation better and want to help or offer us work. We're trying to learn Swedish. I'll be able to learn most of what I need to know to achieve my dream and reach my

goal – to get a job and be able to bring our daughters here. Children shouldn't have to grow up without their parents.

One day when I was going to go out and beg, I saw that people had gathered for a demonstration about the Syrians' situation. I know that there's a war in their home country and that many people have fled here. I was affected so badly. Thinking about what they had been through left me depressed and made me feel anxious. I couldn't bring myself to work that day. The Syrians don't come here because they think it's fun – it's a matter of life and death. In the same way, I want people to understand that we don't come here for the fun of it. I would rather be in my home country with my children. We didn't come here to beg. We came here to work and to do well for ourselves. I just wish that people here would see us as workers.

Some people assume that those of us who beg also steal, but we beg because we can't get work and we don't want to steal – we want people to give from their hearts. God is looking down on us, and if we do wrong, who knows how things will go for our children?

People shouldn't judge me without getting to know me. I want to be treated the way I treat others. It would be better if people heard about us directly from us. For a while there was a newspaper that was sold by the Roma, called Sofia. The articles described the Roma, and our customs and lifestyle. That type of content is good, and it's good when Roma can explain for themselves how they think. In that way, people can get to know us through our own eyes and can understand what life in Romania can be like. ■



Simon, age 32

1984–1999 Birth and childhood, Pekan Mahang, Malaysia
1999–2013 Studying and working, George Town, Malaysia
2013– Ties, Stockholm, Sweden

“WHAT I’VE FELT WORST ABOUT IS THAT I’VE HIDDEN WHO I AM FROM MY FAMILY.”

I was born in a fairly small town in northern Malaysia, a nice place for a child to grow up. I awoke to the smells of the river and freshly cut grass. Life was simple, and I was happy. We climbed trees, swam in the river, collected beetles and played with marbles.

There were six of us in our family. I have two brothers and one sister – I’m the youngest. My big brothers began studying in George Town, Malaysia’s second biggest city. They followed my Chinese parents’ wishes and became engineers, while my sister was into fashion design and I was interested in exactly the same as her. We were a typical Chinese family – the children get to decide very little. But I looked up to my sister and her lifestyle. I shared her interest in Western culture, even though it wasn’t what was expected of me.

I felt a great deal of pressure on me during my teenage years. Ideally I would have wanted to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or failing that an engineer – everything I hated. I wanted to see results immediately, like when you draw, and create something real – ideally with humour. I drew cartoons when I was a child, and my friends laughed at them and praised me. But my mum said I would never get anywhere. She reduced my pocket money and said that I shouldn’t waste my time doing the things I did. I knew I was gay from the age of eleven, but anything to do with sexuality was taboo. I couldn’t show who I was, even if my parents obviously understood that I was different.

When I was 15, I moved away from the family home and started upper secondary school in a small town. I felt like a bird that could finally leave its cage. When it came to my sexual orientation, I was incredibly confused but not afraid. I even dated a girl, and she’s now my best friend. It turned out to be confirmation that I’m gay. But it wasn’t anything I could show outwardly. The fact was that I shut away my sexuality more and more, because my friends used the words ‘gay’ and ‘faggot’ as insults. I enjoyed playing basketball, and most of the players hated gays.

It wasn’t until two years ago that I came out to my mum. It’s been horrible. What I’ve felt worst about is that I’ve hidden who I am from my family. My sister understood – she saw me and how I was. But when she asked me

once “Are you gay, Simon?”, I couldn’t admit it. But I’m so grateful to her. When I was young I wrote a diary as a way of dealing with my frustration. I wrote three full diaries, and they were still on my bookshelf when I moved away from home.

A couple of years ago, my old childhood bedroom was turned into a storage room and my sister was there to help our mum clear it out. And then my sister ‘just so happened’ to read what I’d written in my diaries. Then she called me late at night and asked: “Do you have something you want to tell me now?” I started to panic, and I almost fainted. I could just imagine my mother in floods of tears and my father asking himself what he had done wrong. I asked my sister if she had told our mum. She said no, but she thought I should tell them. We decided to speak again in a few days, and she convinced me to come home and see my parents. At first, I refused to tell my dad. I expected to get a beating. But I went in any case, and by then my sister had already told them.

The best thing was that my dad said: “I respect your choice, whatever that may be, but be careful.” The problem was that my dad thought I had a choice – he has always thought of being homosexual as a lifestyle decision. For my part, I’m glad that he accepted me. He didn’t think I was doing the right thing, but he accepted it just as long as I didn’t “do anything horrible”. It was easier for my mum. She said: “Yes, I knew from the beginning that I’d had a daughter.” She’d suspected I was gay for many years, but my dad hadn’t.

After my only (failed) attempt with a woman, I dated a guy. I was 21 at the time. And I constantly lied to my family who had seen pictures of him and me. At that time, we shared a camera and I often visited my parents. “Who’s that boy?” they asked, and I said he was just a friend. It was so exhausting having to lie all the time, and to find a new lie to cover up the previous one. I didn’t respect myself, and eventually my boyfriend disappeared. I felt that I wasn’t being fair on myself, but it was impossible to be open. Coming out leaves you vulnerable. If you have a job, you’ll probably lose it. If you’re trans, you’ll be imprisoned. Malaysia is an intolerant country.

I've lifted weights since I was 18. At college I studied electrotechnology – not because I wanted to, but because my parents told me to. I completed my studies, but I would have rather studied graphic design, something artistic. But I trained as a chef instead. I enjoyed cooking, and being a chef was quite trendy. I enjoyed the work, but it was poorly paid and that made me depressed. I often went to the gym, and a friend there noticed how I was feeling and asked if I would consider changing my career. So I started working with fitness, initially as an instructor and then as a personal trainer. Now I began to thrive, and I was earning more money. I got the nickname Ninja Turtle because of what my back looked like and the way I move. I also got called King Kong. I was happy there. Gradually, I came to be well known in the town. My parents didn't know about my change of career. They thought I still worked at the restaurant. I'm still the black sheep of the family.

By now, my life was much better. I'd made contact with a Swedish guy, Magnus, via a gay dating site where we chatted. He was coming to Malaysia and wanted someone to guide him. At first I saw him as a friend – he was fun to be with. He came to Malaysia, and I showed him around. Then he came back several times. Our friendship evolved. We travelled round the entire region: Thailand, Laos, Singapore... While we were in Laos, he thought we should go up a really high hill. Magnus isn't particularly fit... It didn't seem sensible to want to go up the hill, 500 steps – it must be a really great view from up there to make it worth it, I thought. Eventually we reached the top, and there were lots of people and mosquitoes. And then... he proposed! At first I panicked and wanted to run away. It was too early. But the confusion only lasted for a few minutes, and then I said yes.

Living in Sweden hadn't even occurred to me. I was worried about my career – could I give up everything I'd started in Malaysia? But in the end we decided to live together in Sweden. It was hard to begin with. I applied for jobs at well-known gyms, but couldn't get anything. The Swedish Public Employment Service suggested working with children, or as a drum teacher! My personal trainer certification wasn't valid in Sweden, and my father fell se-

riously ill. I was very depressed in 2012 and 2013. But now I'm back on track. I'm self-employed, working as a personal trainer. And I'm planning on taking part in the Lucia Cup, a fitness and body building cup. I'm 32 years old, so this is my last chance. After the age of 35, body building is bad for your health.

When I look back on my life, I see that I've missed many opportunities. But my life is so different now, I can be myself. I live with Magnus in Kallhäll. Living together involves having to make compromises... For example, I'm more bothered than he is about keeping things clean, and I hate dirty dishes being left on the draining board, but of course I have my own bad habits. Sweden is a good country to live in. Attitudes are completely different to where I come from. Here, everyone respects each other. In Malaysia, racist incidents are always happening. Here, it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from.

When you listen to the debate, it sounds like migration is out of control. Some talk about people tricking the state to get benefits. But I believe that migrants mostly create opportunities for Sweden, even though it's obvious that there will always be a few bad apples.

When I went to Swedish for Immigrants classes, I met lots of people who had sought asylum. Some Swedes think they're dangerous and bring violence here, but I talk to these people. They're fleeing from war. I've heard terrible stories – adults who have been shot to death in front of their children. Some of them are terrified if they hear a bang. Others can't go on a boat anymore because of their traumatic experiences. Many of these people had good lives in their home countries and were successful.

So before you start judging people, talk to them. Hear it from the horse's mouth. That's the best way. ■

■ Yusak, age 40

1976–1980 Birth, childhood, Cirebon, Indonesia
1980–2002 Childhood, schooling, work, Bandung, Indonesia
2002–2005 Studying, Kyoto, Japan
2006–2007 Working, Delft, Netherlands
2007–2011 Working, Bristol, England
2011– Working, Stockholm, Sweden

“NEWS SITES ARE CLICK- BAITERS – SO IF PEOPLE COME HERE AND DO WELL THAT’S NOT NEWS.”

Bandung, where I grew up, is a really lovely city in the West Java Province. It is home to three of Indonesia’s top universities, so it has a young population that is not afraid of thinking innovatively. It is a creative place, where people dare to do things differently.

I grew up there together with a younger brother and an older brother, a father who was a teacher and civil engineer, and a mother who was a housewife and ran a catering business at the same time. We lived in a detached house. Land was so cheap that there was no reason to build anything but low-rise homes.

At university I took an engineering degree specialising in transportation engineering. After my master’s programme I started commuting to Jakarta to work part-time as a consultant. I also taught at the university in Bandung. I moved between two different worlds and it was a tremendous challenge. My job in Jakarta was very well paid, but that was not the life I wanted to live.

Instead I chose to continue in the academic world and

was offered various prestigious scholarships for doctoral studies in Japan, Singapore and Australia. The choice I made was Kyoto in Japan. I thought that it looked like a challenge and I was attracted to studying in a non-English speaking country.

My time in Japan was fantastic. We foreigners lived by ourselves, a bit like being in a bubble, but there was strong understanding among Japanese people that it is difficult for migrants to get to know their culture. To make cultural exchanges possible there were international conference centres in all large cities. There you can make contact with people who want to learn other languages and these centres arrange activities like traditional Japanese tea ceremonies or walks to old temples. This was how I made contact with Japanese families that I visited and who gave me dinner in their home.

After completing my thesis I wanted to go back to Indonesia to teach, but I didn’t get a job. However, I was offered a research post in the Netherlands. I moved to Delft, a beautiful little town, to do research on urban geography, transport and planning. The university was accustomed to receiving employees from other countries. When I got there, I was given a list of all the things I had to do, from getting a residence permit card to going for a health check. That made everything really simple for me – I did not need to navigate round public authorities on my own.

After my job in the Netherlands I still wanted to go home to Indonesia. But it isn’t easy. More than 300 different languages are spoken in Indonesia and there are many ethnic groups. During the period of Dutch rule people living in Indonesia were categorised by the colonisers – and there are still some traces of that categorisation. Since I am Christian and of Chinese descent, I belong to two minority groups – and that affects my chances of getting a job. Public posts, at state universities for example, have to be representative of the rest of the population, and that means that there are not that many places reserved for a person with double minority status. I had difficulty getting a job as a university teacher at a good university since ‘my quota’ had already been filled. But since then there has been progress and the question of equal treatment between minority groups is on the agenda.



Instead of moving home to Indonesia I was offered a permanent post as a university lecturer in Bristol. This time I took my daughter and wife with me; my wife gave up her job as a professional psychologist and university lecturer in child psychology in Indonesia.

We really had a good life in Bristol, but my wife wanted to continue her studies – and that was actually why we chose Sweden. The idea was that she would be able to take her PhD in child psychology. She had been given that kind of offer by my university in Bristol since they did not want us to go to Sweden. But she wanted to achieve it by herself and I really admire that. I got a job as a senior lecturer at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm. Then when she was not admitted the first time she applied, she decided to learn Swedish – and she has continued to do that. She also needs to validate her psychology degree at the National Board of Health and Welfare. Now it unfortunately feels as though she has got stuck in the bureaucracy.

Since my wife has still not attained her dream, it feels in a way that it was wrong to move here. But we now have our second child and my wife is fighting to achieve her objective. But we are happy in Sweden nonetheless. Here there is a lot of confidence in the young generation – people don't tell young people what to do; instead, they watch them grow. They are sure that things will go well for them. In Asia it is common for parents to push their children to work hard, to get into the best schools, to get certain professions. Here it is alright to take a sabbatical year and take things easy. I think that's good. If there is anything I admire in Swedish society, it is that very thing: not being afraid that the young generation will fail.

Sometime in the future we are sure to move back to Indonesia, but first we will have to see what possibilities my wife gets here.

Just now everything in the media is about refugees, but they should also report on Sweden as a destination for work. Many people see Sweden as a cool country to work in. The times I read about work-related migration, it is generally an opinion article in *The Local*. Many foreign start-ups are doing well in Sweden, but you don't see anything about it in the media. News sites are clickbaiters.

They look for bombastic news, and when they do so there are no articles about people who move here and do well – it is as if there is nothing special about that.

I feel that people in Sweden want to be nice and politically correct – but the way things are does not match up with what people say. For example, they tell you that people are treated no differently, but they are. I wish that people were clearer: If you have to speak Swedish and have a Swedish degree – say so! I think that would be appreciated.

I think that the Government seems to give migrants different priority. I mean that the process for being allowed to stay in Sweden ought to be different depending, for example, on whether you have been here before and worked here, that there could be more fast tracks. Now everyone comes in through the same door. I think it would be possible to set up a more efficient system.

Last year I needed to go to Brussels with an EU project that I had won for KTH. But I couldn't go since I was waiting for my work permit to be extended. I had filed my application in February – and this event was in September. I am very mobile and travel to take part in various conferences and I bring in money for KTH from national and international projects, but I am still not able to do my job to the full. I was supposed to take part in a seminar to show how good KTH is, but it had to be cancelled. And it's not just me. Take the people working in start-ups; they travel even more. Having to go and wait for a permit is death for your business. We are here to work and we can't do what we are supposed to. I think that this is something that should be dealt with – and don't forget that many of those who are working here today are going to return to their home countries and will act as ambassadors for Sweden there. ■



Alireza, age 19

- 1996–1999 Birth and childhood, Bamyan, Afghanistan
1999–2013 Studying and working, Tehran, Iran
2013 Displaced, Turkey
2013– Need for protection, Malmö, Sweden

“I TALK LESS AND DO MORE.”

My mother and I fled to Iran to escape the war and poverty in Afghanistan, but there was no future for me there. As my mother once said: It doesn't matter what you know or what you do – you've already been judged. As a Hazar from Afghanistan, you're discriminated against in every imaginable way. You're reminded on an hourly basis that you're worth less in the other person's eyes. You're looked down on, you're powerless, you're racialised, you're stripped of your opportunities, you're excluded, you're singled out, you're criminalised and you're a scapegoat for widespread corruption. I could have gone to university, but I was falsely accused of having stolen money from the mobile phone shop where I worked. All this led to me being forced to flee.

I came to Sweden as an unaccompanied minor at the age of 16, but I'm also so much more than that. I'm a speaker, a debater, a politician, a survivor, and an entrepreneur. I want to launch a new concept called aligration. This is based on my own motto: I talk less and do more. Aligration, as opposed to integration, is all about problem-solving, but the focus is on delivering solutions to opportunities rather than solutions to problems, and on highlighting role models. My goal is that the word should end up in dictionaries, and that it should be a reference at a political level. The responsibility for society making use of all new arrivals' potential should lie with all government minis-

ters, not just with a single Minister for Integration. I'm tired of all this talk. Do something about it!

I have an idea for a research project to improve the situation for unaccompanied minors when it comes to school and the asylum process. The aim is that this should result in handbooks, seminars and a department that works with unaccompanied minors. The focus is often skewed in these matters. For example, it's important to think about issues of exclusion and how where they live affects unaccompanied minors. In order to be able to improve the systems, we need to evaluate what works in practice.

Several aspects of migration issues are problematic, such as the way public debate creates categorisations. People talk *about* unaccompanied minors seeking asylum instead of talking *with* them. Having a dialogue and discussions with different target groups is incredibly important.

I don't define myself as an unaccompanied refugee minor. When should someone cease to be regarded as 'unaccompanied'? A year after they arrive? Two years? Three? I'm more established and more aware of what's happening in Sweden and elsewhere in the world than much of the Swedish population. But people talk about exclusion instead of talking about inclusion. The guidance and the support I've received in Sweden as an unaccompanied refugee minor has often had the intention of limiting me and my potential for development. There are structural and fully accepted racist tendencies built into all levels of society, especially the way we deal with new arrivals. This is mostly due to a lack of knowledge and a system that doesn't make the most of people's potential.

We need to highlight role models: people who can inspire and motivate others. I'm politically active, socially engaged and motivated. When I first set foot on Swedish soil, I hadn't cost society a single penny in child benefits, healthcare costs or education – unlike a Swedish 16-year-old. Two years later, I speak fluent Swedish, run my own business and pay tax. Why do people look for victims and perpetrators instead of telling the public about examples like me? The media focuses on the cost of refugees and unaccompanied minors, but why don't they also mention that students cost society money?



Refugees are often portrayed as a burden on society and are assigned the role of victims, and unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan end up in the firing line. When crime reports were made against unaccompanied minors earlier this year, the media immediately started attacking them. I was invited to come and talk in the TV studio. Why? Because I'm from Afghanistan and 'unaccompanied'. In the end, I didn't make it onto TV and my statement was never published. Why? Because my words didn't legitimise the media's agenda, and whatever I say is called into question. That's undemocratic, and what exactly is public service anyway? In my eyes, the media is a profit machine that helps to normalise racism, marginalisation and exclusion.

They talk about a wave of refugees and a refugee crisis, while at the same time Europe is accepting less than one percent of all the 60 million displaced people. The fact that around 36,000 people who fled to Sweden were granted asylum here last year is an enormous asset. Sweden needs around a million highly educated people, and many of those who come here are incredibly motivated and skilled, but they need the right platforms. You can't just pass people through society like parts on a production line. ■



■ Geni, age 47

1969–1989 Birth and childhood, Caxias do Sul, RS, Brazil
1989–1996 Studying, Pelotas, RS, Brazil
1997–1998 Working, Cruz das Almas, BA, Brazil
1999–2004 Working/research, Pisa, Italy
2004–2008 Working/research, Tsukuba, Japan
2008–2011 Working/research, Torres Vedras, Portugal
2011– Ties, Karlstad, Sweden

“I HAVE MANY YEARS OF RESEARCH EXPERIENCE AND SPEAK SEVERAL LANGUAGES, BUT IT FEELS LIKE THAT’S NOT WORTH ANYTHING HERE.”

As a child, I spent my summers on my grandparent's farm. We helped to milk the cows, work the land, and grow maize and potatoes – as well as grapes for making wine. Perhaps it was these early experiences of proximity to nature and physical work on the farm that led me to study agronomy.

After graduating, I was awarded a scholarship to study for a doctorate in Italy. I moved there to research the effects of the climate on fruit growing, and it was there that I met my husband.

A few years later, we both received scholarships to move to Japan. We were very happy there, but we dreamed of having children and it was hard to combine family life with working in Japan. When I was offered a fantastic job at a research institute in Portugal, I moved there. This was during the financial crisis, and my husband couldn't get a permanent job. We lived separately for three years while looking for somewhere we could live together, ideally a democratic country with a good welfare system. We moved to Sweden at the same time, and were immediately struck by the country's unique nature.

My husband's contract included help from the university for me to get into the Swedish job market. That's why we wanted to come here – there was an opportunity for me, too. I later heard that my CV hadn't been matched with any employers. There was no interest.

After a semester at Swedish for Immigrants classes, I had a development discussion with my teacher. I was pregnant then, and I wanted to talk to him about continuing with the course. But he just looked at me and said: "Your future is in your belly! Come back in three years!" Of course, my child is part of my future, but I didn't want to stay at home and be isolated. It was important for me to continue learning Swedish and actively look for work. And that's what I chose to do.

Getting a foothold in the Swedish job market isn't easy. I have experience of research and scientific work in Europe, Asia and South America, and I speak several languages, but it doesn't feel like what I've brought with me is worth anything here. I was fairly optimistic when I came here and was prepared for things to be hard, but not this hard. I've applied for lots of jobs all over the country, but

I don't have a Swedish name, any contacts or a Swedish education. When I've asked what I need in order to get a job, over and above my qualifications, I haven't been given any concrete answers. I've lost some of my motivation now.

I want to work. I miss it so much, but unfortunately there isn't enough information about how to get a job here in Sweden. It wasn't the Swedish Public Employment Service that told me about initiatives like the 'korta vägen' scheme for overseas graduates – I heard about it from other new arrivals. The staff at the employment service have been polite and friendly, but that's all. I didn't get any further. I've started training so that I can teach, but I'm currently on leave from my studies so I can focus on learning the language.

Living in several different countries has given me a greater understanding of other cultures and different ways of working and living. I believe I've become more adaptable and flexible. I pay attention to other people and their ways of working. I also think it means I'm not as quick to judge people – instead, I try to understand the people I meet.

Society is segregated. I even notice it when it comes to my daughter. They've divided the children up into groups at preschool, and around 90 percent of the children in her group have a foreign background. They're just children, but there's already a barrier. There's a risk that the society of the future will have Swedes on one side and people with foreign backgrounds on the other. I don't think that's good for anyone. The trend is towards a growing acceptance of groupings: We're here, and you're there. If we think like that, it'll be hard to understand each other. I understand that integration is hard at a time when many people are coming here, and that those of us who have come here have a duty to adapt, but society is easier to understand if we integrate.

The media reports that migrants should get guidance earlier in order to find work more quickly. The politicians have understood that there are problems. There's a need for workers in many sectors, such as healthcare, but there's a gap between how things need to be and reality. Perhaps that gap will shrink. We hear a lot about the challenges faced by society because many new arrivals don't have an education, but the route into work is just as long for those who are highly educated. ■



Amir, age 30

- 1981–1986 Birth and childhood, Tehran, Iran
- 1987–1999 Childhood, Karaj, Iran
- 2000–2007 Studying, Garmsar, Iran
- 2007–2010 Working, Tehran, Iran
- 2010– Studying, Linköping, Sweden

“ACADEMICS ARE VERY OPEN. PERHAPS I LIVE IN A BUBBLE.”

When I was five years old, my family moved from an apartment in central Tehran to a suburb of Karaj, around thirty kilometres from the capital. I was happy there. We had our own garden and got a dog, a German Shepard called Joe. He was very strong and playful, and I remember him as a huge dog – perhaps because I was so small. I remember holding tightly onto his lead, and how he still managed to drag me wherever he wanted to go.

As a child, I enjoyed playing football and basketball. Then I discovered video games, and that became my new favourite hobby: Nintendo, Sega, PC... I still enjoy playing sometimes.

My favourite subjects at school were chemistry and biology. And I've always liked physics and maths. Immediately after upper secondary school I started studying to become a vet at university in Garmsar. During my studies, I lived for a while with my parents, who had moved back to Tehran by then, and also with a few friends in Garmsar with whom I rented an apartment.

When my friends and I weren't studying, we spent time at each other's homes, playing games and sneakily drinking beer. The religious regime in Iran did what it could to prevent us from having fun. For example, alcohol is forbidden and segregation between the sexes is widespread. At my university, only men could study to become vets – it was seen as a male profession. Boys and girls were kept separate at upper secondary school. We were even kept apart on the buses. The girls sat at the front, and the boys at the back.

Once I'd finished my veterinary degree, I started working as an inspector at a bank that dealt with insurance. When farmers reported that their animals were sick or had died and wanted to claim insurance money, it was my job to go and make an assessment. The job involved many hours on the road, which I didn't enjoy.

I then got a job at a national organisation for vets. I travelled to various villages, taking samples and vaccinating animals. I didn't stay very long in that job, either. My final job in Iran before moving to Sweden was as the responsible vet at a chicken farm. It was while I was working there that I decided to move to Sweden. My sister lived here at

that time, and she suggested that I come here. In Sweden, I would be able to study ethology – a subject I enjoy very much – and it was this opportunity that persuaded me to move here.

My sister, who was studying in Falun, said that Sweden was gloomy, cold and expensive. But she's a city girl – I enjoy the things that she calls boring. I prefer nature and life in the countryside to big cities and nightlife. I don't like it when there are too many people.

It wasn't particularly hard to get a permit to study in Sweden, but it took a little longer than I had been promised at first. I was forced to cancel my flight and book a later one as a result. When I came to Sweden in August 2010, it was the first time I had left Iran.

It was the sky that made the biggest impression on me. It's so blue here, with such beautiful, white clouds. In Iran, the sky is either grey and completely cloudy or there are no clouds at all. Here, the clouds have many different shapes, and they seem to be nearer the earth somehow. Perhaps it's because the air is cleaner here. During my first winter here, the snow was more than a metre deep. It was incredibly beautiful.

Studying in Sweden is different to Iran. Here, a lot of studying is group-based and the students work together. In Iran, studying is more about memorising books and completing tests, which isn't as much fun. And I'm not convinced about how effective it is to read the same book four or five times – it feels very old-fashioned.

I came here to do a master's degree. The programme is two years long: a year with various courses, and a year working on a project. I enjoyed the research and working with the people here. When I'd finished my master's degree, I was sure that I wanted to apply for a doctoral position here. My current research is all about the domestication of animals, in other words how a species changes when it goes from living in the wild to living with humans. I spend 60 percent of my time doing research. I also teach, and take some courses myself.

In my free time I enjoy hanging out with friends and watching TV. I still have several friends from when I was living in student accommodation. I think it's a good way

to live. We had our own rooms, but we socialised in the kitchen. I don't speak Swedish, but I've never had any problems making friends.

After I've completed my doctorate, I'd like to research human diseases. I hope to be able to get a good, stimulating job.

My doctorate is a five-year course, although I can only get a one-year permit which means that I've had to apply five times. I don't think that's reasonable – why does the Swedish Migration Agency create so much extra work for itself? It's rare for people to be dismissed from a doctoral position. I think it would be better to revoke a permit if something like that happened, instead of having to keep re-applying. That would save the Swedish Migration Agency work, which I think would be a very good thing.

As people, I believe that we have a tendency to generalise instead of seeing individuals. No matter whether you come here to escape war or to work as a professor, people only see 'migrants'. Maybe things are different within academia, but in the wider world I don't think people see the distinctions as clearly. It's common for academics to have a degree from Iran, for example, or India. That makes for a multinational environment, and the people are very open-minded.

When the media reports on migrants, it's mostly about refugees. And in films, migrants are usually the baddies – villains from Eastern European or the Middle East. I've never read anything about students who come to Sweden. I either read about people who haven't integrated or about new arrivals and the problems they encounter. Writing about students doesn't sell newspapers. If people were more interested in reading about these things, the media would report them. But those of us who are here studying and working aren't of any interest.

It would be nice if people knew that not everyone from the Middle East has come here because of war or lives on allowances. And it would be good if they could see that people come here and contribute, that they don't have any particular problems and aren't criminals. I've never had any problems with anyone or anything. But once again, I'm in academia. And the people in academia are very open. Perhaps I live in a bubble. ■



Inta, age 31

1984–2003 Birth and childhood, Liepāja, Latvia

2003–2007 Studying, Valmiera, Latvia

2008–2010 Studying, Riga, Latvia

2007–2015 Working, Riga, Latvia

2015– Ties, Upplands Väsby, Sweden

“I SPENT A YEAR PREPARING FOR THE MOVE TO SWEDEN.”

Sweden has never been an unfamiliar country for me, but I'd never thought about moving here. My mum was the headmistress at my school in Liepāja, and our municipality was twinned with Danderyd in Stockholm. We exchanged Christmas presents and Easter treats. Every other term, Swedish teachers and head teachers came to stay with us in Liepāja, and my mum went there during the alternate terms. Once I went with her, and I remember the rows of mopeds outside the school in Danderyd. At that time things were hard in Latvia, and not many people had their own moped. I could tell that the atmosphere in Sweden was different. The communication between teachers and pupils was more equal. In Latvia, the teacher wasn't your friend.

I met my boyfriend Erik through a mutual friend in Riga. A few of us girls were learning to play football, and he played for another team. We've both travelled a lot and studied abroad – I've studied in Salzburg in Austria, and in Södertörn in Sweden, and his studies have included time in Australia. I'd finished studying and my experience, contacts and permanent job were all in Riga, and we wanted to see if Erik could find a good job there. But it wasn't to be. Instead, he found a good job in Sweden and bought an apartment in Upplands Väsby.

I spent a whole year preparing my family and friends for the move to Sweden. I wanted them to understand that we

would stay in touch, even if I lived in Sweden. “I'm moving, but we'll see each other again,” I told them. “It'll just take a little more planning.” They didn't protest about my choice, but it was good to be able to talk through it.

I spent a long time preparing for the move, and I tried to find out as much information as possible. But it was hard, and I felt like both the Latvian and Swedish authorities wanted to pigeonhole me. It was hard to get useful information about the best way to prepare. Looking back, I'm disappointed – I did all I could in advance, but when I came here everything was still complicated and took a long time.

The Swedish Tax Agency asked questions that made me feel like I was moving here to take advantage. It's as if people think we come here and then get paid for nothing. But that's not the case.

I've studied Swedish for Immigrants classes, and I'm now studying a basic Swedish course at the Workers' Educational Association. I expect to have finished by the end of the year. I've applied for jobs since I moved here, and when I got a few consultancy assignments I started my own business. I sometimes write reports about young unemployed people without an education and how they should be integrated into the labour market. But I'm still looking for a job. I've studied political science and worked for Civic Alliance Latvia, a platform for all voluntary organisations there. This experience is a big advantage, as lots of projects operate between the Nordic nations.

In the future, I'd like a house somewhere near Stockholm. There's so much nature here, with fresh breezes and water. I've always lived by the sea. I wouldn't be happy if I moved to a town without water.

Our children will speak Swedish, Latvian and English, and English will be our 'secret language'. You know, like when you're talking about where you've hidden the sweets but you don't want the children to understand what you're saying!

It's not anonymous people who come here. I'm thinking about the people on my Swedish for Immigrants course: a plastic surgeon, a nurse and someone who had owned a wedding dress shop in her home country. They were forced to come here. They didn't want to. It would be good for their stories to come out, to show their perspectives. ■



Kristina, age 44

- 1972–1989 Birth and childhood, Ängelholm, Sweden
- 1989–1990 Studying, Madison, Indiana, USA
- 1990–1991 Studying, Ängelholm, Sweden
- 1991–1993 Studying, Varberg, Sweden
- 1993–1994 Studying, Borlänge, Sweden
- 1994 Studying, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1994–1995 Studying, Kalmar, Sweden
- 1995–1997 Working, Ängelholm, Sweden
- 1997–1998 Working, Linköping, Sweden
- 1998–2011 Working, Gothenburg, Sweden
- 2011–2015 Ties, Shanghai, China
- 2015– Returning, Gothenburg, Sweden

**“IF THE OPPORTUNITY
AROSE TOMORROW,
I’D MOVE IMMEDIATELY.”**

One day, my husband came home from work at Volvo and asked me if we should move to China. He’d been offered the chance to start up Volvo’s operations in Shanghai, and the opportunity would broaden his work experience. I was positive about the idea, and thought that it could be an adventure for the whole family. New cultures excite me. I studied in the US as an exchange student, and I’ve gone on many overseas business trips. And when we started looking at accommodation in Shanghai, I fell in love with the city.

Moving from Sweden to China was a big change for me. I went from being self-employed with an income to being a housewife. Before we left, I was forced to give up a big consultancy assignment for ABB, and the jobs I got in Shanghai were few and far between. Being a housewife wasn’t something I was used to. I constantly headed out into the city to keep myself occupied, but after a while I started to enjoy my new situation – especially having more time with the children.

To begin with, we lived in a bit of a bubble. It took time for me to find my own friends. Lots of families moved from Gothenburg to Shanghai, and at first I spent a lot of time with other women whose husbands also worked at Volvo. With time, I got to know other foreign parents by picking up and dropping off the children at school. They were in a similar situation to me, and it was easy for us to make contact with each other.

My ambition was to learn Chinese, but it took time to learn the language and to make myself understood. There’s so much that I still want to learn about Chinese culture and things I want to understand that are obvious to those who grow up in China. For example, the fact that the number four is associated with death and considered unlucky – so much so that hotels don’t have a fourth floor. The number eight, on the other hand, is a lucky number. We lived in the eighth building on our block, and were considered blessed for that simple reason.

As an employer, Volvo arranged lots of things for us in connection with moving, such as insurance and language courses. We had to deal with other practical issues ourselves, like buying groceries. We lived a bit of a life of lux-

ury, and we had our own driver and maid. In Shanghai, I saw how great the economic divide is between the classes, and that there are many poor people in China. It gave me more of a perspective. As Volvo opened a branch in Shanghai, and as so many of us moved there, I like to think that it created new job opportunities for the locals.

Like everyone who moved to Shanghai with Volvo, my husband was on a two-year contract. The plan was that the Swedes should teach the local employees so that they could take over operations. However, the situation changed and my husband's contract was extended. After the fourth year, he felt that it was time for something new. That's when we decided to move back to Sweden.

I was nervous about coming home again, and didn't want to move back. I'd made some wonderful friends in Shanghai, and hadn't worked regularly for years. I didn't know how things would go with working in Sweden, and I thought a lot about how Swedes are so occupied with their own lives. Would I be able to have similar relationships in Sweden to those I'd had in China? It was a tough period. But the children missed home. When we visited people in Sweden on holiday, we always had a lovely time with parties and barbecues so they probably thought life would be like that all the time here. But now the children miss the school and their friends in Shanghai. A lot happened during those four years. We're not the same people that we were when we left. My friends don't understand how I can miss China.

We thought about whether we should move to a different part of Sweden to escape the expat label, and start again from scratch. But since our house is here in Gothenburg and my husband's work is nearby, we stayed put. Sometimes I feel a little out of place, somewhere that nothing changes. I'd already started thinking that way when we came back to visit during the summers – everything was the same! I also learnt who my real friends were, and who didn't feel uncomfortable if I stayed too long or asked if we could sleep over. In China, all my friends stood up for each other through thick and thin. For example, if someone was ill the others came over with dinner. Friends became almost like family. So despite everything, I now think it might have been better to stay in Shanghai.

It was much harder to return to Sweden than to move away. Volvo helped us with lots of things when we moved to Shanghai, but when we came home we had to sort things out ourselves. If we had understood what we needed to arrange before returning home, we could have prepared better. Since our insurance was taken out in China and my husband paid tax there, we had to cancel our Swedish citizenship. When we then re-registered in Sweden, the paperwork was extremely complicated and the assessment took a long time. And until the process was complete, we couldn't get any benefits such as child benefit or healthcare.

Today, I sometimes hear comments such as: "It must be nice to be back in Sweden where we have clean air!" Of course, I think to myself, but it's impossible to enjoy life when everyone is so uptight and reserved. When I say that I miss China, they don't seem to understand that maybe not everything is perfect here in Sweden. Things were great in China, but no one dares to ask how things were there. I think it's a matter of Swedish jealousy. We find it hard to be happy for someone else. Instead, it's always speculation and questioning. The first time we came back from China for the autumn holidays, my daughter was asked what we would do during the holiday. She said that we would just relax at home. Her classmates questioned this, and wondered why she wasn't going out travelling like them. Here in Sweden, we're all expected to do the same thing.

I think the world is exciting, and I'd like to move to a country that is nothing like Sweden. Just going on holiday to another country isn't enough for me. Holidays are superficial, and not enough to really get under the skin of another culture. If the opportunity arose tomorrow, I'd move immediately. My husband isn't quite as enthusiastic, but would consider it for my sake. We discuss it daily, but for the time being we're staying in Gothenburg.

One thing I think is missing from the current migration debate is a discussion on returning Swedish children. If it's hard for adults to come back and adapt to life in Sweden after living abroad, how hard must it be for children? There needs to be a discussion on how children can get the support and tools they need to deal with the transition between cultures, school systems and friendships.

It also strikes me that there's no clear or readily available information for returning Swedes. A simple introductory film that shows how to go about things when moving back and how long the processes might take would make it easier for people returning home. For example, the Swedish Migration Agency could start working together with overseas Swedish organisations like Sweden Abroad, the Swedish Club or other associations. Showing more interest in Swedes abroad could help those who are planning to return. In any case, I know it would have helped us. ■



■ Andreaa, age 25

1991–2004 Birth and childhood, Focșani, Romania
2004–2011 Childhood, Bucharest, Romania
2011– Studying, Stockholm, Sweden

**“THERE’S SO MUCH TO
SAY ABOUT THE WHOLE
ISSUE OF BEGGING.”**

I'll never forget the first time I heard the waves of the Black Sea. It was an incredible experience for a young child. My parents used to take me there in the summer, and we did many trips together. For example, we always celebrated New Year and Easter with my dad and his relatives in Transylvania. It was also largely thanks to him that I got the stability and security that have always been important to me. I need to feel that I have a home and a fixed point of reference in my existence. But at the same time, I dreamt about living abroad from an early age.

Romania offers many beautiful natural experiences: the sea, the mountains of Transylvania and unique locations such as Dracula's castle. It's a good country, with skilled, intelligent people, but I was never tempted by the idea of continuing to study at the University of Bucharest after upper secondary school. I've always wanted to do something big with my life, and I wanted to start working as soon as possible in order to get involved in social issues and influence things. At the back of my mind, there were also thoughts of Sweden where my grandmother lived when she married a Sweden Finn. I used to visit her in the summers, and when I was around 15 my mum also moved there. They both encouraged me to consider Sweden when the time came to choose a university, and so it came to be...

I started studying political science and EU law at Stockholm University. To begin with, I thought I would go back to Bucharest after the first year, but things didn't turn out that way. I continued studying here, but after four years I ended up in a kind of limbo. I didn't really know where I belonged or where I should go. It frustrated me, and my thoughts ran back and forth: stay here in Sweden, or return to Bucharest and do a master's degree there? My dilemma was ultimately decided when I got an internship at a research institute in Stockholm. At the same time, I also started to get a social life which I'd previously been lacking. Everything became easier, and I felt more and more at home in Sweden. Bucharest felt increasingly remote, but I returned one summer to do an internship at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs there. I wanted to gain more experience and see how things worked, but the tasks I was

given weren't particularly challenging. Putting documents in folders wasn't really what I'd envisaged...

After completing my master's degree at Stockholm University, I started looking for work in earnest. After many applications and lengthy silences, I got my first interview at the Swedish Migration Agency. I got the job as a Case Officer at the Application Unit, and what awaited me was that chaotic and historic autumn of 2015 when huge numbers of asylum seekers came to Sweden. We had to work evenings and weekends. There was no question of Christmas or New Year leave. That was the first New Year that I didn't celebrate in Romania. Quite simply, I was forced to adapt to the job context and the constant stress. The focus was on people who had travelled a long way to seek protection here. Many of them hadn't slept for several days, and hadn't had anything to eat or drink. They were sad, tired and exhausted. Many of the children found things tough, and were confused. And it was also tough for those of us who were working – no matter how strong you are, it was impossible not to be affected. You couldn't be neutral and just put everything to one side at the end of the working day. Thoughts continued to whirl around my head, disturbing my sleep. I became emotional, but I also got an insight into how fortunate I and many others are, living far from war and conflict.

Now I'm working with other issues, the so-called Dublin Regulation, which is exciting. In future, I'd like to work more with analysis and go out on assignments, perhaps to an embassy somewhere. I now also feel at home here in Sweden. I've started to enjoy going for walks – no matter how cold it is, I have to go out and get a little daylight. That wasn't something I had to do in Bucharest, as the sun shines a little more often there... When my dad last came to visit me, he laughed and wondered what had happened. Why did I have to go out in the sun and walk every day?

When there was intense discussion and articles about 'the refugee crisis', there was a lot of criticism about how everything was dealt with. Things become problematic and chaotic when large numbers of people come in a short space of time but society – and the Swedish Migration Agency itself, for that matter – hasn't made the necessary

adaptations to accept so many. Criticism is welcome, but I also think that not enough attention was paid to those of us who fought hard to ensure that people would have somewhere to live and a good welcome. We were forced to be fast and flexible. I think it would have been good for the public to have heard what it was like for us and to give an understanding of the situation we were faced with.

I also think about all those who flee here and have completed degrees and doctoral studies, but who find it hard to get a job here. And all those others who, whatever their background, want to do something big and important. I'd like to see more examples showing that it doesn't matter where someone comes from.

The image of people from Romania is also limited, and is often negative here in Sweden. Many people only see poor folk who just sit on the street and beg. There's so much to say about the whole issue of begging. In Romania, it led to problems that resulted in begging being banned. I think there should be a desire to hear more about how Romania and the authorities there dealt with the situation. It would also be useful to hear about the experiences of those who had been beggars in Romania and in other countries such as Bulgaria. There are so many people who should share their impressions and opinions on this issue! And what actually happens in Romania? Many people here just assume that people are discriminated against in Romania and that poor people don't get any help, which is why they come here to beg. But people also come from Romania for reasons other than begging. For example, there are lots of engineers and teachers. There are lots of people from Romania who work in education and in the church, but you don't hear about them. After all, it's not as exciting... Many EU citizens are well placed to work in Sweden and want to work here, but what are the requirements and expectations placed on those who come from other EU countries? These are questions that should also be asked as part of the social debate. ■

Bushra, age 27

1989–2014 Birth and childhood, Sana'a, Yemen

2014– Ties, Gothenburg, Sweden

“I WOULDN'T HAVE LEFT MY HOME COUNTRY BECAUSE OF THE WAR, BUT I WAS ABLE TO LEAVE FOR LOVE.”

There were more than a thousand books in the library in my home. The first time I read a book called *Guitar* by the Yemeni writer Abdul-Wali Al-Shamer, I was filled with a strange emotion. The thought that rushed through me was that I must start writing poetry. Reading and writing books was a feature of my childhood. My father is a journalist, and that had a positive impact on me. He was brave enough to deal with and write about what needed to be heard, but a lot changed with the revolution in 2011. I experienced the war for almost a year, but what I remember about Yemen is what makes me proud of my home country. The people there are always optimistic and extremely hospitable. Everyone should visit Sana'a at some point. It's one of the oldest cities in the world. The art and style of the buildings is unique. The city has a special feel, and the smell of clay comes back to me... If I had been a journalist in Yemen, I would have written about the culture.

Many people say that love comes after the wedding. I don't agree. My parents were open, and allowed me to decide. I thought about my decision for two months after my husband proposed. We were a couple at school, but we met again in 2012. We had stayed in touch via social media



before getting married and flying from Egypt to Sweden in 2014. He decided to seek asylum in Sweden, and wanted me to follow him. I thought Sweden was a country that would help me to achieve my dreams, that I would have more freedom there. Perhaps I got that impression from my father, who had studied and worked in Europe. It was also he who pushed me to go to Sweden when I hesitated. His freedom, his optimism and his faith in me have meant a lot. My friends used to ask if they could borrow him as their father. Leaving Yemen was a hard choice. I wouldn't have left my home country because of the war, but I was able to leave for love.

I'm happy here in Sweden. I've learnt the language, and I have friends and a permanent job at Angered Theatre. I feel like I've integrated into society both quickly and effectively. My husband has played a big part in this. When I don't understand how things work, I can always ask him. It's hard to imagine what it would be like not having any family members here. I believe that the consequences of Sweden making family reunifications harder will be negative.

Sweden has given me a lot, so it also feels important for me to be able to give something back. I'm involved in helping other new arrivals to integrate in various ways, for example as a volunteer with the Red Cross. I also help them in a number of ways through my job at a multimedia organisation. I try to reach out via social media, and I'm planning to publish a book in Swedish and Arabic. I think that one of the best ways of showing other people my home country is to work as a journalist. That way, my voice could reach a large audience. However, journalism doesn't offer many opportunities to prevent war in Yemen. Those who rule the country don't believe in journalism and the media. They only think about themselves.

I have a degree in languages and I will continue to study – I want to do a master's degree in human rights. After that, I want to start a family of my own here in Sweden.

Everything focuses on the issue of refugees, and the activities are all aimed at refugees. That's a positive thing because there are people who come here from disaster situations, but it would be good to have a balance. I believe

that most people know that Sweden accepts refugees, but they don't realise that many people also come here to live with close relatives. The media doesn't write as much about that, which is a shame. People need to know who's coming here and why. More journalists should write about people who come here because of family ties.

My name, Bushra, means 'good news'. My name affects everything that happens to me. Soon, I hope to do something good that many people will hear about and that will make them proud of me. ■



■ Anne-Kathrine, age 41

1975 Birth and childhood, Langå, Denmark
1996–2000 Studying, Aarhus, Denmark
2000–2002 Studying, Umeå, Sweden
2002–2005 Ties, Leuven, Belgium
2005–2009 Working, Toulouse, France
2009–2012 Ties, Pordenone, Italy
2012– Working, Stockholm, Sweden

**“MOVING TO A NEW COUNTRY
IS LIKE GETTING DIVORCED
— YOU TAKE A BIG STEP
FORWARD, AND BOTH LOSE
AND GAIN THINGS.”**

Even as a child, my eyes were opened to other cultures – largely thanks to my parents. My mother often invited people from other countries to our home in Langå, a small town on the east coast of Jutland in Denmark. My dad, who designs and produces wooden kitchen utensils and furniture, sometimes took the family with him on his purchasing trips for wood around the world. In this way, I was introduced to new environments early on. Back in Denmark, I also met people in vulnerable living situations as we rented a house on our land to refugees from Bosnia. Both my mum and my dad had parents who were involved in the resistance against the Nazis during the Second World War and were sent to concentration camps, but were rescued by the Swedish and Danish ‘White Buses’ operation. So when the Balkan conflicts erupted in the 1990s, my dad felt that it was our turn to stand up for those who were suffering. I particularly remember one of the daughters from a family who lived in the house on our land. When our big dog got too close, she was scared and ran away. She associated dogs with the refugee camp in Bosnia and the guards.

I was always open to the idea of living abroad one day, and studying elsewhere. It was my interest in how people live and why they live the way they do that led me to study architecture. After upper secondary school, I therefore moved to Aarhus to study at the school of architecture there, but during the course of my studies my interest shifted from design and the actual industrial process – on which the course focused heavily – to interaction design, which is more about users’ experiences of products. I’d thought about doing a master’s degree in the USA or Australia, but I came into contact with a lecturer from Umeå who told me about Umeå Institute of Design, where the interaction design programme is ranked as one of the best in the world. And so it came to be that I moved to Umeå and met students from all around the world: Canada, Colombia, Denmark... That’s also where I met my Belgian husband, with whom I now have two daughters.

Since Umeå, I’ve lived in several different countries: Belgium, France and Italy. Every time I’ve come to a new country, I’ve learnt the language and ensured that I’ve

sorted out my work situation. If you want something in life, you also have to be prepared to get involved and invest in it. I learnt that early on at home. Every time I've moved to a new town, I've also thought I would settle there for longer than just a temporary period, but that hasn't turned out to be the case. A while ago, when the economic recession started to spread, it was a matter of moving where the jobs were.

It's been fantastic living in different places. Moving around has given me a sense of humility, and has shown me what brings people together rather than separating them. I've built many relationships that are still going strong. I've picked up several recipes that I still use, such as Belgian waffles, endives fried in sugar and butter, and French-style duck. I've always seen freedom of movement within the EU as something natural, and have really made the most of the advantages it offers. My world would have felt much smaller if I hadn't travelled, but moving around like my husband and I have done has come at a price. The romantic notion of just being open to new cultures isn't accurate – understanding how a new society operates is hard work. It takes strength and willpower to build everything up again, and it takes time before you can feel at home. Moving to a new country is like getting divorced – you take a big step forward, and both lose and gain things.

A couple of years ago, my husband and I reached a point where we needed to think about where we would build our future in the longer term, and where we wanted our daughters to grow up. We chose Sweden, where we both got job offers, but there were also several other factors that played a part in our decision such as the Swedish lifestyle, nature, the possibility of cycling to work, equality, and a healthy attitude towards family life. Sweden also paid for my education once upon a time, so it feels good to be able to give something back to society here.

There are many emotions that affect the social debate on migration. I think people stand and shout on both sides: those who want new residents to leave, and those who want them to stay. I don't have the facts or statistics, or proper information. Lots of people confuse refugees and migrants, for example. When discussing borders, the

emphasis is often on the negative aspects. What are the positive aspects? It would be useful to have more facts that illustrate what society gains and what it loses with open borders, for example. It's a difficult question. You can't have one EU country with closed borders and another with open borders. I'd like to see more leadership on this issue at central EU level.

When I think about the debate in Denmark on these issues, it strikes me that the tone is tougher there. On the whole, I find that people are a little more cautious here – they seem to take a more moderate approach.

At the same time, humility in the face of the new means that I don't always think you should step forward and shout out the way you might have done in your home country. I don't think I can come out and have an opinion either way – I want to investigate the issue in greater depth first, thereby showing society respect for what I'm not entirely familiar with. Sweden has put its trust in me, and I want to repay that trust. ■

■ Mark, age 33

1983–1997 Birth and childhood, Johannesburg, South Africa
1997–2001 Childhood, Cape Town, South Africa
2002 Working, Düsseldorf, Germany
2002–2003 Working, Liverpool, England
2003–2009 Studying and working, Cape Town, South Africa
2009–2010 Working, Sydney, Australia
2010–2011 Working, London, England
2011– Ties, Stockholm, Sweden

“IN CAPE TOWN, NELSON MANDELA WAS MY NEIGHBOUR.”

I was born in Johannesburg in 1983, during apartheid. As a child, the apartheid system didn't really feature much in my life. We had a maid and a gardener who worked for us, and I regarded them and their children as members of our family.

When crime rates rocketed, my mum didn't want to stay in Johannesburg and so we moved to Cape Town just before I started upper secondary school. Cape Town must be one of the world's most diverse cities. Black people, coloured people, white people, Jews, Hindus, Hare Krishnas, Muslims and Christians all live there. But it was only when I came to Sweden that I realised just how diverse Cape Town was.

At school, we always observed each other's holidays. When my Jewish schoolmates were off school, we wished them a happy Passover. On Fridays, the Muslim pupils finished early to go to Friday prayers in the mosque. I remember that our head teacher gave me a good telling off when I tried to offer my Muslim friend something to eat

during Ramadan, a holiday that I didn't know anything about at that time.

The school I went to was very strict, which I hated. But now I appreciate it. I don't think I'll ever forget the school motto: “Nothing but the best.”

When I was nine years old, I started writing music. It was my real passion. Sport was compulsory at school, but music always came first for me.

After upper secondary school, I went to Germany and worked there for six months. My dad was born there, so I have a German citizenship. I wanted to meet my dad's family and to see what things were like where he grew up. It was an incredible experience. Then I went to Liverpool to see where The Beatles lived when they were young. They were my biggest musical influences when I was growing up. I planned to stay there for a few weeks, but I ended up staying for eight months.

After that, I went to Ethiopia where my dad was working. He's always worked long hours, so I was used to watching TV while he worked. One day when I was watching TV, I noticed a pretty girl, a reporter at a press conference. I managed to get my dad to arrange press accreditation for me so that I could meet her. She turned out to be a journalism student from Sweden. We started bumping into each other, and she showed me around Addis Ababa.

Back in South Africa, I began studying linguistics. My dad thought it was a strange choice, but my mum was happy that I had started to get an education. However, I soon grew tired of it and quit after three months.

After a while, I started a music production company. I produced music for new product launches and worked with various events. I also made music in my spare time, both as a solo artist and with a band that toured the country. Being in a band is a unique experience. I can't think of many other contexts in which people who don't know each other work so hard together with the sole goal of making their dreams come true.

But it was hard to run a business in South Africa, so I took a job at a record company in Australia. While I was living there, I was shocked at how people spoke about the country's Aborigines. In South Africa, they could have



been imprisoned or fined for making such offensive comments. I found that many people were extremely blasé about racism, even walking around wearing T-shirts that said “Fuck off – we’re full”.

After a year in Australia, I moved to England to work for the same company. There, I met Linn again, the Swedish journalism student I’d met in Ethiopia. She’s added me as a Facebook friend. We celebrated New Year together in Addis Ababa, and we became a couple. In the spring, I started visiting her in Sweden.

As an EU citizen, I was able to stay in Sweden for three months before having to show that I could support myself. I still had my business, and I started working with Sweden as my base.

One of the first things I noticed was how Swedish society isn’t particularly entrepreneur-friendly. If you start a business you have to register it with the Swedish Tax Agency, but I didn’t know that. I had to study Swedish in order to understand the Swedish Tax Agency’s and the Swedish Companies Registration Office’s websites. Starting your own business is unnecessarily difficult. In Australia, the attitude is different. There, it’s more: “Thank you for wanting to start a business in Australia. Here’s what you need to do.” Something that would have made things easier would be if the application forms had been available in more languages, such as English and Arabic.

The fact that my girlfriend lives here has offered a way into Swedish society. She understands that there are cultural differences, and explains to me how things work. Her friends have become my friends.

My business partner has shared his clients with me, and explains how the business world works in Sweden. He’s taught me that if you shake hands on something, it’s a done deal. The business climate here is more trusting and transparent than what I’m used to.

In Cape Town, Nelson Mandela was my neighbour and I also had the great privilege of meeting him. In his speeches, he often said that South Africa belongs to everyone who lives there. I think the same is true of Sweden – or any country, for that matter. The country belongs to

everyone who lives there, even if people are different and think differently to the way you do.

Right now, Europe is facing its biggest challenges and opportunities. Sweden needs to increase its population in order to have more tax payers. People are standing at your door. Do you want to send them away? Where to? And why?

Swedes are generous-minded, and that’s something to be proud of. But I also think that many people are afraid. They have questions that they want answers to, but essentially they’re being told: “Don’t ask those questions! If you’re worried about that, you’re not generous-minded.” People’s fears are seen as irrational, and so we call them idiots, racists or Nazis. I think that’s wrong. People should be convinced, not ignored.

Many people come to Sweden because they’re fleeing from war. They risk being killed and maimed in their home countries. You can tell people that, but they’ll still be afraid. There are some people who listen to frightened people. And then there are those who have their own negative agenda. That’s why I think it would be good to approach these fears differently. Migration brings problems, for example when there’s a shortage of housing. So let us solve the problem.

It’s interesting to compare South Africa with how things are here. In South Africa everything is included – you can’t take anything away. For example, the national anthem is in five languages. We can learn a lot through inclusion. I think you end up with something of a contradiction when you start removing things – like removing gingerbread men from a Lucia procession – in the interests of integration. You don’t have to exclude in order to integrate. You can combine. I think there’s a degree of over-sensitivity, which can be destructive rather than constructive.

Here in Sweden, people don’t laugh at politics. Sometimes I think that Swedes are about to have a heart attack when I discuss things with them. They take everything so seriously. In South Africa, we have much more political satire – even in TV ads. ■



May, age 42

**“SYRIA HAS EXISTED FOR
MORE THAN 3,000 YEARS.
FIVE YEARS CAN’T TELL
THE WHOLE STORY.”**

- 1974 Birthplace, Kuwait
1974–1990 Childhood, Damascus, Syria
1990–2000 Studying and working, Saudi Arabia
2000–2013 Studying, Damascus, Syria
2013 Displaced, Lebanon
2014– Need for protection, Vimmerby and Teckomatorp, Sweden

When I think about Damascus, I can picture the narrow streets in the old part of town, and the mosques and the jasmine flowers. I remember when I was younger how I longed to have children and to be able to visit all the historic sites in Syria with them. But I also think about the orphans I visited at the children's homes as a volunteer with the Red Crescent. I looked for voluntary work when my family and I returned to Syria after ten years in Saudi Arabia. Volunteering wasn't particularly common, and was often met with scepticism. There was a suspicion that volunteers only actually wanted to party with each other, or that they were inspectors from the regime. Having grown up with two socially active parents, it came naturally to me. Doing something to benefit society has always been important to me.

I was pregnant when the revolution broke out in 2011. I was involved in the UN High Commissioner for Refugee's work for women refugees, but according to the regime there were no internal refugees. After giving birth to my triplets, my husband and I wanted to do what we could to support people who had lost their homes and been injured by the war, but it was almost impossible to get through with first aid as the regime blocked such efforts. It also involved taking great risks with our own safety, which we were made well aware of. Our efforts were black-listed, and we were branded terrorists. Several of my husband's friends were kidnapped, and the threats escalated. I didn't even get the chance to say goodbye to anyone before we were forced to flee.

Shortly after my husband and I reached the refugee camp in Lebanon, we had the opportunity to come to Sweden as quota refugees through the resettlement programme. I had visited Sweden a few years previously as a tourist, but my experience then was completely different. In retrospect, I can see how important one's own attitude is. When I visited Sweden in 2011 I was pleasantly surprised by everything that was new to me, and I noticed all the beauty around me: how the snow and the silence stretched out, how clean everything was, and how friendly the people were. But when I came in 2014, what I experi-

enced and saw was weighed down by the involuntariness of the situation – having been forced to leave everything behind and start again in a foreign country. To begin with, I only saw the negative aspects and became extremely depressed. But as I learnt Swedish and made friends, life started to open up again. Since my husband and I came as quota refugees, we were able to start studying Swedish for Immigrants classes almost straight away, as well as everything else you need to get started with.

In Damascus, I studied English literature and language. I continued studying in Sweden, and I've now completed a master's degree in linguistics at Malmö University. Literature has always been important to me. It's the best way to express yourself and create room for understanding. But at the same time, it can also lead you astray. When I was at school in Damascus, there were many books that talked about Syria's efforts and the desire to help Palestinians. We knew that they were just propaganda. As a Palestinian, my father had never been given a permanent residence permit in all his 65 years. And I myself am now closer to Palestine here in Sweden than I was in Syria. As soon as I have Swedish citizenship, I'll be able to travel there for the first time in my life.

Sometimes my husband and I hear from those who have applied for asylum here that we've had it easy, that we haven't had to get here through people smugglers and that we didn't have to put up with the long wait for a decision because we had residence permits when we arrived. I understand that it might appear that way, but we all face our own challenges and I've certainly had my share. What matters most is the solutions we try to find.

There's a lot of talk about refugees, but less action. It's not enough to just address these issues. The focus has to be on identifying solutions and finding a way forwards. I work as a student representative at Malmö University, and last autumn we started a project where people can share their ideas about what would be useful for asylum seekers and new arrivals, such as a workshop about Swedish culture, society and laws. We then try to help turn these ideas into reality. It's not enough just to provide information about a law against smacking children. Everyone has

their own ideas about bringing up children, but there are also social and cultural aspects. You have to create an understanding about why the law exists.

When the question of tougher border controls came up last winter, there was a lot of uproar. There were reports about how the police asked everyone for their passports. When something like that gets so much attention in the media, it spreads worry and fear among those for whom war is still fresh in their memory. Hearing and seeing the police's border control actions stirs up memories of the security system in Syria, and can remind people of the torture that many of them have suffered. It can be traumatic, but that aspect isn't covered by the media. Instead, we see how the growing number of asylum seekers is resulting in chaos and disarray in Swedish society.

We see examples of some refugees who do bad things and people complaining about new arrivals. Why not highlight examples of the many highly educated people who have integrated quickly? Why not hear from those who actually welcome and like new arrivals? I also think we should see more examples of ordinary life and ordinary people. Why does it so often have to be bad examples that stand out? Here, I think that art can play an important role – depicting everyday, ordinary life.

It's not just here in Sweden that the focus easily can be one-sided in public debate. When the revolution began in Syria in 2011, the TV showed pictures of the blood and violence. The cameras didn't show all the red balloons with the word 'Peace' on them that people silently released to the heavens. Nor did they show the flowers being handed out in the name of peace. The sizeable peace movement was consigned to the shadows. It's easier to show and market violence, but we have to remember that violence breeds violence. What do you find if you search for Syria on YouTube? Videos featuring violence, war and dead children. These images don't show my home country. Syria has existed for more than 3,000 years. Five years can't tell the whole story. ■



■ Linn, age 37

- 1979–1998 Birth and childhood, Älmhult, Sweden
- 1998–1999 Working, London, England
- 1999–2006 Studying, Visby, Sweden
- 2006–2009 Working, Cork, Ireland
- 2009 Working, Västervik, Sweden
- 2010–2014 Ties, work and studies, Providence, USA
- 2014– Returning, Växjö, Sweden

**“WHEN I HAPPENED TO SAY
THE WRONG WEDDING DATE,
THEY GREW SUSPICIOUS.”**

The main feature of my home town, Älmhult, was IKEA – the company is based there. My parents worked there, as did everyone else’s parents. My first summer job was at the quality department there, and we all went to IKEA’s ice cream bar after school as there weren’t any cafés in Älmhult.

After finishing my studies, I moved to London. I worked at the Dolce & Gabbana concession in Selfridges. The British royal family do their Christmas shopping there, and they close the entire store. I remember how we stood watching wide-eyed as the princes passed our department. My year in London was filled with working, partying and making new friends. It was as if I had a bucket list that I wanted to work through, and it started with London.

Going to art school was the next thing on my to-do list. I did a two-year arts course in Visby together with a bunch of creative people, and studied painting, graphics and video installations. After that, I stayed on Gotland and began studying archaeology. I always did what I felt like, and thought that responsible adult life could wait.

Once I’d taken my degree in archaeology and the time came to start working, I discovered that there weren’t many jobs for archaeologists. I remember what the careers adviser at my upper secondary school used to say: “It’s always good to study something you’re interested in.” That motto had also guided me: I’d done what I was good at and had enjoyed it, but I’d been living in a dream world. Suddenly, I ran up against a brick wall.

Although the job prospects in Sweden were bleak, there were lots of jobs for archaeologists in Ireland. Ireland had received a large sum of money from the EU to expand its network of motorways, which resulted in a need for excavations. There are many historic remains in Ireland which represent a significant source of income, as they attract many tourists. So when they came to build two-lane motorways across the entire country, they needed a lot of archaeologists. Several hundred of us came from different countries to work there. It was extremely physical, and it was hard work being out in the field carrying out excavations. But it was also great fun digging up things that had lain untouched for hundreds or even thousands of years.

Immediately after moving to Ireland, I started working with an American guy whom I’m now married to. We moved in together and worked on excavations for almost three years.

In 2008, Ireland was hit hard by the financial crisis. Suddenly, the pubs were empty – it was as if a balloon had deflated. Lots of immigrant workers from Eastern Europe returned home. Their cars were abandoned at the airport and had to be towed away. I think that those of us who had come to Ireland to work knew that we were in a bubble – and that we would keep going until it burst. The same evening that my partner and I lost our jobs, we decided to get married. We wanted to continue our lives together, and to try life in America.

We got married in Boston in 2009. I flew back to Sweden, and nine months later I got a visa to travel to the US and apply for a Green Card. My husband had flown out to the US ahead of me, so I was asked lots of questions at passport control. They wondered why I’d flown on my own if I was so happily married, and when I happened to say the wrong wedding date, they grew suspicious. I was taken into a room where I had to wait with a Russian woman who had come to visit her son, and two Palestinians who were going to a conference in Boston. The men from Homeland Security took it in turns to make fun of us. They passed my passport around and laughed, and insinuated that the Russian woman might be a spy. It was incredibly humiliating. I was allowed to leave after two hours, but I’ll never forget that evening.

We moved to a house in Providence, a few dozen miles south of Boston, and I got a job as an archaeologist at the company where my husband worked. I was happy there. Americans are very open and friendly, and people take the attitude that anything is possible if only you want it. There’s so much positive energy in the idea that the American dream drives people on. But at the same time, there are also lots of negative things in the US, like racism and poverty. It was clear that the poor don’t stand a chance. You can work as much as possible and not get anywhere – not even earning enough to afford the rent or health insurance.

After a couple of years, I started doing a master's degree in geographic information systems at Lund University by distance learning. I got a job with a large engineering consultancy company and worked on projects such as flooding analyses of the American coastline.

The American culture is very job-oriented. My managers made it clear that giving one hundred percent wasn't enough – they expected more of me. We wanted to start a family, and I didn't see how it would be possible to combine that with the rigours of working life. What's more, everything in the US was driven by money and I didn't want to see my future children get stuck in the rat race. So we decided to move to Sweden.

In the US, I was able to start working quickly. There, they'll take a chance on someone who hasn't been able to prove their worth yet. But at the same time, it's also easier to get fired, and if you lose your job you also lose your healthcare insurance... When I came back to Sweden, I sometimes found society to be a little rigid and humdrum; you do things the way you've always done them, and there's a fear of doing things wrong. But there's also a degree of security in that. It's nice to be able to relax and not have to worry about healthcare insurance.

The best thing about living in Sweden is the peace and quiet. We live in the centre of Växjö, but we can still get to the countryside easily. As a new parent, I also appreciate Swedish parental leave: ten weeks of unpaid leave in the US compared with 18 months of paid leave here makes an enormous difference. We can live a family life here, which is very nice. Now we're looking for a house and would like to move to the countryside.

I think that most people see migration as being needs-driven. That was why I moved – because I needed a job. Moving abroad has never been an end in itself for me.

Most of my friends in Växjö come from other countries, and many have moved here for love. Migration is an unavoidable conversation topic in this context, and they often talk about culture clashes. In America, it's common to say hello or smile when you meet someone in the street. I've become used to that, so now I tend to smile at someone when I make eye contact with them, but the 'silent greet-

ing' usually seems to surprise people here in Sweden. It's as if it's OK to say hello to neighbours in the stairwell, but not if you see them outside...

In Swedish society, we put people in different places so that no one is an obstacle to someone else's life. We put the elderly in old people's homes and asylum seekers in asylum accommodation, and we then think that they're being looked after. But their emotional and social needs aren't being met. We think that we're welcoming because we offer arranged accommodation with new IKEA mattresses, but do people really feel welcome? Do they feel acknowledged in a society where their neighbours hardly greet each other beyond the stairwell?

I wish that people would talk more within public debate about how those who come here are welcomed. Even arranged accommodation risks becoming a kind of storage place. A whole society is needed in order for migration to be successful. ■

Karolin, age 39

1978–1999 Birth and childhood, Uddevalla, Sweden
1999–2000 Working, Berlin, Germany
2000–2003 Working and studying, Gothenburg, Sweden
2003–2010 Studying and working, Rome, Italy
2010–2015 Working, Florence, Italy
2015 Returning, Gothenburg, Sweden
2015– Working, Malmö, Sweden

“I WAS SURPRISED WHEN I SAW ALL THE DADS WALKING AROUND TOWN WITH THEIR BUGGIES.”

After upper secondary school, I decided to move abroad. I felt a need to gather my thoughts and find my own way in life. My reasoning was that it would be good for me to do this somewhere where no one knew me. I wanted to broaden my experiences. By encountering other opinions, I also wanted to investigate what could be done differently. Being blind to the defects around you can make it hard to think new thoughts.

First, I moved to Berlin where I ended up by pure chance. I went with a friend who was going to study there. While she studied, I looked for jobs. I was lucky and found a job relatively quickly, and I decided to stay there for the next two years.

Working in Berlin was an informative experience: I had to adapt in a country where I didn't speak the language, and I had to learn to deal with challenging situations. One event that I remember particularly clearly was the time when I tripped and sprained my ankle in the U-Bahn. It

became clear how hard it was to make myself understood when I didn't speak German. But things turned out OK, as I managed to find an English speaker on the platform who helped me to the hospital and acted as an interpreter.

During my time in Berlin, I decided that I wanted to study abroad. My interest in design led me to Italy. I was looking for a contrast to the minimalistic Swedish design philosophy, and I chose to study in Italy where the style features bold, colourful creativity. So I returned home to prepare to move to Italy. I was accepted at a design school in Rome, and I took courses in Italian. After Berlin, I understood how important it was to know the language in order to get the most out of my studies.

I was looking forward to moving to Rome in 2003, but I was also nervous about studying an entire course abroad. Linguistically I felt well prepared, but it was harder than I'd expected. I didn't understand a word of the first lecture. It took a while before I got to grips with Italian and was able to focus on my studies instead of getting caught up on the language.

After my course, I wanted to stay in Italy. My studies had given me experience of the Italian design industry, so it felt more secure to work with design there – despite the uncertainty of the job market. A couple of months after graduating, I got my first job at a design studio. The working hours and the pay weren't the best, but I was delighted nevertheless.

It's easy to come into contact with people in Italy. It's a society where you can quickly make superficial acquaintances. In Italy, you're dependent on contacts. As far as I know, there's no unemployment benefit or equivalent financial support if you find yourself unemployed. In situations like that, your own social network is extremely important – you have to find someone you know who can help you to get a job. It was a stressful work climate, but eventually the professional uncertainty became natural to me.

I returned to Sweden when the economic crisis reached Europe. Italy was hit harder than Sweden, and I noticed how more and more companies were going bankrupt. The national mood was negative, and many people were fearful



about the future. Personally, I had a permanent job and I was coping, but the feelings of uneasiness and uncertainty also affected me. I had to choose between weathering the storm and taking things into my own hands to improve my situation. I decided to move back to Sweden.

To begin with, I was nervous – I didn't know whether Sweden would be as I remembered it or if I would feel at home there. I'd been away for quite a long time, and things change. But I discovered that Sweden is a very stable country with many forms of socioeconomic security. I didn't give it much thought when I was younger, but now I see just how valuable our welfare system is.

Moving between countries isn't without its complications. I'd become used to the Italian system, and it took me a while to readjust to a new society. For example, I found that the local post office had disappeared and it was no longer possible to pay bills at a bank branch. When I moved into my first apartment in Sweden, the electricity suddenly went off. I called the electricity company and complained, before finding out that the owners had terminated the agreement and I would have to sign a new agreement. I didn't have a clue that electricity agreements were a personal thing in Sweden – in Italy, they were included in my rental contract.

I also discovered that gender equality is different in Sweden compared to Italy. I was surprised when I saw all the dads walking around town with their buggies. In Italy, I'd never heard of a man taking paternity leave.

I love warm weather, and I've found it hard to get used to the Swedish climate. Some days I don't know how to dress to survive the changing weather. During my first year back in Sweden, I tried to cope with my Italian wardrobe. But after the winter, I was forced to replace everything with wool and other warm, rainproof materials.

Initially, I didn't feel at home in Sweden so I flew back to Rome to experience the sensation of feeling at home again. I still visit regularly, but now it's more for a sense of nostalgia and to see my friends there. After two years back in Sweden, I also feel at home here.

Purely spontaneously, I don't feel that there's any debate about returning Swedes. Personally, I would have

liked some simple information to guide me when returning to Sweden. A list of bullet points for people returning home would have been useful, with information about the restructuring of the postal service and other changes that have taken place in recent years. Of course, it's much easier for a returning Swede to integrate into society than it is for other migrants. We often have friends and relatives who we can ask for advice, but we might also need a dose of everyday practical information. However, there might not be a need for a comprehensive debate on how to deal with this. ■



Agatha, age 34

1982	Birth, Ekpoma, Nigeria
1982–1998	Childhood, Benin City, Nigeria
1998–2000	Studying, Ile Ife, Nigeria
2000–2002	Working, Benin City, Nigeria
2002–2005	Studying, Ekpoma, Nigeria
2006–2007	Working, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria
2007–2011	Working, Lokoja, Nigeria
2011	Studying, Aarhus, Denmark
2011	Studying, Utrecht, Netherlands
2012	Studying, Aarhus, Denmark
2012–	Ties, Hässleholm, Sweden
2013–	Working, Vinslöv, Sweden

**“SWEDEN WASN’T AN
OBVIOUS CHOICE. I HAD A JOB
IN NIGERIA THAT I LOVED.”**

I grew up in a polygamous home in Benin City, Nigeria. My grandfather was king, and it’s common for men in his position to have more than one wife. Both he and my father had several wives. We were a big family. Lots of siblings and cousins lived together in a large house, and it was fun. Of course, there was sometimes squabbling and quarrelling, but the family ties and the love were strong. Anyone who was away from home was missed. The best thing of all was our joint mealtimes, with a big dish of food in the middle of the table that we all ate from.

As royalty, we often wore traditional clothing and jewellery, which meant that we were recognised when we were out and about. At restaurants, we were taken aside to sit at the best tables. We were respected and we were the centre of attention, but I preferred to do things my own way and not follow the rules. As a princess, for example, I couldn’t grab something to eat on the go when I was in town. That just wasn’t the done thing.

I remember my childhood mornings, how my dad would turn the radio on early. We listened to relaxing music and the news. On those early mornings, with the radio playing in the background, I first began to dream of becoming a radio presenter. A few years later, I’d changed my mind and wanted to be a nurse, but my teachers made me put this dream aside. My maths and physics teachers were very strict, and beat us with canes. I was so scared of them, I jumped out through the window when they entered the classroom. So I dropped maths and physics and specialised in art and communication subjects instead.

At the age of just 14, I went to the head of the radio station in our town and said that I wanted to be a radio presenter. They took me in! I didn’t get paid, but the people who worked there mentored me and I enjoyed learning about the job. By the time I was 15, I had my own radio show.

After studying theatre and media at university and working as a radio presenter, I wanted to study abroad. I chose Denmark, as the process for getting a permit to study there was straightforward. Five years ago, I moved to Aarhus to study TV production. My husband was the first person I met when I landed at Kastrup Airport. He was a

friend of the family, and he met me there to give me a winter coat and bedding. We stayed in touch via text message and phone, and then he came to visit me.

We got married that same autumn, and talked a lot about where we would live. For me, living in Sweden wasn't the obvious option. I had a job in Nigeria that I loved, and I knew that I would have to learn a new language if I moved here. But my husband didn't want to move to Nigeria. I believe in marriage and that you have to make an effort to make things work, so I decided to give life in Sweden a chance. I told my husband that I would give it two years and return home if it didn't work. Things turned out well, and so I stayed.

I started Swedish for Immigrants classes, took a cleaning job and did work placements at a leisure-time centre and a school. I don't like sitting around – I always want to be doing something. I want to have my own money and not be dependent on a man.

Three years ago, I got a job as a personal assistant – and then my old dream of becoming a nurse was reawakened. This autumn, I'll start studying healthcare and nursing. I love helping people. In Nigeria, I helped elderly and disabled people in my free time. Helping others is an important part of my Catholic faith. Once I've qualified as an assistant nurse, I hope to continue studying and become a nurse.

I have a son who is 18 months old, and I want him to feel that his parents do the same things as other children's parents. I don't want him to think: "My mum does a menial job because she's black." That's one reason why I want to train as a nurse. I don't just want to do it for my own sake – I want to do it for his sake, too.

I don't think it's good that politicians have decided to make family reunifications harder. People want to be with their families. If someone lives in a country where the internet isn't reliable, it can also mean that they can't communicate – and that can be disastrous for families.

The media gave me the impression that authorities such as the Swedish Migration Agency and the Swedish Public Employment Service are there to help you. But in reality, it's not that simple. According to what I'd read and heard,

I thought you could just go to the Public Employment Service and be assigned a case officer to discuss things with, but that's not how it is. Many people don't get a case manager for several months. And when you finally get a case manager, they mostly tell you to go to the website and look for a job. I only got the help I did get by being persistent.

The media doesn't report much about migration due to family ties. It's all about asylum seekers. That's why Swedes seem to believe that all migrants are asylum seekers. This isn't the case. Some come here to work, or to get married. At Swedish for Immigrants classes, everyone took it for granted that I was an asylum seeker. Other students asked about "my case", and my teacher didn't believe me when I said I had studied theatre and media. I had to show her my videos on YouTube in order to be believed!

That made me feel bad, as if my foreign education was being looked down on. It feels like some Swedes don't understand why people have come here if they have a good education. They don't see that people might come here for reasons like marriage or good job offers.

The media's reporting should be more balanced. If you make a documentary about refugees, you should also make a documentary about people who come here to marry or to work. For example, SVT should visit an adult education class to meet people from other countries and then follow various people who have migrated for different reasons. I feel that most of the programmes that are made are about people fleeing or paperless people – not about people who are here to work, for example.

I also think that the Swedish Migration Agency should have stories on its website from people who have come here for various reasons, so that people who are heading here know a bit more about what to expect. ■



Kavira, age 22

- 1994–2003 Birth and childhood, Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo
2003–2014 Displaced, Kampala, Uganda
2014– Need for protection, Delsbo and Iggesund, Sweden

“WE MADE SUCH A NOISE THAT THE NEIGHBOURS RUSHED IN... THEN THEY REALISED WE WERE SHOUTING WITH JOY.”

To begin with, life was good in Congo. But then came the problems, with more and more conflicts and enemies. My great-grandfather was king, but many people did not want him on the throne. Several of my relatives were killed, and my dad was kidnapped. To avoid meeting the same fate, the rest of the family and I fled to Uganda. We were given protection at the refugee camp in Kampala, since our enemies might come after us. Outside the camp, there were sometimes people calling for us to go home to Congo. We were still afraid of being killed, but we had a roof over our heads and I made friends and carried on with my everyday life.

Although things were tough in the camp, we had protection and many families found themselves in a similar situation. Most of them were from Congo, but there were also refugees from Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. Many of them were given the opportunity to travel onwards to countries such as Canada and the USA. Obviously, I was happy for them, but I was also sad. Being the

one who was left behind was hard, but after nine years it was our turn. The day my family and I found out we could come to Sweden, we were so happy that we just started shouting. We made such a noise that the neighbours came rushing in and wondered what had happened. Then they realised we were shouting with joy.

Here in Sweden, we have freedom. I have what I need, and I can do what I like. I have food, an apartment and friends, and I can study. The only thing that is hard is the language. When I was young I wanted to be a pilot, but now I'm fighting for my dream to work as a case officer at the Swedish Migration Agency. I want to learn about various problems and situations in the world so that I can decide whether people can stay or not. I first had this dream in Uganda when I met all the people in the refugee camp and heard about their problems. I'm currently studying nursing, but later on I'd like to try studying law and learn more about other people. One day I also want to visit Nairobi in Kenya and other countries in the world.

It's important to highlight the reasons why there are wars and various problems that force people to flee. Those who flee are looking for protection, peace and security. In many African countries, women – and not just refugees – are exposed to violence. In Uganda, this often happens when girls go to school. It's not easy to talk about, and because of corruption the perpetrator always gets away with it. Corruption forces people into silence. I think that's wrong, but I don't know how it can be changed.

I also think it's important to attention long processing times. Waiting to see your family again can be particularly painful when you've escaped from war. ■



Najat, age 28

1987–2005 Birth and childhood, Nador, Morocco

2006–2009 Studying, Fez, Morocco

2010– Ties, Halmstad, Sweden

**“THE IDEA OF BEING
THE ONLY GIRL IN A MALE-
DOMINATED INDUSTRY HAS
NEVER SCARED ME.”**

I grew up with three brothers and I always used to play with them. I never had a Barbie doll – I played football instead. My parents didn’t differentiate between me and my brothers. I had freedom, and I was allowed to move away from home by myself to study at university.

Six years ago I moved to be with my husband, who is originally from Iraq. When I came to Sweden, I wanted to get a job as quickly as possible. I’d heard that it wouldn’t be easy because of my veil, and I was worried that it would be an issue. I didn’t want to change – I wanted to be accepted for who I am. Before I came here, I had never thought that I would have to change in order to be accepted. Unfortunately, many women who wear a veil and who come here are told that it will be hard for them to get a job. Some of them might not even apply for the jobs they want for fear of being rejected.

In order to find work quickly, I wanted to train as a cleaner. But the Swedish Public Employment Service didn’t think that was appropriate for me as I have a degree in economics from Morocco. But I stood my ground and was able to get trained anyway. I just wanted to enter society and get a job – any job at all. At Swedish for Immigrants classes, you only meet people from other countries and you have to do something in order to step outside that world. I managed it by doing a work placement and later on by getting a job so that I could work alongside my studies.

Because of my upbringing, it’s been natural for me to take my place in a male-dominated industry. Some girls might not dare to train as an engineer because the training mainly attracts men. That’s not something I thought about when choosing my career. I thought about what I like: maths and calculations. I was the only girl in my class at Halmstad University who had chosen to specialise in electrical engineering, but that didn’t bother me. The idea of being the only girl has never scared me.

It’s easier for those of us who come here to be with someone. You already have a residence permit when you arrive. You can start your life straight away, and can start studying. Those who come as asylum seekers can spend several years doing nothing, which is just lost time. When

you come here due to close ties, you have the support of someone who already knows how things work in Sweden. Someone who can give you tips and advice, and help you financially.

I've been fortunate. I've received the support I asked for. I've been given free training and I got a job after my second interview. Today, I work as an electrical engineer for the Swedish Transport Administration in Gothenburg. I work with rail transport, and I really feel that I make a difference to people's everyday lives. It's important for me to feel that I'm giving something back to society.

I've become part of society, but not really in the way I'd like to. I always have to try to explain to my colleagues and classmates that I don't share the same values as ISIS, for example. I don't like having to explain that. One day, a woman on the train asked if I was a Muslim. When I said that I was, she asked: "How do ISIS think?" How would I know?

In order to be able to feel more at home, I think there should be more places where Swedes and immigrants can come together and just talk. When I meet others, I force myself to show them that the ideas they have about me because of my appearance aren't necessarily true. Hopefully I've paved the way for women who wear veils at my workplace.

If I make a mistake, I want people to help me, not laugh at me. When I presented a project with a classmate at university, several people laughed at me because of my accent. Afterwards, they said to my classmate that it would have been better if I hadn't taken part. They didn't realise that I'd done most of the work. Just imagine if they'd had to present a project in Arabic in Morocco! I think it's important to put yourself in the migrant's shoes.

When I worked in home help services, there was a lady who initially didn't want me to come to her house. When we then got to know each other, she apologised for her prejudices. She explained that when she saw my veil, she saw war. But when we got to know each other, she saw the inner me. Her ideas had come from the TV. That's what she herself said. She watched TV all day and that's where all her impressions about the world came from. The

media plays a major role. It's true that some women have been forced to wear the veil, but not all of us. The media shouldn't just focus on women who are oppressed – they should also listen to those of us who choose to wear the veil. In my case, my husband suggested that I take it off. But I don't want to.

Migration isn't just about people who are forced to flee. Migration can also be voluntary. We should talk about the different reasons why people migrate. I think that people need to be told that we aren't all refugees. Not everyone gets help from the state, but many people have the impression that people just come here and take. When I came here, my husband had to support me for two years. I don't think people realise that.

Now I've heard that the maintenance requirements might be made stricter, which I don't think is good. This could mean that people who come here don't take the time to learn the language, and have to start working straight away in order to bring their partner here. Even though it's good to work, I think it's extremely important to focus on the language. I've met people who have lived here for many years without being able to speak Swedish. Another disadvantage with the maintenance requirement is that those who come here become completely dependent on their partner from a financial perspective. I think it would be better to get money in the form of a study allowance to learn Swedish, or a paid internship. It doesn't have to be much money – just enough to get by on. I received a bonus for completing my Swedish for Immigrants course quickly. Now they've done away with that, which is a shame. It can boost students' motivation. ■



■ **Johanna, age 36**

1980–2000 Birth, childhood and studies, Stockholm, Sweden
2001–2003 Studying, Sundsvall, Sweden
2003–2008 Working, Stockholm, Sweden
2008–2015 Ties and working, Berlin, Germany
2015– Returning, Stockholm, Sweden

**“MY FIRST FEW YEARS
IN BERLIN WERE LIKE
SOME KIND OF CONSTANT
INFATUATION.”**

decided early on that I wanted to be a journalist. When I was about 10 years old, I bought a video camera with my savings and recorded TV programmes with my friends. We produced news reports about things that had happened in our suburb. I also made my own newspapers with articles about my family, my class and my teachers, and at upper secondary school I launched the school newspaper.

I studied journalism in Sundsvall. I saw it as my chance to experience another part of Sweden, as I assumed that I would move back to Stockholm later where most of the jobs were. The course was excellent, and my internship with the local TV station led to a part-time job during my studies. In my final year, I moved to Stockholm to do an internship on a couple of current affairs programmes. That led to a job at SVT, the national broadcaster, for a few years. However, I was curious about other aspects of the TV industry so I applied for jobs at various production companies. I also started freelancing a little for newspapers and taught myself the art of selling articles.

It was in Stockholm that I met my husband. He was training as a pilot, which often means that you can expect to live abroad for a few years. Lot of major airlines have training programmes that lead to jobs within their organisations. Since my husband speaks German, he thought about moving to Germany. I wasn't tempted at all to begin with, but then I went on a business trip to Berlin and thought the city was absolutely fantastic...

The first time I visited Berlin, it was freezing cold. I was there with a docusoap production, herding round a group of tired teenage dancers that I was trying to make a TV programme about. It's hard to explain, but there was something about Berlin that gave me a strong sense of feeling at home. The atmosphere was so laid back. At that time, I was feeling a kind of pressure living in Stockholm – I was a typical good girl who was making my own career and feeling a mass of demands being placed on me. Lots of people in Stockholm seem to have experienced the same things: pressure on what they should eat, how they should work, where they should live, what they should look like... I was battling against so much all the time. I wanted to start a

family, but I didn't feel I could do it in Stockholm. My life had no balance. But then I went on this trip to Berlin and felt such a sense of calm. People looked different, and seemed OK with that. The entire city was full of contrasts. No two districts are alike, the architecture is varied, and so are the people. It's a big city in a different way to Stockholm, which makes it more tolerant.

When I came home, I told my husband that I would consider Germany – if we ended up in Berlin. A couple of years later he applied to Lufthansa via their training programme, and got a job with one of their subsidiaries, German Wings. And so we moved.

My first few years in Berlin were like some kind of constant infatuation with the city. There's a culture there where everything is possible. Lots of people go there to follow a dream – to write that novel, or become an artist. This means that some of what you see on the artistic scene isn't particularly good. But I liked it. The important thing wasn't how well people performed, but that they tried. I worked as a journalist, and wrote about Berlin for the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet's* travel supplement, among other things. My job was to describe the city, to observe it and be in love with it. It became a big part of my identity. We lived in a turn-of-the-century apartment on the punkiest street in the Friedrichshain district, opposite a squat. In the mornings, I used to stand at the window and look at the new political messages that had appeared on flags and banners overnight. My romantic vision of Berlin had been confirmed.

In my articles, I wrote about everything that was fantastic about Berlin, but there was also another side: an everyday life where I was often alone with our two children, struggling to understand the system and to learn the language. Making new friends takes energy, and doing it in German was absolutely exhausting. Learning a new language is a huge challenge, and there are so many rules. First, it's mostly about making yourself understood. Then there's the matter of day-to-day life. You need to be able to read and understand all the formal letters from the bank and the social security department, and you need to be able to fill in every form imaginable. There are a lot

of forms to complete in Germany! And last but not least, you have to build relationships in faltering German. Even when I spoke the language fluently and had German friends whom I loved, there was a layer that I never penetrated. I was never able to have those really stimulating discussions – the language got in the way. Speaking a language fluently gives you a completely different opportunity to be who you are.

Despite my love for Berlin, my husband and I had a feeling that we would move back to Sweden one day. There were a few winters when I felt it was a little wearing being on my own so much with the children while my husband was off flying. And it was hard selling texts from Berlin. I wanted to continue working as a journalist, but I didn't see any opportunity to develop professionally unless we moved back.

We started discussing whether we wanted our children to be Swedish or German. Not that we thought there was anything wrong with being German, but I longed to have the same frames of reference as my children. Part of being an immigrant involves being alone in your frames of reference, which can affect you more than you might think. The thought of being like that with my children filled me with sadness. For me, those frames of reference are about very subtle things, like how people behave, talk, think and react... things that I wanted to share with my children. And I didn't want them to feel that they didn't have roots. I'm very family-oriented – my roots are very much about my large family – and I wanted to give our children the opportunity to build close relationships with their relatives.

Deciding to move was incredibly hard. It was like a divorce, and it dragged on for half a year. I don't know how many lists I drew up of the pros and cons. When we were going around Stockholm looking for somewhere to live, we couldn't find anything we liked. The idea of leaving the buzz of Friedrichshain with its weekly markets and the clowns in the playgrounds really didn't appeal. But when we finally moved here, things turned out very well. We now live close to my sister-in-law. Our children have gained a large family, and they often play with their cousins. After just a few weeks in Sweden, I was getting more

work than I could handle. That's when I realised how hard I'd worked in Berlin and how little I'd got back in return. It's much easier to get things rolling as a freelancer when you're actually there and can network in a different way.

I don't think there's enough said about the amount of energy and effort it takes to learn a new language. There's a lack of understanding. People talk a great deal within public debate about how people should integrate and adapt. But what that actually means isn't as easy to understand if you haven't been in the same situation yourself. Completely changing your surroundings, language and context requires a real effort. And if you've been through terrible trauma, things must be a hundred times worse. When we moved to Germany, we were luxury immigrants in every respect. We were seen as having an air of romance, like something out of an Astrid Lindgren book. People wanted to be friends with us, and wondered how we could come from a fantastic country like Sweden and move to Germany. Our situation was completely different to that of many others, but still it wasn't easy. Not belonging took a lot of energy. My own experience as a migrant has given me a greater respect for and understanding of those who have managed to learn Swedish. I'm full of admiration for all those who have learnt Swedish, especially if their native language has completely different roots.

Something I've thought about a lot is how infinitely important the words we journalists use are when writing articles that deal with immigration to Sweden in some way. And how we twist things! It depresses me the way migration is always linked to words like 'problem' and 'unemployment' – there are so many positive things, too! For example, Berlin wouldn't have been half as interesting and exciting as a city if it hadn't been so very multicultural. ■



Lisa Monique Söderlindh

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Migration Agency

MIGRATION — THE GREAT NARRATIVE OF OUR TIME

In Sweden everyone can say, write, and think almost anything they want. Our constitutional freedom of the press and freedom of speech ensure the free exchange of opinions, free and all-round information, thus promoting public debate. This is among the most valuable and important things we have.

Statements like this tend to be heard in discussions of the topic. As we are often reminded, however, strong legislation is no guarantee. In France and many other parts of the world, including Sweden, a debate arose about threats to free speech, the limits to freedom of expression, and the foundations of democracy, in the wake of the terrorist attack on the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and the subsequent drama of murder and hostage taking in Paris.

At that time, in January 2015, I was working at the Unesco secretariat in Paris as part of an exchange that was coming to an end. It was time for me to return to the press unit of the Swedish Migration Agency, to working days lined with questions from the media about regulations, statistics, and individual migration cases. The expected scenario nagged me. The recent events made me ponder, obviously about why the attack had happened and what drives people to extremism, but also about how the migration issue was linked, almost as a matter of routine, to various challenges in society, thus fuelling the growing xenophobia.

The people who perpetrated the deeds were French citizens who had grown up in French society. Despite this, divisions and lines of conflict were drawn ever deeper between an “us” and a “them”. In many opinion corridors, connections were made between “the terrorist threat” and the rising number of people seeking international protection. The perspectives of the people who were bundled together in increasingly sweeping terms under the label “them” were heard much less frequently, and the conversation devoted even less attention to the related question of which mechanisms determine who is allowed to speak. The need for a more representative selection of voices in what was becoming a polarizing and dehumanizing migration debate was palpable. So too was the need to strengthen the factual foundation and to provide all-round information concerning migration.

In this situation, would I go back to working at the Swedish Migration Agency and carry on “as usual”? With information that would be used

in reporting *about* people whose own voices would mostly be absent, and largely painting a one-sided picture of migration to Sweden? Perhaps it was my lot as a civil servant of the state to toe the line and deal with all the questions, with no close consideration of all-round information or reality-based representation. But didn't we all need to do something? Moreover, perhaps there was a special call on all of us who had contributed to the great narrative of our time, not to let a phenomenon as old as humankind be reduced to a news story? My parents found each other beyond the borders of their respective homelands and settled in a third country. My life-story too arises from migration and a world in movement. This movement is an essential for life – and an opportunity. The boundary I drew was that I should never let my working role take precedence over the responsibility I felt as a fellow human being.

MIG Talks

And perhaps there was no contradiction. My pondering led to the idea of MIG Talks – a communication initiative with several purposes. On the one hand, to contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive public conversation about migration to Sweden and give a voice to some of all the thousands of people each year who lie behind the statistics, the people for whom the Swedish Migration Agency exists according to its mission. On the other hand, to make visible the reasons and the forces that drive voluntary and forced migration, and to make room for new residents' perspectives on the migration debate and their own thoughts about the future in their new homeland, Sweden.

Thanks in large measure to management who dared to open the door to new ways of thinking and working, the one did not need to exclude the other. I returned to the Swedish Migration Agency and began the work on MIG Talks. The Swedish name for the initiative hints that migration is about “me” (*mig* in Swedish). This “me” includes the people who have come to Sweden because they need protection, but also those who have moved here for other reasons, and who are less frequently heard in the public discourse. In MIG Talks we would not speak *about* or *to* but *with* each other. The approach gained a hearing. Thirteen institutions¹ in the

1. The Delegation for Migration Studies, the newspaper *The Local*, Invest Stockholm, Nordiska Museet, the Swedish Sports Confederation, the Red Cross, the Swedish Arts Council, Stockholm City Library, Stockholm University of the Arts, the Swedish Film Institute, the Swedish Institute, Sweden's International Talents, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

media, culture, sports, the public sector, and civil society supported the idea, which clearly demonstrated that more people saw the value of shared efforts to meet new needs in the wake of increased migration.

A total of 100 new residents who moved to Sweden between 2010 and 2015 were involved through a selection intended to reflect the composition of migration based on the main motives. Of these 100, 31 had come to Sweden through family reunion, 21 due to a need for asylum/protection, 9 to work, 4 to study, 19 as part of the free movement in the EU/EES, and 16 through remigration.

The communication initiative was carried out in 2016 and 2017. One of the main activities was a thematic series of conversations between the new residents and representatives of the cooperating partners. Public conversations were held at Stockholm City Library and Nordiska Museet. Interview stories were spread in digital channels with the website *Migtalks.se* serving as the hub. Materials such as video clips, news articles, illustrations, and graphics were also produced and published on a regular basis to shed light on migration to Sweden, based on facts and on the perspectives of people with experience of migration.

This book assembles 87 of the 100 interview stories. In many ways they make up a unique contemporary documentation of a chain of events that was neither part of the plan nor could even be envisaged when the idea of the communication initiative was born. Five months after I returned to Sweden and began the work with MIG Talks came that historic autumn known as “the migration crisis”. There was a succession of headlines about the increasing number of asylum seekers, and the voices in society talking about the increased migration to Sweden were louder than ever.

If the challenge had previously been to expose what the actual migration to Sweden looks like – for example, that love and family reunion have historically been the main reasons why most people choose to settle in Sweden – the challenge had now suddenly become enormous. In many respects the migration issue as a whole became synonymous with the question of the limited part of migration related to asylum and forced migration. Many of those who moved to Sweden for other reasons described experiences of seeing less priority being given to their own situation.

At the end of 2015, when I interviewed the first people who were to be part of the collection of stories for publication and dissemination at the start of 2016, it was already clear that the debate was moving far away from any conversation about how newcomers *can* and *want* to participate in developing society and jointly shaping our shared future. The importance of this conversation increased with every new headline that used metaphors invoking volume, water, waves, flows, and currents. Many of the interview

stories remind us that new perspectives can add perspicacious analyses and reality-based depictions of major societal challenges and opportunities – and with that a vision of long-term solutions. In other words: precisely that which for the most part was noticeably absent when the number of people seeking protection in Sweden rapidly increased in a short time.

In the course of the work I often reflected on what is lost when people who have changed their homeland, by choice or by force, are not heard or seen to a greater extent at different levels in society. What is the source of the anxiousness that is so often glimpsed when a new resident's opinions and perspectives are elicited? And why is the question of a person's origin often considered so much more natural to pose than the question of where that person is headed? Why are newcomers welcome to remember and tell about their migration but not quite so welcome to show that they are much more than this? The fact that there are different reasons and forces making people flee their homes involuntarily, or migrate of their own free will, does not contradict the fact that all types of movement are – and always have been – forward-looking. Many of the interview stories featured in this book show that migration is in fact infinitely more than geography. Labels such as “asylum seekers” or “unaccompanied refugee minors” often have an inhibiting effect, and it appears to be easy to forget that they are used to categorize people on the basis of a temporary state. The greatest upheaval in the whole journey is generally waiting in the new homeland.

On the selection and the approach

The website *Migtalks.se* was the main location of the interview material in 2016 and 2017. Parts of it have subsequently been used in digital teaching material, Clio Online, published by Bonnier Education. The 87 stories in the present book (out of a total 100 on the website) have also been transferred to Nordiska Museet's collection platform *Minnen.se*, where they are freely accessible.² Since the stories are now also published in book form, there is good reason to give an account of how they were collected.

The aim of the MIG Talks communication initiative required broad participation with actors from different arenas of society. The Swedish Migration Agency has for a long time had dialogue and collaboration with actors on various matters, for example with the Red Cross and the United Nations Refugee Agency, concerning issues such as seeking asylum, the

2. A total of 13 participants could not be reached or actively declined to be part of this book or *Minnen.se*.

asylum process and judicial matters, and it was now possible to extend this dialogue. In other cases dialogue was initiated based on the Agency's wish to find new partners in collaboration. To reach actors in the culture sector, an appeal was made to museums and exhibitors across Sweden through the newsletter of the Swedish Exhibition Agency.

As the initiator, the Swedish Migration Agency had the ultimate responsibility for implementing MIG Talks. The collaboration partners worked together for the overall achievement of the goals. The form of collaboration was specified more closely through a framework agreement between the Swedish Migration Agency and each collaborating partner, with a focus on participation in the series of conversations and with the intention of carrying out other activities, separately or together, in order to promote a nuanced and inclusive conversation about migration.

To convey a picture of the composition of migration to Sweden between 2010 and 2015, as regards commonly occurring countries of origin and motives for moving here to stay or reside in Sweden, a framework was set for how many people could participate in each migration category, based on statistics from Statistics Sweden and the Swedish Migration Agency – see above. To be able to take part, a person had to have come to Sweden between 2010 and 2015 and had to have a residence permit or the right of residence or stay. Participation was voluntary, based on informed consent. Being prepared to share one's experiences and perspectives on the theme of migration was essential for participation.

Invitations to new residents were posted in the channels and platforms of the Swedish Migration Agency and the partners in collaboration. During the start-up phase we also received assistance from the fact-finding company Sweden Research in the work of finding participants. Since the number of people interested in taking part never exceeded the maximum number of possible participants, no need arose for selection on any other ground than the criteria for participation described above.

Standardized questionnaires were distributed to the informants in preparation for the semi-structured interviews that were conducted in the form of conversations.³ The premise was that nothing would be published before the person in question had a chance to read and approve an edited version of the interview story. Non-leading follow-up questions were used in cases where the person did not spontaneously elaborate on the answers.

There is a good spread as regards the participants' residence and living context in Sweden and in terms of age and sex. It should be noted, how-

3. The interviews were conducted by Ingrid Arinell, Hannah Davidsson, Staffan Dopping, Daniel Rydelius and Lisa Monique Söderlindh.

ever, that a certain chain effect is visible in the material, which can be explained by the fact that some participants had been tipped about the possibility to take part in MIG Talks by people in their immediate circle. Also, the collaboration partners were active to different degrees in spreading the invitation to their target groups.

Parts of the interview responses elaborate on the question of how migration is handled in the public conversation. A tendency that was particularly noticeable here was the correlation between media consumption and thoughts about media reporting. For people with greater media consumption the problem with media representation as they experienced it was often central. Among those who consumed little or no media there was a more neutral attitude to the media portrayal of migration and its effects.

Conclusion

It should never be forgotten that our perspectives, ideas, and memories change with time. The stories in this book capture a moment, a phase in life and a condition in which the informant happened to be at the time of the interview. One day, it may be hoped, we will also have a chance to read about how the continued journey through life turned out.

Sweden lives in the world and the world lives in Sweden. This is not a temporary state of affairs but a fundamental order. Global migration, the great narrative of our time, is not a passing phenomenon. It builds and shapes our world. Since these stories were collected, with the help of some of my fantastic former colleagues at the Swedish Migration Agency, it has become even more urgent, if that were possible, to act for an open and inclusive society in which foreign-born citizens and new residents – with the right to go on living in Sweden – also have a strong participating voice.



Jonas Engman

Ethnologist and head of the Archives
at Nordiska Museet

MIGRATION – VOICES IN MOTION

In autumn 2015 the image of Sweden as a land of solidarity was challenged. Thousands of refugees arrived from conflicts in the Middle East and Syria, and during this time Sweden became the country in Europe that received most refugees in relation to its own population. This migration led to pointed discussions about ethics, human dignity, racism, nationalism, Swedishness, and the Swedish model of society. Debate raged everywhere, stirring up established figures of thought about morality, human rights, cultural and social identity, the economy and the labour market. Not least of all, it was about the role of the media.

The expressions that were used to describe this migration varied greatly but still often involved words like *refugee flow* and *refugee situation*. “Flow” and “situation” are polyvalent metaphors that are also highly charged, and so they provided an interpretative framework that made the “refugee migration” into a problem. In the rhetoric one could even hear it hinted that Sweden was in a literal *crisis*. The words thus masked the horrifying circumstances that had led people to leave their communities and their everyday environments.

There were counter-images too, of course, for instance in the picture of labour immigration. Some people maintained that Sweden needs a population boost and that migration is something positive in social and above all economic terms. Polarization between opinions and perspectives is by no means new in migration contexts.

One may wonder about the mechanisms that conceal individuals and their life stories. A common tool is to create terms and designations that link people together on simplified grounds. In this way all those who have fled from or via the Mediterranean are transformed into “refugees”, no matter who they are. It is essential to do the opposite – to make individuals and their personal experiences visible in order to arrive at a deeper and nuanced understanding of people’s situation and conditions.

Nordiska Museet and MIG Talks

Late in 2015 the Swedish Migration Agency, on the initiative of the communicator Lisa Söderlindh, started a series of conversations called MIG

Talks, with a format that enabled an exchange of experiences between migrants and Swedish organizations. The conversations were documented, creating material that is now stored in Nordiska Museet's archives and is also available on the website *Minnen.se*. For an archive of cultural history it is necessary to acquire new documentation all the time, which is why this material has been given a place in our collections, to be available for research now and in the future.

In a concluding panel discussion at Nordiska Museet on 5 May 2017, some central questions were raised: How do we see and hear those who have moved to Sweden in the public discourse and in the media? Why does the migration debate look the way it does? What consequences does it have? A major motivation for Nordiska Museet to take an active part in the MIG Talks was to enable migrants to make their voices heard in arenas where people actually listen. The traditional mass media are too overcrowded to allow individuals to have their say. And although social media are available, to be heard requires an audience, and that is often limited.

The core of the material from the MIG Talks is now available in book form, exactly as it was transferred from the Swedish Migration Agency to Nordiska Museet in 2018. We have here the majority of the individual voices that spoke about their personal experiences. Nordiska Museet has chosen not to edit them. It is hoped that they will serve as a document of a time of change for individuals and for the welfare state.

The voice of forced migration

Texts about migration tend to be problematic in one way or another. They are quickly subjected to unwarranted interpretations, and used as arguments for or against immigration and refugee reception. The role of Nordiska Museet is to document and collect material as far as possible without steering the content. Yet as a researcher I must always ask myself how archival material has come about: who collected it, how, and for what purpose. These questions become even more important when material is to be published in book form. In a book the voices are exposed in a way that does not happen to them in the archive.

The reader should be aware of some circumstances concerning the basis for this book. The framework for the interviews – and for the MIG Talks – was a communication drive by the Swedish Migration Agency, which also planned and implemented the talks. One therefore cannot regard the interview statements as unfiltered testimony, especially since they have been edited to suit the public media sphere on a website. A general

question of source criticism is whether the informants were in a position of dependence, and another concerns whether the informants themselves are neutral in their narratives.

Yet another, more specific, question is whether the interviewees are representative of migrants in general. The answer is no, since the participants represented different kinds of migration status, and there were too few of them to be able to represent an entire category of people. The latter is not problematic as long as one is aware of it. And this is the strength of collecting individual narratives: although they are not representative in a statistical sense, we can see that the narrators share many experiences.

It is clear from the material in the book that the media dramaturgy has affected the form of the interviews. This circumstance, of course, affects our ability to interpret them. This means that everything – from the social climate to the conditions of the individual interview – must be taken into consideration. The narrative situation, in other words, determines our interpretative framework. What role is performed by the person asking the questions, and what role is performed by the person who responds and tells the story?

Considering Nordiska Museet's collections as a whole, this is not unique. In fact, all interpretation of archival material must proceed from a knowledge of how the material came about. But beyond the interview situation and the editing, the material manifests lived experiences, true accounts of dramatic events, departure, even death. In short, narratives that our age is tragically familiar with. In a somewhat longer historical perspective, the individual narratives about refugee experiences can be linked to narratives from Nazi Germany, from the former Yugoslavia, Chile, Argentina, Hungary, and other countries from which people have felt forced to flee because their lives have been threatened.

The MIG Talks material is not all that Nordiska Museet has collected. When the first migrants from the Middle East arrived in Stockholm in autumn 2015, the museum had the opportunity to perform documentation. This yielded a large amount of pictorial material but also interviews and observations from the Central Station in Stockholm, from trains and asylum accommodation. At first only a limited effort was planned, but it was expanded in pace with the development at the Central Station and in the debate as a whole.¹ An early and rather touching impression was the private assistance that was given on the spot. This dwindled noticeably

1. A small part of the material is presented in the picture collage by the photographer Karolina Kristensson, "Recognize: Stockholm Central Station, autumn 2015" in the annual of Nordiska Museet, *Fataburen* (2017).

after a few weeks, parallel to the shift of focus by the mass media to more general migration issues – a possible illustration of the way that the reception was just as much a media issue as a humanitarian one. Nordiska Museet’s material can demonstrate this and simultaneously give a background to the larger shift that took place during election year 2018.

The migrant’s voice in Welfare–Sweden

For a museum of cultural history it is particularly important to collect and preserve contemporary narratives, not least the kind that remind us that democracy and the stability of society cannot be taken for granted but must be reclaimed at every moment. It is in everyday life that democracy is shaped and reshaped, and it is also often – but naturally far from always – everyday communities and security that it hurts most to leave. The memory of a bygone everyday life also sets its stamp on the encounter with social and political systems that are different.

Many of those who fled in 2015–2016 came from Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East, where the family and kin often constitute a social, economic, and cultural hub around which life circles. In Sweden they met an anonymous welfare system that must have appeared incomprehensible, even cynical, at least up to the moment when they started to interact with it. They also met a Sweden in change, where the “refugee question” and migration got the blame for many problems. Narratives about experiences like this are in short supply in our collections.

There are nevertheless brilliant examples of collections to do with twentieth-century refugee migration. Nordiska Museet, for example, has an important collection of Jewish memoirs, describing not just the perverse everyday reality of the concentration camps but also the time after the liberation.² Many arrived in Malmö after the end of the war in 1945, where the photographer KW Gullers was among those who met them. The interview material is copious and was the first of its kind in the world. “Remembering Migration” is another collection drive, initiated in 2008, which we hope to be able to continue in collaboration with the Multicultural Centre in Botkyrka.

The MIG Talks material, which Nordiska Museet has now acquired, correspondingly provides an intersection between, on the one hand, global

2. Britta Johansson (ed.), *Judiska minnen: Berättelser från förintelsen* (2000).

movements and, on the other, changes in the self-image of the Northern European welfare states as protected neutral islands. Welfare-Sweden, with room for everybody, is an image to which ungrounded notions are attached today, about social homogeneity and an ethnically homogeneous identity. As I see it, the “refugee flow” challenges this image. In fact, it challenges us to ask whether the Sweden that some people dream of ever existed in reality.

Another figure of thought that is prevalent as these lines are being written is that the social contract is being broken and that Sweden is increasingly resembling other European states. The future will show whether this is true. But one thing is certain, that changes in society today are not due to migration itself but to the geopolitical shifts that are among the causes of migration. The social contract that is cited is mostly still valid. It may be renegotiated, although not because of migration, but because of the successive transformation of the welfare state. Swedes are not losing their cultural identity. On the other hand, the global networks, which are a constant in the history of modernity, are becoming visible.

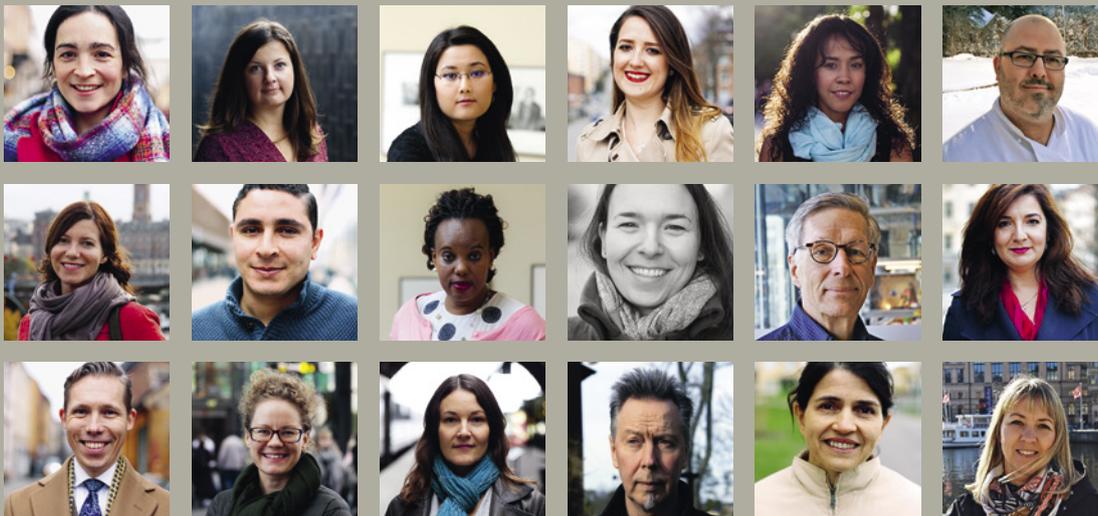
Sweden has been spared the ravages of war for a very long time, but it was nevertheless a society of poverty until just a couple of generations ago. A large share of the population left Sweden, not of their own free will but because of suffering. Emigration to America and labour migration to Germany and Denmark was due to dramatic structural transformations, from an agrarian society to an industrial society. Those who paid the price were already living on the margin. The collections in Nordiska Museet testify to this too.

It is in this light we ought to see the material in this book. The texts arose in distinctive circumstances, but they clearly illustrate multiple dimensions of change in society. In themselves they constitute a documentation of forced migration and the conditions of migrants, but they reflect at least as much how the authorities have difficulty finding a voice. *For whom?* The answer to that question will be found in the future, but it cannot be formulated until globalization has been fully accepted as a self-evident feature of everyday life.

Henrik Logal Nida Petra Winnie Will Jia Justus Uyen Lisa Naome Ingrid Marcia Nipavan Kaisa Hewan Saipirun Sanchari Karolina Omar Marzieh Nina Jihad Dean Sawi Caitlyn Louisiana Kenia Igor Perw
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Tomoko Jörn Jaana Rasha Shawn JanHenrik Ayesha Marc Burak Baraka Johanna John Iman Christine Jenny Vitali Ion Andres Mariana Khaled Michal Zi
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hanna John Iman Christine Jenny Vitali Ion Andres Mariana Khaled Michal Zinica Simon Yusak Alireza Geni Amir Inta Kristina Andreaa Bushra Anne-K
ren Lisa Naome Ingrid Marcia Nipavan Kaisa Hewan Saipirun Sanchari Karolina Omar Marzieh Nina Jihad Dean Sawi Caitlyn Louisiana Kenia Igor Perw
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Migration exists everywhere – and there has always been migration. Yet the public discussion about this phenomenon tends to be highly charged. At the same time, the migrants' own voices are not heard so often. In this book 87 persons are given an opportunity to speak. Their reasons for migrating have varied, but they all have experience of moving across borders and between nations, communities, and value systems. Their stories are individual but they seem universal when we place them side by side. They bear witness to the conflicts of our time, but also to a human condition.



Migrationsverket



NORDISKA
MUSEET