



STEPS OF CHANGE

Stories of migrants from the Western Balkans

INTRO:

Movement and motion are part of human nature, and the human being is an eternal seeker.

A seeker of a better life.

A seeker of dignity.

A seeker of meaning.



Along this path, humans have often wondered:

“Why do some birds choose to stay in the same place when they can fly anywhere on the Earth?”

(Harun Yahya)

And then, that same question was turned inward:

*with the desire to go,
to breathe,
to sail,
and in return receive what is willing to give.*

*To create, erase, and fill the voids,
and perhaps to return home happy again.*



The Western Balkans (WB) has, for decades now, become a meeting ground where not only paths to final destinations intersect. Stories, destinies, and aspirations intersect as well. The aspirations of those arriving from

Ukraine,
India,
Mauritius,
Turkey,
Egypt,
Nepal,



Syria...

Those who speak different languages, listen to different music, enjoy different foods, and are used to waking at different hours.



And it is precisely there - between suitcases, expectations, awakenings, and hope, that their clocks have long been set to the same time, the same time zone. In the place where they arrived, paused, and chose to stay, building their own place under the sun.





Raveena Raveena

WHERE A SMILE BECOMES HOME



Twenty-five-year-old Raveena Raveena arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina from northern India in 2025. Today, she works in a well-known shopping centre in Sarajevo, where she wins people over with her smile, warmth, and determination to build her own path in a new country.

Initially employed as a cleaner, her responsibilities gradually expanded over time. She has become a familiar face among both colleagues and customers. Although she is still learning Bosnian, Raveena does not hesitate to talk, and the first word she learned was "fast." In that way, she exchanged the bustling, fast-paced streets of India for the somewhat slower rhythm of Sarajevo, where, at work, speed is still expected.

Decisive and brave.



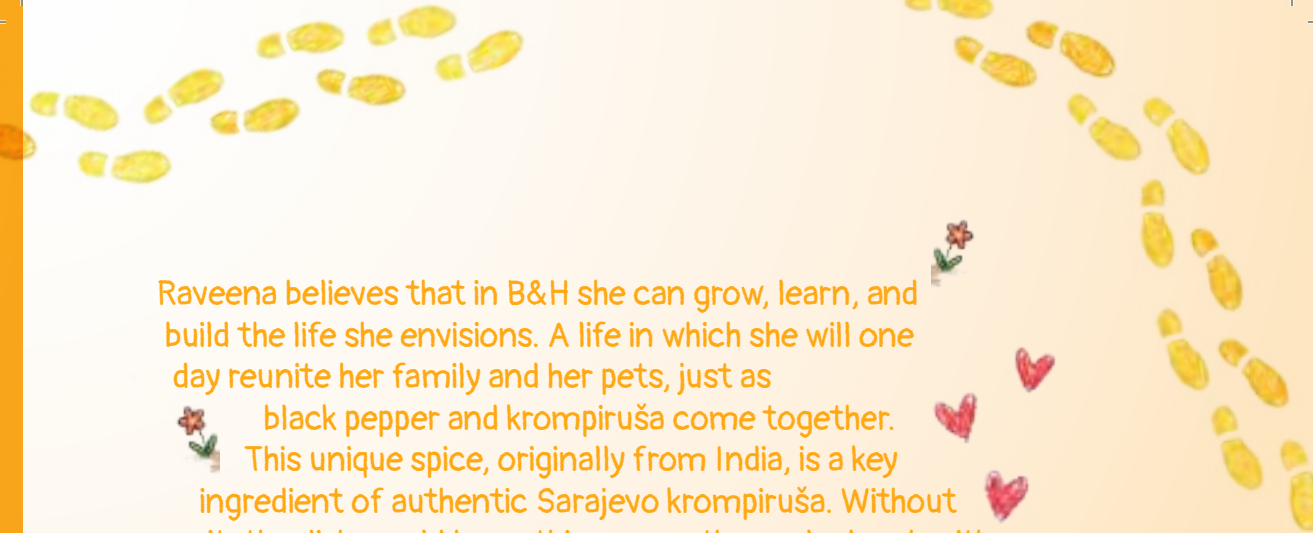
Her colleagues describe her as highly intelligent, kind, and always ready for a laugh. They have also come to know her simple but favorite vegetarian meal: rice, potato pie (krompiruša), and yogurt.



How did rice and krompiruša find their way into Raveena's heart, and had she ever, before coming here, imagined a potato-based dish typical of the Balkans?




Back home in India, Raveena is missed by her mother and two brothers, but that is not all. She is also missed by her three dogs and her horse. While she misses them dearly, she has fallen in love with Bosnia and found new furry companionship here. Her small everyday joy is now a cat named Rabija.



Raveena believes that in B&H she can grow, learn, and build the life she envisions. A life in which she will one day reunite her family and her pets, just as

 black pepper and krompiruša come together.

This unique spice, originally from India, is a key ingredient of authentic Sarajevo krompiruša. Without it, the dish would be nothing more than pale dough with potatoes.

 In this way, Raveena's sense of purpose in Bosnia is enriched with a touch of home in the small details that make up everyday life.





BETWEEN NOTES AND WAFFLES

Erdem

Uğuz

Erdem Uğuz arrived from Turkey

----- to Montenegro (MNE) guided by a simple desire - to find a calmer rhythm of life. A professional musician and music teacher, he is also the owner of a small waffle shop that has quickly become a favorite spot for many locals in Podgorica.



He first visited Montenegro in April 2024, and it won him over instantly. The nature, the peace, and the atmosphere made him feel at home. Much like love at first sight, after that first visit he decided to move. Seeking a simpler and more peaceful life compared to the fast pace and density of much larger Turkey, Erdem found exactly what he had been hoping for.



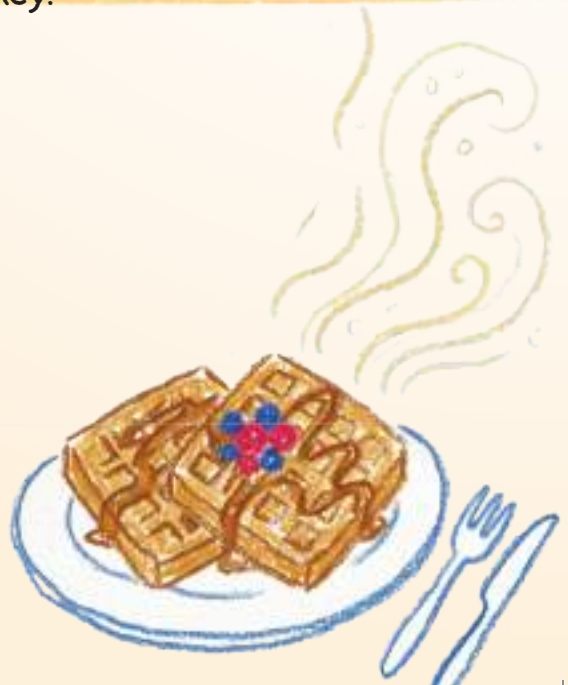
His life in the WB is now shaped by two passions - music and working with children. Word about Erdem and his music lessons spread quickly, and parents soon began reaching out, eager for their children to learn to play an instrument. The mother of one of his students believes that people like Erdem, through their effort, talent, and dedication, enrich the communities they join while building their dreams from the ground up.





For Erdem, life in Montenegro is exactly what he was searching for - a blend of music, work, simple moments of joy, and a sense of belonging to a new community - one just as warm and sunlit as his native Turkey.

And as the sweet aroma of Erdem's realized dreams drifts through the streets, wrapped in the warmth of a familiar space that signals the first fresh morning waffles, passersby whose paths cross with his become aware of one thing - whether in Turkey or Montenegro, kindness and warmth are written in the same melody.



BOTH THE BALKANS AND BRAZIL ARE MINE

Thiago Ferreira

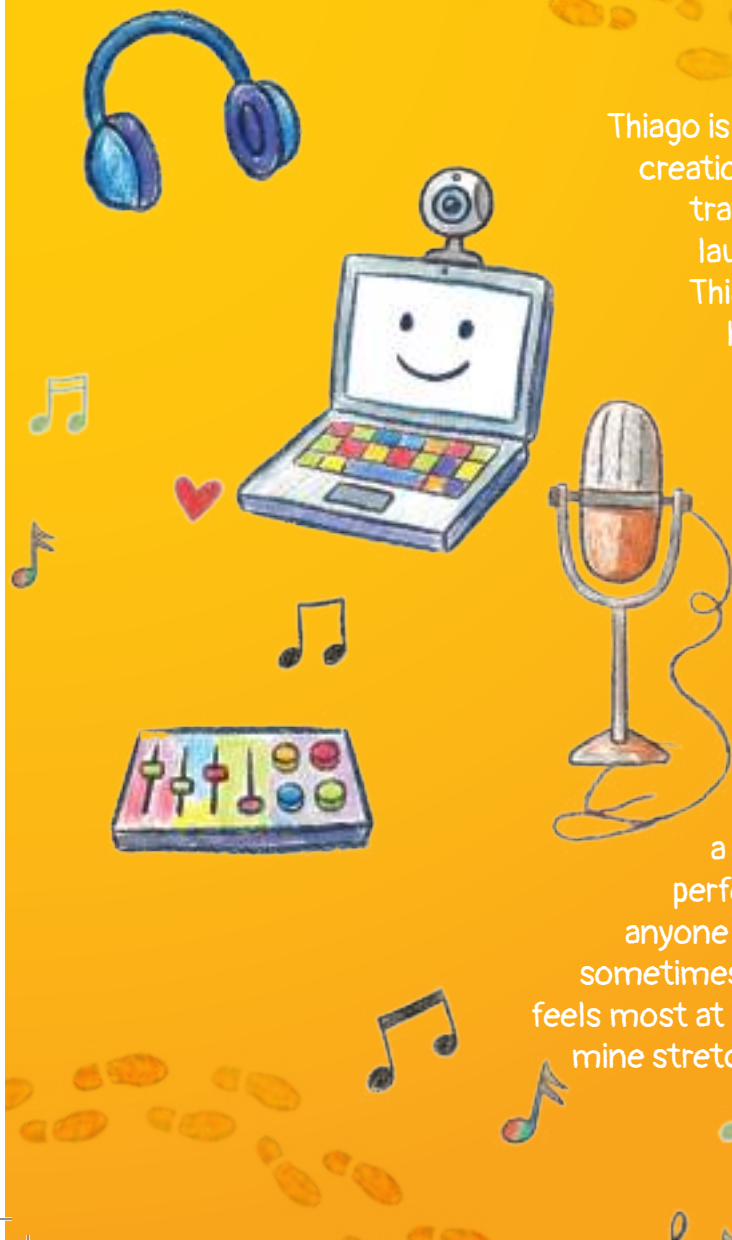


Thiago Ferreira from Brazil was only 18 years old when he landed at Belgrade's Surčin Airport in 2012. The biggest challenge at the beginning of his life in Serbia was the language. His days passed in attempts, misunderstandings, and frustration in communication. Instead of giving up, Thiago studied even harder. Today, he speaks Serbian so well that he not only understands it - he owns it. Since 2014, he has been a co-founder of a tourism agency that continues to connect the Balkans and Brazil-his homeland.



Thiago's mission is to bring tourists to the hilly Balkans, and take people from the Balkans to his home country-a land of sun, contrasts, and great coffee-working across several ventures he created himself rather than simply found.





Thiago is also involved in media content creation. He has hosted and produced travel shows, and more recently launched a podcast, "Simply with Thiago," on YouTube. In the Balkans, he feels at home, often speaking warmly and with a smile about his native Brazil, to which he gladly returns for a few months each year.

His new life is also made up of small things he discovered: wool socks, ajvar, and kajmak, without which he says he cannot live, and kolo, a traditional dance he claims to perform "90 percent better than anyone else." There's even a song he sometimes sings, with a line: "Everyone feels most at home in their own village and mine stretches from here to Rio."





Sometimes a new beginning does not mean starting from scratch. Sometimes it means that, far from home, we have actually arrived exactly where we were meant to be. A place where people know us so well that no explanations are needed. A place where Thiago has put down new roots, while faithfully preserving memories of the "good old days"-both in the Balkans and in Brazil. In the Balkans, Thiago has not only become a successful professional and creator, but has also built a family. With the people who matter most to him, he has created a home that brings together everything he loves.

Ali Kureshi

A BRIDGE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS



Ali was born in Peshawar, a vibrant city rich in history in northern Pakistan, where he grew up with his parents, sister, and brother in a world shaped by shared meals, school days, and family outings. Economic reality, limited opportunities, and a sense of responsibility toward his family led him to consider leaving. When he arrived in North Macedonia at the end of 2017, it was (so he thought) only a stop along the way, a random point on the map he knew nothing about. The possibility of asylum, which at the time seemed like a temporary solution, gradually became the beginning of something lasting.





That beginning was not easy, as it was accompanied by a sense of

NOT BELONGING.

But as the days passed, something began to change in Ali's perception of the Balkans - the kindness and openness of people slowly started to break down those barriers.

Through the friendships he built, he came to realize that a new life was just beginning - one in which he started to feel welcomed and valued.

The language, once his greatest obstacle, became the key to everything. He learned it at the Asylum Seekers' Centre, aware that without it, there could be no life he wished to build. Within just a few months, new opportunities opened up, eventually leading him to work as a translator.

His knowledge
and reliability
carried
him
further



to people who needed his voice. In Skopje, above all, but also in other places where his interpreting skills were recognized, Ali has helped, and continues to help, other migrants navigate a system that can often seem cold and difficult to understand. He speaks their language and understands their fears. At the same time, he helps institutions better understand the people who arrive. All of this has led Ali to no longer see North Macedonia as a place along the way, but as his second home.

ABOUT THE BROCHURE

These true stories, along with many others, began in the Western Balkans through legal migration, including successful asylum procedures and secured work permits, as part of regulated processes of arrival and residence in each respective country.

“Steps of Change – On the paths that shape safety” is the name of a campaign by Hilfswerk International, implemented during 2025/26 as part of the project “Strengthening Migration Management, Asylum and Return Processes in the Western Balkans” (with the support of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund – AMIF and the Federal Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Austria). Through real-life stories of people on the move, the campaign highlights how complex and deeply personal migration processes are.

By sharing authentic experiences of individuals who have gone through these journeys, the campaign presents examples of successful migration management that have resulted in equally successful asylum procedures. In doing so, it demonstrates how the Western Balkans region has been enriched by the contributions of foreign workers who actively support their communities and societies on a daily basis.

In cooperation with the agency Fabrika, real stories were identified and developed—stories of opportunities to start anew, told by people who have chosen Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia as places for a new life, or a better future for themselves and their families.

**STRENGTHENING MIGRATION MANAGEMENT, ASYLUM
AND RETURN PROCESSES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**



Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
Interior

JOINT
COORDINATION
PLATFORM



This project is co-financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior