



# EMERGING INSIGHTS

01

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

# Empathy and Visibility in Polarized Societies

## Global Issues

**In a world more connected than ever before, it's puzzling that it still feels so divided.** True integration of people who do not look, act, or believe the same has to go beyond simply being able to access a world of information. The status quo of discrimination and fear is reinforced, in part, because the information we receive is determined by algorithms that cater to our biases. Two people can be exposed to the same issue, but have two entirely different interpretations of the facts.



There is an urgency to look for solutions to solve for the stereotyping and discrimination that is perpetuated in this landscape of misinformation. Even with progress toward inclusion, people around the world are put in peril with the promotion of isolationism, exclusion, and political division that has recently been on the rise. Social innovators are pushing through the division to build cohesion and empathy in a time of polarization.

## The Headlines

### **Fear about jobs keeps fueling anti-migrant sentiment and xenophobia in South Africa**

*Quartz Africa 8/15/18*

### **Humans for sale: Libyan slave trade continues while militants kill and torture with impunity, U.N. says**

*Newsweek 3/21/18*

### **'If we go they will kill us': Rohingya refugees fear repatriation to Myanmar**

*CNN 11/15/18*

### **Racism against black people in EU 'widespread and entrenched'**

*BBC News 11/28/18*

### **Italian Minister Moves to Count and Expel Roma, Drawing Outrage**

*New York Times 6/19/18*

## New Ideas

We see reasons to be hopeful. In 2018, Ashoka Fellows are building innovative solutions focused on authentic integration and pathways to rethink approaches to race, diversity, and inclusion of people from all creeds, political parties, ethnicities, and national backgrounds.

Our Fellows have focused on sharing new strategies for justice, healing, and reconciliation. These include an initiative in the southern United States focused on building a repository of stories of racial discrimination for healing and awareness. Another two Fellows are working to bring Roma people – in Brazil and in Europe – out of the shadows. And, we have multiple stories from our Fellows working to ensure there is authentic inclusion of people who are differently abled.

### Closing the gaps in empathy and equality

In the United States, **Reverend Steve Miller**, Founder of the HBCU Truth and Reconciliation Oral History Project, works to improve a fundamental misinterpretation of the roots of racism. He begins by recognizing a systemic failure of empathy that has reinforced institutional racism where the systems that perpetuate inequality continue to be part of the legal, legislative, and administrative infrastructure of the country. Using storytelling rooted in the personal narratives of family members, students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) gather stories from their loved ones to serve as evidence, inform public policy, and provide for grassroots organizing and advance in research. The stories will be marshaled by the black church, which will take a leading role in matters of racial equality and relationship building, in order to help the narrators be healed, by being heard. The project has been adopted by seven historically black colleges and universities and two independent universities.

Combatting the economics of racial inequality in Brazil, **Adriana Barbosa** is building new social and economic systems that remove the invisible barriers that have restricted Afro-Brazilians to economic activity in micro and small enterprises. Constituting the majority population in Brazil, citizens of African descent have dominated these markets, but have incomes that are less than half the average of people of European descent. Adriana's work accelerates, connects and promotes Afro-entrepreneurs within corporate value chains to break through this reality. She has built a physical, branded marketplace event, the Feira Preta, which is an annual fair that brings entrepreneurs together for a celebration of black enterprise and creativity. It is also an institute with a co-working space and a lab to help entrepreneurs develop strong business models and gain access to financial markets and services. Adriana Barbosa is filling an important economic gap to re-envision a more equitable future for people of color.

### Enhancing visibility of the marginalized

While Adriana Barbosa seeks to correct injustices for a majority population in Brazil, two Fellows are work-

ing to bring a historically marginalized community, the Romani, to light. There has been a historical lack of information about Roma people that has perpetuated institutional racism and excluded them from accessing public resources. **Elisa Costa's** Maylê Sara Kali International Association (AMSK) is the only Roma organization in Brazil. Her organization coordinates networks to collect and disseminate information which counteracts negative stereotypes. A network of volunteers (prosecutors, statisticians, sociologists, and lawyers) has helped to revise statistics to demand they receive benefits. Due to AMSK's work, all 800,000 Romani have been guaranteed healthcare by the Ministry of Health.<sup>2</sup> In Italy and across Europe, **Carlo Stasolla's** organization Associazione 21 Luglio is redefining what it means to be Roma and is specifically focused on advocating for integration strategies across the continent. With a focus on providing data to propel action, Carlo's team focuses on providing governments with information on housing, health, education, and legal status of Romani, based on extensive fieldwork. After developing a policy plan for the closing of Roma camps in Italy, the City Council of Rome changed laws to adopt the suggestions and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance published the report as a call to action on how segregation based on ethnic origin is in violation of both Italian and European law. The organization monitors the implementation of these plans and much work is left to be done. A report from earlier in the year shows that 26,000 of the estimated 180,000 Roma are still housed in informal shanties and Roma camps.<sup>3</sup>

### Reconsidering the definition of ability

Our Fellows are focused on driving inclusive social programs and services for diverse ethnic or racial groups, but a number of Fellows this year are also showing us that we need to rethink ability and inclusion for differently abled individuals. **Jonas Staub** creates a culture of inclusion in Switzerland by ensuring that everyone in society feels responsible for each other. His organization, Blindspot, works to reverse the trend of treating children with differing abilities as apart from everyone else. As a social worker, he noticed that differently abled people had no autonomy – they were always told what was good for them and removed from decision making. He believes that differently abled people should be enabled to connect and integrate in authentic ways with everyone in society. Sports have been his starting point – giving children the opportunities to play together and understand that differences should not divide them.

**Danny Sajida Rahman** brings together parents and caregivers to collectively develop tools and resources to change mindsets around autism. In Bangladesh, children diagnosed with autism find themselves living

2. GASPAR, Lúcia (2012) Ciganos no Brasil. Retrieved from <http://basilio.fundaj.gov.br/pesquisaescolar/>

3. Associazione 21 Luglio. (2018). 2017 annual report of. Retrieved from <http://www.21luglio.org/21luglio/rapporto-annuale-2017-26-mila-rom-emergenza-abitativa-2/>

completely closed off from the rest of society because they are often misunderstood as “cursed.” There is little to no infrastructure to protect children with neurological disorders and there is no social safety net to help them as they grow older. Danny has united caregivers and parents to form the Parents Forum for Differently Abled. As a collective they work to address negative media portrayals of autism and advocate for policy shifts. A major outcome of this effort has been the addition of Autism Spectrum Disorder as a di-

agnosis recognized in the “Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013.”

Autistic children, children with Down syndrome, or children with dyslexia are being integrated more meaningfully into the Turkish education system through the work of **Hasan Zafer Elcik**. Only 5% of the 375,000 pre and primary school-aged children with autism in Turkey have access to education. Access to special kindergartens where they can interact with peers are especially cost-prohibitive. Zafer created Otsimo, a mobile applica-

tion and community (both on- and off-line) to reach more families. Children can focus on basic literacy with positive and stress-free learning tools. A “family app” enables parents and caregivers to participate in their child’s education and help them succeed. There are 44,000 registered users and 16,000 children a month actively using it. In moving forward, Zafer plans to scale globally, democratizing information through play-based educational tools for any child with a special condition.

## How to Celebrate the Local

In many communities and nations around the world, discrimination and division are not necessarily reflected by skin color, religious belief, or ethnic affiliation. Economic and educational inequality, uneven distribution of resources, and rural and urban divides can be just as damaging to economic livelihoods. There has been great progress in ethical businesses, with more companies recognizing their practices have had detrimental effects on down-market producers, but the fight for equity and inclusion in markets continues.

In 2018, two Fellows are putting fair trade at the forefront, while also celebrating and promoting local and indigenous talent.

**Carla Fernández** demonstrates that small-scale, ethical, and eco-friendly textiles made by artisans who respect the integrity of ancestral production techniques can secure commercial success at international scale. Her bottom-up creation process, rooted in a careful study of Mexico’s rich variety of artisanal textile-making techniques, enables artisans to be protagonists in the production and design process. Carla protects traditional pre-Hispanic production techniques and designs from extinction, transforms them into high fashion, and plugs them into international value chains.

**Chid Liberty** is creating a full, ethical apparel supply chain in Africa aimed at catalyzing economic growth and setting new ethical standards for apparel manufacturing globally. Liberia, Chid’s home country, is recovering from a 14-year civil war that destroyed national infrastructure and basic social services and left an estimated 64% of the population living below the poverty line. Prior to the war, the economy, like much of Africa, relied heavily on natural resource extraction and agriculture that was controlled by governments and foreign-owned companies. To create a sustainable manufacturing revolution that benefits Africans first, Chid’s solution is to introduce value-based brands that focus on local talent and needs. He has begun with a fair-trade certified apparel factory called Liberty and Justice that started with the help of a group of women in Liberia. The brand is sold in the United States at a high-end retailer, Bloomingdales, and donates school uniforms and supplies to Liberian children for each t-shirt sold. There are nine factories in multiple African countries.

## The Opportunity:

### Make Everyone Powerful

*How do we reshape our societies to enable everyone to be equally powerful?*

Change is the new normal. Today’s economic, political, and social environments stand out for their complexity and uncertainty. The global community will continue to connect through new technological advances and grow and expand in response to economic and political instability. To be able to adapt to change, everyone will require skills in empathy and agility. Some will fear integration, but we know this can be overcome when people are able to employ complex thinking, problem solving, and creativity.

The seventeen Ashoka Fellows in our 2018 cohort who are contributing diversity and inclusion solutions show us how integration enables everyone to win, not just the select few. They are showing us how to overcome deep cultural and structural barriers to build a future in which all beings – regardless of their gender, race, ability, or age – are treated with dignity and supported in reaching their full potential as changemakers.

With our continued commitment to diversity and inclusion, Ashoka seeks opportunities to amplify and accelerate these innovations for more collective impact by helping convene teams to scale impact, match make solutions with key stakeholders, and cultivate a global conversation to influence others to adopt and spread solutions.

## About Ashoka

Ashoka believes the most powerful force for change in the world is a new idea in the hands of the right person. With this conviction, we pioneered the field of social entrepreneurship 38 years ago. Ever since, we've bet on the optimists and the adventurous among us who see the world not as it is but as it should be. Year after year, they forge new pathways to get us there, growing unexpected ideas into transformative social progress.

Leading social entrepreneurs are not heroes working in isolation. Their success depends on creating roles for ordinary people — parents, refugees, computer scientists, farmers, and young people — to play an important part in the solution. With each new leading social entrepreneur we nurture, therefore, Ashoka is creating a different kind of future: one where each of us looks inside ourselves and sees a changemaker.



## Methods

### Ashoka's approach to supporting tomorrow's social innovations

After 38 years of electing the world's leading systems changing social entrepreneurs, Ashoka knows how to find new ideas. For this analysis of our 2018 Fellows we tapped into the resources of our Ashoka process to mine the reports, interview notes, reflections, and writings of our teams across the globe who are expert innovation spotters and who have deeply examined the work of potential Fellows. The learnings, patterns, and insights we cull during the rich Fellow selection process provided the baseline data for this report.

## Partner with us

We are always looking for new partners to help us find and support Ashoka Fellows around the world to advance systemic change in new and growing fields. please contact Maria Clara Pinheiro [mpinheiro@ashoka.org](mailto:mpinheiro@ashoka.org) for more information on how you or your organization can help us continue to grow the largest global network of social entrepreneurs.

## Donate to Ashoka's Global Venture Fund

Global Venture Fund is a pool of philanthropic funds dedicated to finding and electing new Ashoka Fellows. The Fund prioritizes supporting the search and selection of social entrepreneurs in emerging or underrepresented areas of innovation, and under-resourced geographies. Please visit [ashoka.org/donate](https://ashoka.org/donate) and indicate Global Venture Fund in your donation.

## Recommend a candidate

Do you know a systems-changing social entrepreneur who could benefit from the financial and network support of the Ashoka Fellowship? Nominate them at [ashoka.org/engage/recommend/fellow](https://ashoka.org/engage/recommend/fellow).



# Everyone a Changemaker



ASHOKA

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