

Mina Jaf, a Voice of Courage for Refugees in Europe

by Women's Refugee Commission,

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Mina Jaf was a refugee from the day she was born – in the midst of a chemical gas attack on her village in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1988. She fled with her family over the mountains to Iran and over the next 11 years, they went back and forth between the two countries, often spending no more than one night in the same place.

Pretending to be asleep, the young Mina listened to refugees from Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda tell their horrific stories of rape and domestic violence. She understood that they risked stigmatization and shame if their experiences became common knowledge.

Mina grew up determined to fight for the rights of all refugee women.

When Mina was 11, her mother got her children to Europe, where they lived in asylum centers for more than three years in Denmark. When she was finally granted asylum, Mina began to fulfill her personal mission. Most recently, as project coordinator at the Starpoint Project in Brussels, she was on the frontlines of the refugee crisis in Europe, being a first point of contact for newly arrived refugees.

"I struggle every day to find the right words (in one of the seven languages she speaks) to tell women this one thing: If you have been raped, at another asylum center or along your journey, you must tell it," Mina says. "If you withhold this information – because you are afraid, because you are ashamed, because of the taboo – you will not get another chance."

Now Mina is branching out on her own. She is creating an organization to train female translators to provide information and help women and girls on the dangerous journey.

"My most important lesson from working in the field is this: How the information is given is just as critical as what information is given. Especially when you are talking to the women."

Come and meet Mina Jaf and hear more of her incredible story at the [April 21st Voices of Courage Awards Luncheon](#).