



## Women empowering women

**Odessa Primus, 25, Czech Republic**

In 2015, Odessa swapped her student life in London to volunteer in refugee camps in Greece and Lebanon. She wanted to experience first-hand the things she had only read about in newspapers. Little did she know that this would change her life forever. Inspired by the small miracles she saw around her every day, she wanted to play her part. On returning home she gathered over £20,000 and a Facebook community of over 1,500 followers to support the ongoing efforts to assist refugees.

Thanks to her fundraising actions, Odessa was able to provide practical support to victims like Osama, who was orphaned in a bomb attack in Damascus. "Being able to help Osama get his prosthetic leg was such a human inspiration, it made me realise how much one individual can do, even make someone walk again", Odessa remembers.

Soon after this experience, Odessa realised that the media reports did not reflect the reality of what she had seen on the ground in the refugee camps. "I had to take action." So in May 2017 she decided to launch her own non-governmental organisation, the "Go Think Initiative," to combat disinformation on the refugee crisis.

In 2017, she was selected from among hundreds of young people committed to promoting sustainable development around the world to become one of the Young Leaders at the annual European Development Days (EDD). This allowed her to share her views and experience with the many Heads of State and Government and leaders of the development community who attend this regular 'Davos of development'.

Being named a Young Leader has had a strong impact on Odessa's professional life. She is now often invited by the European Union as an expert to discussions on refugees, especially on how best to protect vulnerable women and girls. "I find it extremely inspiring for me as a young woman to know that I am making a difference in other women's lives." She also collaborates with the United Nations as a consultant on the inclusion of women and young people in peace and security matters.

“No matter what time or society we live in, people look at each other and see gender and age, colour and class. I've found that what I can do is think "I am not a woman in this situation, I am not young person, I am simply a person, a citizen, and that is the only criteria I should be judged on. Becoming a Young Leader for the EDD enabled me to be in the same room with incredible people who have accomplished great things. However it was up to me to engage them. That's what makes a young leader, their ability to make people listen, and to lead.”



Odessa Primus during the EDD 2017 panel discussions.



Odessa Primus in a refugee camp.