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| Unravelling the Mediterranean migration crisis |

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| * **Michael and Niyat’s story** |

When Michael and his wife Niyat left Eritrea in September 2015 they had little idea of what lay ahead of them. Like many Eritreans, Michael had been conscripted into the army at a young age.

After 14 years of being forced to work for virtually nothing, and with no release date in sight, he decided he could take no more. Taking advantage of a period of leave, Michael and Niyat left Eritrea, crossing the Red Sea by boat to Sudan with the help of fishermen whom they met on the shore.

When they arrived in Port Sudan they made their way to Khartoum by bus but after living there for one year they moved on because they no longer felt safe. To escape, Michael and Niyat paid smugglers to take them to Libya across the Sahara Desert. It was a very challenging journey. Both were beaten by the smugglers.

They were also held captive by the smugglers and forced to call family and friends to raise money for additional payments demanded for the journey across the sea. When they had been at sea for around five hours they were rescued by an Italian ship. Realising that Niyat was heavily pregnant, Italian officials arranged for the couple to be taken to a hospital in Malta (which was closer than Italy) where their daughter was born the following day.

Michael and Niyat told us that they had never intended to come to Europe, and certainly not to Malta, but as their journey unfolded they believed they had no alternative. They had only sought to find safety and a place where they could make a life for themselves and their new baby.