

SPOTLIGHT

# Andreas's story shows Firm's life-changing impact

The Firm's work with asylum seekers and migrants goes far beyond pro bono advice.

The Firm's role in setting up the Legal Helpdesk (view the full video with sound below) has one external recognition

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## Andreas's story shows Firm's life-changing impact

**E**xamples of our pro bono secondment work can be found elsewhere in this issue, but the story of Brussels Paralegal Andreas Fadoul is particularly compelling.

Andreas was part of a team from the Brussels office that recently won a PILnet Local Impact Award for its extraordinary pro bono work with asylum seekers.

The team was recognized for the Legal Helpdesk, a first-of-its kind collaboration between our Brussels office, the Brussels Bar Association, Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, and 30 other law firms.

Since April 2019, the Legal Helpdesk has been providing everyday legal information and assistance to hundreds of asylum seekers denied access to appropriate accommodation, food and medical care.

In Belgium, due to a shortage of accommodation at government-operated sites, asylum seekers are prioritized based on vulnerability criteria (families, unaccompanied minors, single women, vulnerable males).

This has resulted in single men arriving in Belgium seeking international protection being forced to sleep on the streets before an opening is available. Close to 75 per cent of the individuals denied reception facilities are introducing their first claim for international protection.

In April 2022, the Brussels Bar launched a unique collaboration with 30 law firms and local NGOs to create the Legal Helpdesk.



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**“Working for White & Case was the breakthrough I desperately needed, especially because I had to be employed in Belgium for 465 working days to earn Belgian citizenship, which was essential for me to be able to build my life here and increase my employability.”**

ANDREAS FADOUL, PARALEGAL, BRUSSELS



The team included Brussels Partner Mark Powell, Associates Mario Barka and Niccolo Piga, Legal Trainees Diego Garcia and Elisa Coppo and Andreas.

Mark says: “The helpdesk was initially set up for refugees from the Ukraine, but it quickly became apparent that the principal clients were non-white, non-Christian, young, single men, who were given a particularly rough ride in the system. It has been disturbing and rewarding in equal measure to help them find shelter.”

Diego adds: “The migration flow that already existed before the war in Ukraine is now relegated to the back burner of the European agenda. It is sad to think that these migrants, escaping a horrible situation in their home countries, arrive to find no basic living rights or shelter.”

Volunteering for the project had particular relevance to Andreas, who is a migrant himself.

In fact, Andreas was facing the same problems until the Firm came to his aid in a life-changing way.

Andreas explains: “It has been a long journey for me. I left Syria in November 2013 to escape the war, leaving my family behind and fleeing through Lebanon to Turkey.

“I then had to risk my life at the hands of smugglers in an illegal raft crossing from Turkey to the Greek island of Samos on Christmas Eve 2014.

“I remember being petrified during the night crossing. It was so dark and we were completely lost. It was hard to see how we would survive.

“Conditions when we arrived on Samos were horrendous. It was the end of 2014 before asylum procedures were in place. It’s hard to explain how vulnerable and hopeless you feel in those moments.

“Towards the end of 2015, I was told that Vrije University (VUB) in Brussels would be a great place for me to complete an LLM in International and European Law. I am a qualified lawyer in Syria and was accepted into the program.”

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ANDREAS FADOUL,  
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Andreas at home in Syria with his mother



Andreas started his course at VUB in the summer of 2016, but quickly realized that things wouldn't be easy, especially as his English was quite basic at first.

He says: "It was an extra challenge on top of the work itself, but I passed the course a year later, which was amazing.

**"The Firm gave me an opportunity that nobody else would. They have allowed me to prove and support myself."**

ANDREAS FADOUL,  
PARALEGAL, BRUSSELS

"However, while all my classmates quickly got job offers, I found myself constantly rejected."

Andreas was struggling to remain optimistic when a chance encounter with White & Case Partner Jacquelyn MacLennan changed his life.

He says: "I'm an Orthodox Christian and was heading to church when a marathon in the city blocked my route. Rather than go home, I saw St Andrew's Church (a Scottish church in Brussels) and decided to go in. At a service on Christmas Day 2018, I met Jacqui.

"Since then, Jacqui has always been there for me, helping when I moved to a new apartment and when I needed furniture or support. She took me to hospital when I needed an operation and drove me back home during the pandemic in 2020 and helped as I recovered.

"Most people know Jacqui as a successful lawyer, but I can testify that she is so much more than that. She is a credit to the Firm, perfectly reflecting your human side."

Jacqui also connected Andreas to the White & Case team in Brussels, which led to an internship from March to June 2019. In 2021, he was offered a position as a paralegal. It was at this point that he started volunteering for the Legal Helpdesk project.

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MARK POWELL, PARTNER, BRUSSELS



Andreas explains: "Working for White & Case was the breakthrough I desperately needed, especially because I had to be employed in Belgium for 465 working days to earn Belgian citizenship, which was essential for me to be able to build my life here and increase my employability."

Andreas achieved citizenship in June 2022. He says: "When I got the news, it seemed too good to be true. I can't explain how life changing a moment it was for me and I'll be forever grateful."

Andreas paid tribute to White & Case for having faith in him when all seemed lost. He comments: "The Firm gave me an opportunity that nobody else would. They have allowed me to prove and support myself.

Andreas reserved special praise for Jacqui for the part she played in his journey. He says: "I am now a Belgian citizen and free man. I have full rights and freedoms and can live my life here just like everyone else. That would never have been possible without Jacqui. I forever am in her debt!"

Jacqui commented: "It's been a privilege to get to know Andreas over these years, and fantastic to see how White & Case people have stepped up when this was needed."

Andreas is also delighted he was able to contribute to the Legal Helpdesk project – an experience that meant he could help others going through a similar journey to his own.

He says: "Getting involved with the project was a small way for me to show my appreciation, because I know first-hand how difficult it is.

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A photograph of three women of diverse backgrounds sitting outdoors and smiling. The woman in the foreground is wearing a black hijab and a black long-sleeved shirt. The woman behind her is wearing a white headscarf and a purple patterned jacket. The woman on the left is partially visible, wearing a white shirt. The background shows a brick wall and some greenery.

## Breaking barriers in the UK

Several White & Case volunteers, including Andreas, provided essential employability skills advice to refugees seeking employment in the UK at a half-day event last summer.

The virtual session was organized with charity [Breaking Barriers](#) and aimed to help refugees who face the challenge of high unemployment, often due to language and qualification issues.

The event was run in collaboration with the Firm's Anti-trust Racial Justice Taskforce, with Washington, D.C. Partner Dana Foster among those who took part in the training.

Other volunteers included Partner Marc Israel, Associates Aishwarya Jha, Henry Gafsen, Joe Paisley and Bethanie Abrahams, Professional Support Counsel Peter Citron, and Andreas.

