



# HEAR OUR VOICES

Undocumented children and  
young people share their stories

The Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) is an international nongovernmental organisation that represents a network of 155 organisations working with undocumented migrants in over 30 countries, primarily in Europe as well as in other world regions. With 15 years of evidence, experience and expertise on undocumented migrants, PICUM promotes recognition and realisation of their human rights, providing an essential link between local realities and the debates at policy level. PICUM provides regular recommendations and expertise to policy makers and institutions of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and European Union, and has been awarded participatory/consultative status with both the United Nations and Council of Europe.

[www.picum.org](http://www.picum.org)

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## SIGRID RAUSING TRUST

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### ANONYMOUS

## Weight in gold

Like the shadow that I am  
You know me well  
I live near you  
But our lives are different.

I'm undocumented, you see  
Hopeless and depressed  
My life is chaotic  
And I live it in fear.

I feel like I belong to this place  
But you're quick to tell me that's not the case.

I am here, your neighbour  
Your colleague  
Your waiter at the restaurant  
Your son and I were classmates  
Did you notice?

Same story, wherever I go  
Like the shadow that I am  
I fade to black

Crushed hopes and stifled dreams  
A lifetime of uncertainty  
The story of many like me  
Like pet parakeets that never flew  
So many never know how high they could soar

And if dreams were worth their weight in gold  
And resilience and courage cashed like cheques  
Then young migrants would be a class of their own.

This piece was originally published in Brave New Voices: a city imagined, an anthology of writing by young people from around the world living in London who took part in English PEN's Brave New Voices project. Find out more and read the anthology on [English PEN's website](http://EnglishPEN.org).

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## Foreword

The testimonies and stories in this short booklet on undocumented children illustrate some of the wide variety of circumstances and reasons that can lead to a child being undocumented. Often the reasons are multi-dimensional, reflecting a combination of facts and circumstances and changing status.

All children have rights and all EU Member States have committed to ensuring respect for those rights. Our job is to promote the protection of the rights of the child, with a specific focus on children in the most vulnerable situations. The child's best interests as a primary consideration are writ large in the UNCRC, legislation and policy documents, but when push comes to shove, it seems that this right is not always considered for all children.

No child - indeed no person - is illegal. These stories will, I hope, start some much-needed conversations. Beyond Anteneh's moving reaction to a gesture of kindness when he was in dire straits in Calais about 10 years ago, or the harsh reality of Empress being deported from the UK to another country, or the very challenging and unfair start in life that Hanna has had in Germany, look at the agency and resilience of children such as Natalia and Ramin.

The stories also tell us a bit about the champions for these children: volunteers, NGOs, teachers and schools. Children being/becoming/remaining undocumented may say more about our system failures than we care to hear. We should do everything possible to realise the rights of all children and increase the capacity of duty-bearers to respect the rights of all children, thus extending that network of champions. In practice this means getting different authorities and agencies to work together, to ensure access to essential services including education, healthcare and housing. Undocumented children need more effective

access to redress mechanisms including ombudspersons for children, and we should also ensure that they have access to legal advice, assistance and regularisation channels.

I hope the stories – in putting a name and a face to the circumstances – can help to address the “othering” of undocumented children and allow us to make concerted efforts to ensure that the Maryams and Mamdous of this world enjoy their rights.



Margaret Tuite  
Child Rights Coordinator  
European Commission



## Editor's preface

Undocumented children – children with an irregular migration or residence status – are often described as ‘invisible’, ‘living underground’, or ‘under the radar’. To a large extent they are ignored in policy. They are the children that fall through the gaps in the existing protection frameworks for children who are considered more vulnerable, although they have equal rights, and in many cases, face similar risks and challenges.

When accompanied by a parent, migrant children are often treated exactly as adults, rather than individuals with agency and rights of their own. Their rights as a child and best interests are very rarely considered, and they are not heard in immigration and asylum proceedings. Particularly when considered irregular or undocumented migrants, they can be subject to restricted access to essential services, including education and health care, as well as arrest, detention and deportation. There is also a fundamental lack of data, which perpetuates their exclusion from policy and public debates.

However, children, young people and families residing irregularly do so within communities, with children usually attending school, as much as possible, and parents working in local businesses. They have often been, and continue to be, in contact with immigration authorities through a period of regular residence and/ or applications to regularise their status on protection, humanitarian, family, health or other grounds.

Children can become undocumented for different reasons and often change between statuses during the course of their childhood and youth. As a child's residence status is usually dependent on their parents', they too become undocumented if the parent loses their residence or work permit. In other cases, families may have submitted

an application for international protection, which was refused, or applied for an official family reunification scheme through a family member with regular status, but not qualified. While some children are undocumented after having entered Europe irregularly others are born 'undocumented migrants', although they have never moved anywhere, because their parents are undocumented. The limited protection of unaccompanied children means they often become undocumented young adults with very few prospects of regularisation after years under the protection - albeit limited in some countries - of the state.

Even a few years can be formative in the identity and development of children and young people. Their integration is a reality, whether or not this integration is reflected by academic achievement or other indicators of 'success', as would be the case with any other child, let alone a child facing discrimination. They are visible and integral European youth.

Further, the number of undocumented children and young people will only increase as States adopt ever more restrictive policies. A significant proportion of those who have arrived in recent months and years will have their applications refused, and not all will return or be forcibly removed regardless of the current political will to do so. Regular channels such as family reunification remain limited and new criteria are being introduced. The increasing barriers to access protection, and criminalisation of migration, will push more children, young people and families into precarious and irregular residence.

This collection seeks to give visibility to the everyday realities of children and young people considered irregular or undocumented migrants; to the challenges they face due to their immigration status

and the strength it takes to overcome them day by day. Furthermore, it aims to give visibility to their voices.

Bringing together a range of individual stories and testimonies in different formats, from around Europe, the booklet presents personal perspectives on some of the pervasive impacts that immigration control measures can have on the well-being and development of children and young people. These impacts are not a foregone conclusion; children and young people can be incredibly resilient. However, this cannot reduce accountability for subjecting them to such harm and hardship. On the contrary, the creativity and participation of undocumented children and young people should be recognised and supported through urgent reforms in policy and practice.

PICUM wishes to thank all the children and young people, as well as their parents and supporters, who contributed to this booklet by sharing their story.

*Michele LeVoy*

Michele LeVoy  
PICUM Director



**ABDI**

## After that, I hated my life

Abdi is 16 years old and originally from Somalia. He was detained for 17 days in the airport detention centre in Greece.

At that time, I hate my life. We were living in small [room] and they locked it. And you cannot do anything. Sometimes you are sitting. You are not able to sit how you are sitting all the day. Now you are free, you can make movement. If I say – sit like this for one hour or five minutes, you feel something.

I have been there 17 days without taking bath, without changing clothes and they allow me to go to the toilet two times, in the morning and in the night.

After that, I hated my life. I waited and I begged my god to take me out of here. After that they called me one day and they said – we take this paper for you and say you are free, you can go wherever you like in Greece. They give me one paper. And I arrived in Athens.

## AISHA

## Isn't it time for a change?

Life, it keeps changing constantly  
I don't get everything I need instantly.

My dad, moved to Ireland, when I was nine  
From a very young age, I had to pretend, I was fine!

My mum joined him at eleven.  
The place I called home was no longer a heaven.

At 13, I had to come to Ireland,  
I had no choice but to leave my homeland.

The longing to meet up with my parents,  
The calling,  
The calling to sense their presence.

I was stepping into a new beginning.  
Thinking my life will have a new meaning.

I thought everything was going to be chocolates and flowers.  
But then it turned out to be thunderstorms, showers.

Reality struck,  
I felt run over by a truck.

I WAS UNDOCUMENTED!

Being paperless made it harder for me.  
Being helpless doesn't discourage me.

My future is at stake.  
Do I kill time by listening to Drake?

My chances of going to college are scarce.  
But, should you care?

I will get my leaving cert result this August.  
Then do I sit home and hide in a closet.

My future, dependant on a piece of paper.  
My goals, a skyscraper.

Isn't it time for a change?  
Because being undocumented surely doesn't make us strange.

Yes, I am undocumented & unafraid.

Isn't it time for a change?  
Because being undocumented, surely doesn't make us strange.

Aisha is 18 years old and a member of the Young, Paperless and Powerful (YPP) group supported by the Migrants' Rights Centre Ireland.

This piece was written as part of a creative writing and spoken word project. Read more writing from other members of the YPP group on [PICUM's website](#).

## ANTENEH

## The jacket that teaches me kindness

I cannot even remember his face, or his hair, his clothes.

But I never forget that guy.

This is 10/11 years ago.

A very bad time for me, living rough

out of a plastic bag in Calais village

a place with no streets, no main road

it is Lunchtime, on my bench

I wait for food outside the main building

with everyone else. My head is down,

just thinking.

“You ok?”

I hear his voice. It makes me sit up straight.

He is standing in front of me.

I never see him before

And so he doesn’t know my name

I don’t know his

He says only one thing “wait for me here”

And then he’s gone

and so I sit and wait, still in the queue for the food

After 10 minutes he comes back

With a plastic bag in his hand

“this is for you”

I don’t know what is inside the bag

But I take it from him

When I look inside, there is a jacket

And believe me, REALLY I need a jacket at this time

The jacket is royal blue

It is brand new

“This is mine?” I ask him

“Yes it is yours. Put it on.”

So straight away I put it on

and this jacket keeps me warm

but it also teaches me kindness

this jacket is not just a jacket

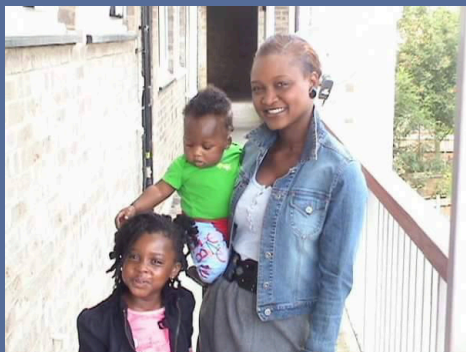
It scratches my mind

You are human

Anteneh, now 25, arrived in the UK when he was 15 years old.

This piece was originally published in *Brave New Voices: a city imagined*, an anthology of writing by young people from around the world living in London who took part in English PEN’s Brave New Voices project. Find out more and read the anthology on [English PEN’s website](#).





Empress, Prince and Jane in the UK.

Photo © Centre for Youths Integrated Development

## EMPRESS

### I can hardly sleep at night

#### Empress:

My name is Empress. I am 12 years old, I live in Abuja, Nigeria with my mum and younger brother. We were both born in United Kingdom. We left London when the home office sent a letter to my mum that we have no right to remain in the UK.

Coming back to Nigeria was very traumatic, the weather was unfriendly, the environment was so strange and I can hardly sleep at night, I felt ill time without number. Thanks to my mum for always caring for me. I missed my school and friends a lot and I hope to see them one day.

#### Empress' mother Jane:

Never in my wildest imagination would I have thought I would leave the UK and come back to Nigeria. I have built my life in the UK had my two children there, but all of a sudden I was asked to leave due to my undocumented status, even though I was working on regularizing my stay.

My first thought was how do I cope with two children in a country where I don't have much idea on how to survive? How do I pay my bills? Who would be there for me and my kids? Where do I start from? Who do I run to? My experience back home is better left unimaginable. It was frustrating settling down. The pains, sorrow, agonies still hunt me till this moment. UK Home office actions concerning deportation are without human face.

Empress, her brother Prince (6) and mother Jane were deported to Nigeria in 2010. Jane had lived in the UK for 10 years.



The photo shows a rally of high school students demanding documents for a schoolmate. RESF regularly helps mobilise rallies demanding residence permits.

Photo © Réseau Education Sans Frontières (RESF).

## HAFIDH

### My story

Since I have been arrested, anxiety and fear have become my everyday life. I am afraid to go out. I am anxious every morning when I get up to go to class because I am afraid of being deported, of waking up one day and thinking that I'm no longer among my own people. What frightens me most is not to live in my country but I am afraid to live far from my family, my brother, my sister, my father and my grandmother, the people who have given a meaning to my life.

Besides, since I have arrived in France, I have done everything to integrate, adapt and build up my life. But I would not have thought, that this country did not need me as much as I needed it, that this country was not attached to me as I am attached to it, because all my roots and all those I would never stop fighting for are in this country. And today, I will keep fighting, hoping that one day I will be regularised and able to live like all the others, fearless.

Hafidh is from Algeria. He arrived in France when he was 16 and lived with his brother. He was 21 when he wrote this text. Meanwhile, he got married, has become a father and got documents.

This piece was originally published in 'La plume sans papier', a collection of writing supported and produced by Réseau Education Sans Frontières (RESF).



Photo © PICUM

## HANNA

## Child without a name

Hanna is five years old. She drew this picture of the happy family she wishes for.

Her mother named her Hanna but her name is not officially recognized anywhere; to the German authorities, she is a nameless child. She lives with her Filipina mother, Maria, in Cologne. She was born in Cologne, and has always lived there. She knows no other country but Germany but has been considered an undocumented migrant all her life.

Hanna's mother, Maria, came to Germany six years ago trying to provide for her two children and husband in the Philippines. She was employed as domestic worker by a diplomat from the United Arab Emirates who repeatedly raped her while she worked in his household. He is Hanna's biological father but never recognised paternity and has not been held accountable for rape as his diplomatic immunity protected him from being prosecuted while in Germany. Maria was left undocumented when she fell pregnant and could no longer work, so Hanna was born undocumented. Maria was afraid of telling her family in the Philippines about Hanna fearing that her husband would think she cheated on him and that her family would disown her. Hanna's father meanwhile returned to the United Arab Emirates.

When Hanna was three months old, her mother turned to the organisation Agisra for help. Agisra works to ensure the rights of migrant and refugee women. Agisra helped her to file a complaint as a victim of rape in Germany, due to which she received 'Duldung' status, a suspension of deportation. With the support of Agisra, Hanna also received a birth certificate. However, according to German law, Maria was not entitled to officially determine her child's name without the

consent of her husband in the Philippines or proving that he is not the biological father, since Hanna was born into marriage.

For this reason, Hanna's birth certificate has no first name and only includes her mother's last name.

Maria eventually told her husband in the Philippines about Hanna, to ask him to do the paternity test. He subsequently decided that he wanted a divorce.

According to the embassy of the United Arab Emirates, Hanna's biological father could not be found. He has never provided financial support for Hanna's care.

Agisra is currently supporting Maria to obtain full custody for Hanna which would allow her to determine her child's name herself and have it recognised. They hope the authorities will recognise Hanna's name before she starts school in the coming year, and regularise her status in the near future.

## Drawings by children in the Moria hotspot in Lesvos, Greece







Photo © 'Despertares' center of Córdoba Acoge for unaccompanied children and youth

## MAMADOU

I stopped speaking to my family so they can't ask me what I am doing here

### Mamadou:

I am very worried for what has happened, since now I can't enrol in any course or learning activity to get education. I can't do any internship to gain professional experience either. I don't have the possibility to move to another town or country to look for other opportunities. I don't have any identification documents. My migratory project is completely paralysed and I don't even know when they will give me an update on my situation.

I wake up every day thinking about my situation, about what can happen, about when I will know. But above all, I feel very worried because I can't help my family. I stopped speaking to them so they can't ask me what I'm doing here.

Mamadou is 16 years old (according to his Passport) and 18 according to the authorities. Mamadou left his home town in Gambia when he was 14 years old. He passed through Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger before getting to Morocco, and then crossed to Spain.

Speaking to the organisation Córdoba Acoge, Mamadou explained that it was a hard trip, he was very scared. He lost the little baggage he was carrying, his money was stolen, he suffered violence, he felt insecure, he didn't have a roof over his head or food to continue his journey, and he even suffered attacks in the countries going through armed conflict. When he arrived to Morocco, his story was only just beginning.

He explained how he had to live hiding in the woods, how he spent sleepless nights scared that the Moroccan police would arrest him and send him to Algeria.

He tried many times to jump the fence between Morocco and Spain until one time he was 'lucky' and made it to Spanish territory. He spent 8 days in hospital due to the multiple injuries caused by the border fences, from which he still suffers consequences.

When he was discharged from the hospital, he was sent to the CETI of Ceuta (Center of temporary stay for immigrants), and he was there for four months. From there he was transferred to Almería, where he lived with relatives and worked irregularly in the fruit and vegetable greenhouses.

One day, he was stopped by the police and identified as a child. They transferred him to Córdoba to enter a centre for unaccompanied children. In the centre, he started an individualised education project, in which objectives are set to work with the child across various areas, such as health, social life, family, education, profession and documents.

After being in the centre for 8 months, the public prosecutor ordered that he leave the centre because medical tests determined that he was over 18.

From that point, his future took a radical shift: in addition to having to leave the centre in a few days, he was charged for using false documents. He was called by the police to respond to the charges, and they kept all of his documents.

Mamadou was only days away of giving his fingerprints for the procedure to get an initial residence permit. The procedure has been paralysed after what happened.

## MARYAM

### The police may show up at the door to take you away

Maryam is 16 years old and has been living in the Netherlands for 8 years. Maryam's family is originally from Iraq. Maryam, her brother (13), sister (9) and parents are considered irregular migrants because their applications for international protection and a residence permit on other grounds have been refused. The family have applied for asylum again, due to the present situation in Iraq, and are currently in this procedure. According to Dutch law, families with underage children retain a right to accommodation when their applications are rejected. These families are accommodated in so-called 'Family Locations'. From there, they can be moved to the closed family detention centre in Zeist, prior to deportation.

#### Maryam:

Along with my parents, my brother and sister, I came to the Netherlands to escape the war in Iraq. Since our arrival we've lived in many asylum-shelters.

Constantly moving from place to place is not something we really enjoy, I think nobody does. In the AZC shelter, where we momentarily live, we have to share the bathrooms, the showers, the kitchen and the laundry facilities. Besides the lack of privacy, the worst thing about staying there is the stress and the uncertainty we live in. The police may show up at the door to take you away to Zeist, where families are detained prior to return, to then deport you to your country of origin.



Defence for Children - the Netherlands (DCI-NL) and ECPAT Netherlands have launched a campaign 'Ik blijf hier' ('I will stay here') and petition calling for a law establishing the right to a residence permit for all children that have been residing in the Netherlands for more than five years. The campaign is supported by a broad range of civil society. For more information and to get involved see [DCI-NL's website](#).

Photo © Defence for Children

What I fear the most about going back to my country, besides the danger the war brings with it, is us (my brother, sister and I) not having any type of future there. Neither my siblings nor I speak Arabic, which makes it almost impossible for us to have an education.

When the day comes that my parents can no longer take care of us, we should be able to stand on our own two feet and face everything on our own. However, with no diploma the risk of us ending up on the streets is almost certain.

The day we heard the news regarding the Children's Pardon, we were the happiest we had been in a long time. Sadly, none of us meet one of its conditions, namely that we should have collaborated with our own return. This makes me feel as they finally gave us something we really needed to just take it back.

The Children's Pardon (kinderpardon) was first a temporary programme that ran from 1 February to 1 May 2013 to regularise children who had lived in the Netherlands continuously for more than five years before turning 18, and had previously claimed asylum unsuccessfully. They had to be under the age of 21 at the time of the agreement and not have left the central government's supervision for more than three months. In total, 675 children and 775 family members received residence permits through the scheme. Hundreds of children were rejected or did not apply as they did not meet the requirements.

The Children's Pardon has been made into a permanent mechanism, but an additional criterion has been added, making it far more restrictive than the temporary procedure: Since 1 May 2013, the child (and his/her family) also needs to actively "cooperate" with their departure, in order to qualify for a residence permit. Most of the applications are denied because of this cooperation criterion, but at the same time, it is unclear how this criterion can be fulfilled. Members of Parliament have asked clarity. The rejection rate is 95%. Within three years of implementation, only 40 children have been granted a residence permit through the mechanism.

## MILOŠ

### My life

#### Miloš:\*

My name is Miloš, I am 13 years old and was born in Serbia. I have been living in Austria since I was 10. I came here with my grandpa and my grandma.

I have been thinking of becoming a car mechanic but I am not quite sure yet. My biggest wish is that we can sort everything here in Austria, my grandpa, my grandma and I, and that I can finish my school education.

I was one year old when my mom left my dad. Since then, my grandpa and grandma have been taking care of me.

The worst was that we had nothing to help us get by – we somehow lived and survived. My father and grandpa worked the whole day for which they got 500 dinar. What are 500 dinar? Not enough for all of us to buy food and what was worse, we had no electricity or heating because we had no money to pay for that.

Later, he [Miloš' father] left and married again.

My wish is to become a car mechanic, why? Because if I finish my professional training, I could work anywhere as a car mechanic.

My biggest wish is to finish school and that we sort everything here so I can help my grandma and grandpa.

\*Name changed.



**Miloš' grandfather:**

Although my son and I worked a lot, we could not feed the whole family (6 persons) and provide for the most necessary. To avoid that my children get into begging, become delinquent etc., I decided to go with my wife and grandson to Vienna.

We managed in Vienna to rent a small apartment of 30 square metres and register Miloš at school.

The last work I did was on a horse farm. I did all needed work, such as installing water pipes and electricity, digging and repairing of paddocks and barns. During this work, I had a work accident with a circular saw. One of my fingers got amputated.

What was problematic was that there was no immediate care. Instead, I was driven in circles for about 1.5 hours by a colleague, following instructions of the boss, until I almost collapsed and lost a lot of blood. They eventually dropped me off alone in front of the hospital. Since this accident, I keep having anxiety, panic attacks, heart palpitations and circulatory problems.

Thanks to UNDOK (Anlaufstelle zur gewerkschaftlichen Unterstützung UNDOkumentierter Arbeiter – Drop-in Centre for union support for undocumented workers), I managed to face the situation and take the necessary steps towards a positive future including medical and legal consultations. I received a humanitarian permit and work permit for one year. Now I hope to find work.

What I wish for the future is particularly for my grandson: a possibility to finish school and a training, to learn a profession.

And that he can finally say “we made it” and we don't have to hide anymore.

Miloš is registered in a public school. His classmates and teachers do not know that he lives irregularly in Vienna.

He likes to go to school and does well in his studies. However, he is not able to attend regularly due to health reasons. He suffers from headaches, allergies, bronchitis, diabetes. It is not easy to receive continuous medical care for him. He frequently has strong belly aches and can then not attend school. Other activities outside of school are not an option. The financial situation is difficult, in particular costs for transport to school, clothing, school lunches, school trips etc.



Photo © PICUM

**NATALIA**

## It makes me forget the fear of being expelled

My name is Natalia and I'm 21 years old.

When I was 7, I took a plane from Chile to the Netherlands with my mother and my younger sister. My dad had gone there a year before and was waiting for us. The first thing my sister and I did when we got off the plane was run to my dad.

When I started school here it felt like I didn't know anything. I was very confused and I even forgot everything I knew in Spanish. It was as if I had gone backwards. I started school in a language group. I learned the language very quickly. In half a year I could already communicate well with people and I could help my parents, since for them it was harder to learn the language than for me.

I am currently 21 years old and I'm about to be 22. Last year I finished middle education with good grades and I was ready to start studying in university but unfortunately that wasn't possible because of my lack of a Dutch residence permit. It was a big disappointment since I have worked hard many years to get good grades and be able to go to university. In the Netherlands, middle school is divided in levels. When I finished primary school they sent me to the lower levels because my parents were immigrants and that was enough to decide that I wouldn't have capacity for more. Many teachers told me the same thing during middle school. During all my life here in Holland I have had to fight to prove the contrary. Little by little I was able to make it to higher levels.

It's already been two years that I haven't been able to study so I've decided to look for other ways to develop as a person. I have found ways to continue studying languages. I found a place where I could study French for a while in exchange for working in the reception at the place where they teach the courses. Before finishing middle school, I engaged in the fight of undocumented domestic workers to push for the government to accept the C189 convention with the FNV union. I am also an ambassador of the Anna Frank Foundation. The project I initiated with the help of the Anna Frank Foundation consists in teaching children in schools about discrimination and equality for all. To teach them that even though the 2nd World War is over, inequalities and discrimination persist.

I also work as a babysitter and house cleaner to earn some money to be able to study. It's not an ideal job but working with children makes me feel like a child again. Being with those children makes me feel like someone with no worries or obligations. It lets me forget for a couple of hours that I might have to leave to another country, that maybe I will have to start my life from scratch, that I will have to leave the country I thought was my home, my friends and my volunteer work. It makes me forget the fear of being expelled. I am trying to get a visa as a foreign student in the Netherlands. But the amount of money that has to be paid as a foreign student every year is incredibly high and I don't have it. Also, working undocumented, I don't earn much money.

This whole situation is very frustrating and unfair. All my friends have been able to continue their studies or take a gap year and travel around the world.

In the Netherlands there are many young people who don't care about studying and they don't value it whereas it is the only thing I want. I would like to be in their shoes to at least have the option to study without being worried that I can be deported at any time to a country they call "my country" but that I actually don't know anymore.

I really hope and wish that the Dutch government decides to recognise me as a citizen of the Netherlands and recognises my contributions as a volunteer in different human rights organisations, as a worker and as a student, and that they give me a Dutch residence permit.

**NISHTA**

## Waiting

Someone somewhere  
Is making a decision about my life  
Right now.

And it scares me to death  
Knowing the decision could  
Be negative.

I feel worthless, hopeless, suicidal  
When I think of it.  
Everything that goes through my mind  
So depressing

How can I stop the noises in my head?

## All about me

Ingredients

100g of beauty  
50g of happiness  
A teaspoon of intelligence  
3tbsp of brown sugar

Don't go easy on the madness

Take brown sugar caramel – it's the beauty of life  
Then add a teaspoon of intelligence  
Leave to chill for a few hours

Warm up the box of love  
Make it all cosy, just like soft hugs  
Mix in some cuteness  
Then stir the madness in.

Bake at 250 degrees for 20 impatient minutes.  
Then service the sweetness  
To every sad or happy face.

Nishta is 24 years old and a member of the Brighter Futures youth group supported by Praxis Community Projects.

This piece was originally published in *Brave New Voices: a city imagined*, an anthology of writing by young people from around the world living in London who took part in English PEN's Brave New Voices project. Find out more and read the anthology on [English PEN's website](#).



A video of Ramin telling his story is available on [PICUM's website](#).

Photo © PICUM

## RAMIN

### I always try to just think positive

Ramin is 21 years old and from Afghanistan. He came to Belgium with his family when he was 13 years old, in 2008, and was undocumented for over two and a half years after his mother's asylum claim was refused. Today he advocates for young migrants' and youth rights as spokesperson of the Kids Parlement which gathers migrant youth in Belgium. He is also engaged in many other activities including rap music, known under the name Ramin D'Boy.

Of course I missed lots of chances because of being undocumented. For example, me and my brother were playing [football] in a local club in Bruges. After three months, we transferred [to the next division] but because my mom's application was refused, we had to move to another place. It made everything difficult, we missed a chance. There was a chance for us to play on a higher level. When you are undocumented, you can also not travel, for example. Sometimes we had difficulties at school when we could not go on school trips.

But it depends how you think about it. I never kept myself too busy with the fact that I was undocumented. My belief was to just keep working hard; I go to my school and I am here in Belgium with a target. I concentrate on that and leave the rest behind; so to just think positive.

My teacher was one month, day and night, busy with our case because my mother's case was refused and we had one month to go back to Afghanistan or Pakistan. Normally, I am someone who is all the time laughing, playing and jumping around but I was really sad at school. I explained my situation to my teacher. She spoke to the Director and

they organised a demonstration and let 600 balloons in the air with a message to the State Secretary of Migration.

Suddenly there was a lot of media attention ...suddenly it became something big and this is how I later got involved with the Kids Parlement. I think my case was the first in Belgium that got so much attention from the public. In most cases, people don't speak about it, but for me it was like this is my reality and I don't feel ashamed of that.

We were a big group, not only Afghans, with the same problems, all young people. It was together with lawyers from the Progress Lawyers Network. This is how Kids Parlement started with young people who were undocumented and never heard in their cases.

We talk about accompanied minors because unaccompanied minors stay until they are 18, or they have a guardian for example to ask for asylum.

One of the aims of Kids Parlement was that there must be an investigation before they make a decision [on an asylum claim] because they don't think about the consequences for the kids. Luckily, this is today officially accepted and kids have the right to ask for asylum.

One reason why I got involved in Kids Parlement was that, politically I was able to say my opinion and do something with that. That's why I am still doing my work and later became spokesman of Kids Parlement to spread the message.

## SARAJANE

### Whether I rise or fall

As a child life was colourful and bright  
 Little did I know it would turn darker like the night  
 A storm that would stop the light  
 Suddenly from where I was  
 To another land that I now call home  
 Nine years here  
 And Nine years of fear  
 As you watch your friends take the road  
 The road to continue  
 You must stay behind and let it pin you

Because I have been told that this is it  
 How am I supposed to not feel unfit?  
 Unfit to simply be in this society  
 With the building up of anxiety  
 Which fills my veins  
 Yet I cannot explain this pain  
 The pain from a piece of paper, a paper  
 That will decide whether I rise or fall  
 Always thinking about my existence  
 And being persistent

As you are trying to find the way  
 Someone who does not understand the pain will say...  
 There will be another day





Mural painted by the Young, Paperless and Powerful youth group in Dublin, Ireland.

Photo © Young, Paperless and Powerful and the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland.

Another day, another day to think about the barriers that have  
stopped me creating my future

Another day, another day filled with stress and uncertainty of who  
you are

But Who Cares?

Nobody Cares.

Another day, another day of watching your friends tell you all about  
their new jobs and college plans when you know you can't do any of  
that

Another day, another day of feeling hopeless and helpless

How long must this continue?

With the emotions crushed into a ball

Everyday becomes a taller wall

A scar that is hidden deep

But why must I weep?

When I start to think that this is normal

A teenager that sees their future as tiny as a decimal point

Being told that I have barriers

Makes me more of a warrior

I continue to question the purpose

But there's only one thing deteriorating my focus

A piece of paper, a paper that will decide

Whether I rise or fall

SaraJane is 17 years old and has been undocumented for 9 years. She was 8 years old when she left Mauritius with her teenage brother to join her parents in Ireland, who had left Mauritius nine months before their children to go to Ireland. Her parents had student visas which do not allow dependents, so they were unable to apply for official family reunification to be together.

SaraJane's father was unable to get a work permit after 7 years of studying and residing regularly in Ireland, and also became undocumented.

SaraJane is a member of the Young, Paperless and Powerful (YPP) group supported by the Migrants' Rights Centre Ireland.

This piece was written as part of a creative writing and spoken word project. Read more writing from other members of the YPP group on PICUM's website.





PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON  
UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS

PICUM - Platform for International Cooperation  
on Undocumented Migrants

Rue du Congres / Congresstraat 37-41, post box 5  
1000 Brussels

Belgium

Tel: +32/2/210 17 80

Fax: +32/2/210 17 89

[info@picum.org](mailto:info@picum.org)

[www.picum.org](http://www.picum.org)