

I have been involved in Youth in Action projects since October 2011 and am currently working as a Project Manager for a UK charity. I also took part in a Grundtvig mobility in Turkey in May 2014.

I was born in inner-city Birmingham (Lozells, scene of riots in 2005 and 2011) and attended the local comprehensive. I am the first in my family to attend university. My life was typical - extra Islamic classes after school and college until the age of 19, family pressures, (almost ) forced marriage (it affects males too) and adverse effects on grades and employment.

Since taking part in the Youth in Action programme, my life has turned around. I have travelled all over Europe thanks to the EU and to the ASHA Centre in the Forest of Dean. I am also a freelance youth trainer and I deliver courses on European Islam, Human Rights and Democracy. I recently completed my MA on the European Union and received a distinction for my thesis. I accomplished this alongside full time employment.

The programme has enabled someone like me who grew up in a closed community, to connect with people across the world. Without the travel funding, I would never have dreamed of having such experiences. They opened my mind, and I truly believe that EU opportunities can do much to counter the threat of radicalisation.

It is debatable whether English is my first language. My parents have lived in the UK for more than forty years. They do not speak any English because they've never had reason to do so since they've spent their lives in a concentrated ethnic community. The first words I spoke were Bengali and this is the language I spoke until I attended school at the age of five. I now speak English, Bengali and Hindi. Thanks to the European programmes, I have a good knowledge of French and Portuguese.

Please continue to support the programme. Such opportunities are amongst the few opportunities that will enable our young people to embrace this changing world. Do we wish them to be left behind? Do we wish them to grow resentful due to their limited opportunities? Do we want young people in inner-cities and ghettos to radicalise and become disillusioned? If they cannot adjust themselves to democratic values at the national level, then let them have a try at the transnational level.

Kind regards,

Khalid Miah