

Bekilda, a 21 year old Albanian head of household living in Romania

Bekilda is a social counsellor for Save the Children Romania. She loves working with refugee children for once Bekilda was a refugee herself.

She was only 10 years old when her parents told her that they would be going on a very long trip. She was to say goodbye to her grandmother and to the other relatives. Her parents were forced to escape from Tirana, Albania, to seek political asylum in Romania.

Bekilda's stepfather was a founding member of a democratic party in Albania, which caused long lasting political problems for himself and his wife. Bekilda believes that her parents' flight from Albania to avoid political persecution and her own refugee status in Romania, could cause her problems if she ever returned to Albania.

The ten or so years spent in Romania have been a blend of joy and sorrow for Bekilda. She misses her own home, the rhythm of life in Tirana, and her friends and relatives, especially the big family get-togethers at her grandmother's. Life in Romania at first was confusing. None of the family spoke Romanian, and for many years, home was the refugee centre.

Five years ago, Bekilda's mother died from cancer. Subsequently, her stepfather set up a new home with his son, Bekilda's half-brother who was born after their arrival in Romania. He had decided to become independent and left his stepdaughters to fend for themselves. Bekilda had to get a job to support her younger sister, her elderly grandmother and herself.

During her years in Romania, Bekilda has completed high school, despite losing two academic years earlier on because she didn't speak the local language. She is now studying psychology at university while working as a social counsellor for Save the Children Romania in a refugee centre. With her earnings, she is able to provide for her family, including their own rented apartment. She says, "I am safe. I am independent, and I am a university student. I like to work with refugee children and to help them. All these things make me happy and I believe that this is just the beginning of a life full of success".

In early December 2002, Bekilda's application for Romanian citizenship was accepted. She has successfully settled in her host country.