

DIABY ABDOURAHAMANE

“IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO FOCUS ON ME WHEN I TALK ABOUT MY ARRIVAL IN PORTUGAL BECAUSE I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENTER THE THEATER GROUP (REFUGIATO) AND THERE WERE ALREADY PORTUGUESE PEOPLE (...) SO I END UP ENTERING OR SNEAKING INTO SOCIETY WITHOUT KNOWING IT”



I'm from Côte d'Ivoire and I arrived in Portugal in 2007. When I arrived at CPR, I joined the theater group and met refugees who were already here and some Portuguese, who helped me with integration's important things, like: enrollment in social security or the creation of a bank account, but also how the city works, where the party is, etc. This gives courage, because it shows that *if they can live here, I also can*.

But there is another side that belongs to you: which is the desire to be here. People don't have the same goals or priorities. There is people who want to have asylum in another place, settle down and live there (...) or try to travel to another country. But this was not what I wanted to do.

It is easy for me to break the ice, I come from a country with more than 60 ethnicities, I speak English and Spanish and it's easy to have a conversation. But for those who don't have relations here it is very boring, and those people are very dependent on CPR (or host institution) because there is nobody who gives them some will to live. They don't have a friend or two to go watch a football match or something to occupy their day.

At ComParte's (integration project) dinners there are many refugees who found jobs and homes through Portuguese people, who exchange contacts without us asking for anything. We have social gatherings and dinners; we talk about topics and then relationships are formed.

About integration, it is important to explain to refugees why work is important. That you will not have assistance for life. There needs to be a framework for refugee's autonomy and independence.

For me, reception in Portugal, is incomplete. There is a lack of training and awareness delivered to society, host organizations and refugees and there is also lacking what you are creating (community sponsorship initiatives).

“IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO WELCOME; IT IS IMPORTANT TO RAISE AWARENESS FOR DIFFERENCES. IT IS EASIER FOR SOCIETY TO ACCEPT WHEN IT KNOWS THE CULTURE”

Community sponsorship is an important solution, but it has two sides: there has to be a good awareness raising and there can be cultural clashes, because there are people who cannot be in a different country without their community. People have to be very well selected on both sides.

I would like to have been welcomed through community sponsorship, but if it was today, I wouldn't want to leave Lisbon.

