

Thursday 30 June, Lagadikia



Mohammed Abdulwahid, 25
Basra, Iraq

I left Iraq in 2018, because someone said they would cut me and kill me. It was my home, but it was impossible to stay.

There is an Islamic party, Sarai Salaam...

There is a footballer in Iraq with a similar face to mine. In my area, I was known by people, because everyone said I looked like him. So I attracted attention, perhaps.

In Basra, I lived with my parents, and I worked as a photographer, taking portrait photos of people.

One day I was going out to take a photo, and while I was there, I met members of this party, who came over to me. They took my camera off me. I had long hair and they told me I should cut it.

But I didn't take any notice. I spoke to some people about what happened, and the party members brought my camera back.

But one or two months later, I met the same people again. They took my camera and smashed it, and then they seized me and took me to jail for one week. They said they would kill me unless I changed how I looked, because I looked European, with long hair and my clothes. They told me again to cut my hair.

They let me go, and then when I told my family, because they had been worried about where I was, they got scared. They told me I should leave Iraq. I did as they asked, because they were worried about me. I was quite worried as well.

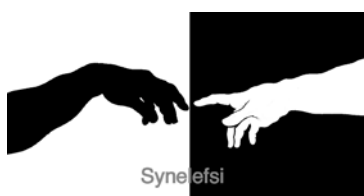
I went from Basra, into Kurdistan. Then I travelled into Turkey. I flew to Turkey, with no problems. I stayed in Turkey for almost one month, and found a smuggler. We walked to Greece, coming across the river.

I went to Athens, where I stayed for two or three months. I tried to leave Greece by air, because I had a contract with a smuggler. But they left me.

I stayed in just one room in Athens for ten days. I didn't go outside or do anything. I don't even know where it was, and after that I had no contact with anyone.

But my friends who knew I was in Athens called the police. There were four people in that house but the police just caught me.

They put me in jail for six months, because I had no documents. When I was let out, I was scared to be in Athens, so I went to Thessaloniki. I was in Katerini, then I came to Lagadikia, in October 2021.





I have been learning in the **IHA** language programme for six months. My aim is to learn English and Greek.

I have no documents, so I am working to get them, because without documents I can't get a job.

I started to teach people in a camera class, and I had a job doing gardening. It was hard work. It's in the sun and I get tired, with pain in my legs and body, so I have had to stop for a while to see if I can recover. It is not the first time I have had the pain in my leg.

A year ago, I worked for a month in a food factory. My job was to clean olives and other fruits and prepare it by taking the stones out. That was in Veria.

I used the money to buy a new camera. This was a good moment for me. I had really just been inside, doing nothing, feeling low, scared and tired, not going out.

I was depressed, and at the same time I had cabin fever.

There was just no reason for me ever to go outside, so without a reason, I didn't.

But when I moved to Lagadikia, I started to volunteer with **IHA**. Because I was working, I met people and talked to people. It felt like the first time in a long time.

I also started to take photographs again. I take portrait photos, of people. And I realised when I take them, it makes me happy.

So now I run a camera class, with seven members. It's a great feeling to teach. I enjoy it a lot, and you see people take an interest and learn, get better.

I have no idea what will happen next. I was thinking about the future, but for now I have to stop doing that. It worries me and makes me sad. I have to start thinking about what is happening now. I live here. I think many of us need to do that. Live in the moment.

My dream is to be a photographer. I don't mind where. Any place I can do this, I will be happy.

I do speak to my family. We miss each other very much, but they are OK and that makes me happier.

Coming here – to Northern Greece, to Lagadikia, and to **IHA** – has helped me a lot. Doing work, having something to go out for, it has changed my life. Even just having the chance to work made so much difference to me.

You can view a selection of Mohammed's portraiture [here](#)

