

LGBTI

REFUGEES



LGBTI REFUGEES

THIS BOOK IS A PRODUCT OF THE COLLECTIVE
WORK OF HEVI LGBTI ASSOCIATION

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This book has been published with the contribution of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Association and Aık Toplum Vakfı (Open Society Foundation).

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ISBN: 978-605-83323-0-0

Printed and bound by Ceylan Matbaa
Maltepe Mah. D. Pasa Cad. Guven İş Merkezi No: 83/317 Zeytinburnu/ İstanbul

Phone: 0 212 613 10 79



TABLE OF CONTENTS

To Begin With	7
Ozlem Colak: LGBTI refugees and Turkey: A refuge that gets more insecure	15
Ramtin Zigorat: Congrats to the Muslims!	26
Suma: If you bring a LGBTI friend of yours, we will release you	33
Nadir: The police created an army of guards with a series of cars in front of the door of the party building	38
Ilyas: ISIS opened fire on us	41
Martha: Then I realized that homophobia and transphobia don't belong to a specific religion	43
Ezdiyar: I was not in love but he became a member of ISIS	46
Ruzgar: At that moment I felt my heart sank. And the rest is gone	51
Ali: Go, join the war and die there	54
Misa: I said, 'No, I am Lebanese.'	58
Almira: Even your family could be waiting in line to kill you	61
Rizvan: Policeman: I'm sure you did something to deserve this	66
Joseph: I am ready even to sacrifice myself	72
Prof. Dr. Zeynep Kivilcim: "Legal violence" against the LGBTI community continues	78
Acknowledgements	83

To Begin With

This book, ‘LGBTİ Refugees’, was prepared by Hevi LGBTİ Association, the Hevi working team on LGBTİ refugees, and with the support of the specialists in their field.

To begin with, we want to point out the violation of rights, originating from the definitions of the terms ‘Refugee, Asylum-Seeker, Immigrant, Guest’. Accordingly, we start by discussing the topic within the frame of Turkish law system and international legal dimension.

According to the recent data announced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a large part of Syrian Refugees has been living in Turkey. The number of the registered Syrian “refugees” in Turkey is stated as 2 million and 72 thousand by October, 2015. The Republic of Turkey refers to the refugees from Syria as “guests” within the context of temporary protection. Although the concepts of refugee, asylum-seeker, immigrant or guest look similar within the lexical meaning, in fact, they bear important differences in terms of legal rights.

What Is Refugee Status?

In international law, the concept of “refugee” refers to the person who lives outside of his/her country of citizenship and who can’t or doesn’t want to return to that country with reasonable fears that he/she will be persecuted because of his/her race, religion, nation, allegiance to a specific social group or political view.

What Is Asylum-Seeker Status?

An asylum-seeker is a person who seeks for international protection as a refugee but whose status has not been recognized officially yet. This term is often used to refer to the ones who wait for the final decision of the government or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) about their application to get refugee status. Even if their status is not recognized officially, the asylum-seekers can not be returned their country of origin, their rights must be protected.

What Is Immigrant Status?

The term “immigrant” refers to the person or family members who immigrate to another country or region to improve their financial and social conditions, to increase their or their family’s expectations from future. Immigrants, basically, can be identified as people who leave their country not with a reasonable fear that they will be persecuted there, but with the reasons resulting from expectations about education and work. Immigrants make preferences about constituting their living environment in another region or country to reach a better life standard, while continuing to benefit from the protection of their country of citizenship.

What Is Temporary Protection (Guest) Status?

In accordance with the regulation organized by the article no. 91 of the Foreigners and International Protection Law no. 6458, the people who are under temporary protection and referred as guests are the ones who are forced to leave their country, who can’t return to the country they leave and who set out on this journey with their own will to find an urgent and temporary protection. While some of these journeys are conducted with legal documents like passport and visa in a regular way, some others can be executed in an irre-

gular way, improper to the legal systems of the countries, and even sometimes in a way by walking towards the borders in mass. The protection which is provided for the foreigners who come to the border or who cross the border is called “Temporary Protection”. In Turkey, the regulation of Temporary Protection (Guest) went into operation on October 22, 2014.

As stated above, Syrians who had to leave their home country because of the war in Syria have been debarred from a set of rights to live in the context of government policies by being taken into the scope of ‘Temporary Protection (Guest)’.

UNHCR is commissioned to organize the international actions which aim to protect the refugees, to lead these actions, to solve the worldwide problems refugees face and to maintain the rights and welfare of the refugees. But in Turkey, according to the ‘Temporary Protection’ regulation, clause 4, article no. 16/1: “During the operation of the Temporary Protection, individual international protection application of the foreigners who are within the scope of the relevant regulation is not put into operation with the aim of making the Temporary Protection measures performed efficiently.” This regulation precludes the Syrian refugees to apply for international protection from UNHCR as they are within the scope of “Temporary Protection”.

The term “Syrian refugees who are in sore issue” that has been made clear in the document titled as “The Syrian Refugees in Turkey – Frequently Asked Questions”, which was prepared by UNHCR but doesn’t take part in the current “Temporary Protection” regulation prepared by Turkey, refers to the LGBTI individuals as well:

“As their protection is provided by the temporary protection system, UNHCR Turkey doesn’t conduct the registration or refugee status detection operations for the Syrians in Turkey. But UNHCR supports Turkey and humanitarian partners in detecting the Syrian refugees who are in sore issue, in need of special protection and additional/supplementary protection interventions. UNHCR staff can make contact with the individuals who are forwarded to UNHCR for protection evaluation to follow up the process. Protection evaluation aims to determine the most appropriate solution for the protection needs of the refugees in the country of asylum. Protecti-

on evaluation is not the register process.”

Contrary to general opinion, while Syrian LGBTI individuals can benefit from the opportunity of “being placed to a third country” as they are within the scope of ‘fragile’ categorisation, we observed during our field work that a clear majority of Syrian LGBTI refugees is not informed of the application conditions for international protection measurements of UNHCR.

Why Is This Book A Necessity?

Both in our country and in Middle East, Africa and East Europe, people suffer from Homophobia and Transphobia.

Together with the war period started in Middle East under the name of Arab Spring, fragile groups whose living spaces were already restricted have been more of an open target. As a result of its geographical position, Turkey turned into a transit route for refugees who want to immigrate especially to European countries. LGBTI individuals who take part among the groups who came to or were forced to come to Turkey as a result of the policies of the governments suffer from the homophobic, transphobic, heterosexual system in Turkey, together with the obstacles against having access to the rights to health, sheltering, work and education as other refugees do.

Our researches as Hevi LGBTI Association in the field of LGBTI Refugees led us to get into a closer contact with LGBTI individuals who were affected in the first degree from the warfare and the attacks of the terrorist organisations (ISIS, BOKO HARAM) in the Middle East and Africa and who had to leave their countries.

As a result of those contacts, the reporting studies started as interviews with refugees, exposition of the violations of rights and solution offers prepared the ground for publishing the experiences shared by the refugees as a book. The project was started with the aim to help the LGBTI refugees access to actual rights and to mold public opinion about the topic in Turkey.

This book contains the interviews made with LGBTI refugees who are the victim of both the war and the patriarchal-masculine system of their country. This book contains the interviews with the refugees who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual or transgender. This book generally aims to discuss the

previous lives of the individuals interviewed in their home country, how they came to Turkey and the problematic issues they experience here. Both the ones within the Temporary Protection (Guest) status and within the refugee status have to fight with many issues in Turkey, and mostly by themselves alone. To name some of those issues:

1. Housing – Residing

■ “Refugees who are within the scope of international protection application in Turkey are under the obligation of residing in the cities designated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and of declaration. The person has to give signature to the Foreigners Section of the relevant city of residence. In the case of neglecting the notification obligation three times in a row and not residing in the place designated or leaving the place of residence without permission, his/her application is accepted as withdrawn and the evaluation process is stopped.”¹

■ “Asylum-seekers and refugees in Turkey have unrestricted residence right in the cities (satellite city) designated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. Asylum-seekers and refugees cannot choose the city of residence by themselves. They can only make the choice for the city of residence on the grounds of line of descent (mother, father, sibling, spouse, grandmother, grandfather) and consideration of health.”²

■ As can be understood from the article above, as there isn’t a legislative regulation about relationships between LGBTİ individuals, there are LGBTİ couples who are resided to different cities compulsorily although they live together. LGBTİ couples experience difficulty because of this situation and the solution is

1. No. 16458 Foreigners and International Protection Law Residence and Notification obligation Article no. 71 may bring some administrative responsibilities to the Applicant like obligation of residence in a temporary shelter, a specific place or city which is informed to him/her or obligation of notification in the scope of requested model and time period. The Applicant is supposed to register to the address registration system and notify his/her residence address to governorate.

2. Withdrawing the application Article no. 77 – (1) If the Applicant ç) neglects the obligation of notification three times in a row without any excuse or doesn’t go to the place of residence designated or leaves the places of residence without permission, his/her application is accepted as withdrawn and the evaluation process is stopped.

LGBTI REFUGEES

sometimes leads one of the partners to reside in the other city illegally. On the other hand, one of the partners has to rent a house in the city of residence designated and give signature in that city in every 15 days.

■ For the decision concerning the forwarding to cities, the statistics of the intensity of the satellite cities should be taken into consideration first. Prior options are the other satellite cities designated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, except from the metropolitan districts like Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Bursa.

Homophobic and transphobic assault, a common issue in Turkey in general sense, is felt more when we go from big cities to rural area. As it is mentioned above, placement of the LGBTI refugees to the small cities outside of the metropolises in which they can have a more “easy” life, drives it into a bigger dilemma. In most of the interviews we had with the refugees living out of metropolises, we were informed that harassment, rape and violence are more often in those areas. While it is already a known fact that refugees in general are charged with higher prices while renting a house, it turned out that refugee LGBTIs are charged even more, and especially the transsexuals face serious difficulties while renting a house.

2. Right to Health:

“The persons who have international protection application or status and have been defined as heimatlos are considered as having general health insurance. Those persons are subject to the terms of Social Security and General Health Insurance Law no. 5510.”

During our fieldwork, we observed that refugee LGBTIs have difficulties in accessing to right to health because of the homophobic and transphobic approach in the healthcare organizations. As the necessary education about gender and discrimination is not provided, refugee LGBTIs are subject to discrimination as a result of conscious or unconscious behaviors.

3. Right to Work

“According to legal regulations in Turkey, applicant or conditional refugees can apply for right to work at the 6th month after the international protection application.”

But as the legal procedures and bureaucracy take too long, most of the refugees work without insurance and regarded as low-cost workforce.

We observed that refugee LGBTIs also have similar problems, most of them are subject to harassment and plagiarisation. In Turkey, at present, work areas are used as an element of social detention against LGBTI individuals, with the help of the government. Especially the transwomen are driven to work as a sexworker willingly or unwillingly. It is also the same for refugee LGBTIs who came to Turkey.

As a result of the interviews we made, we observed that many refugee LGBTIs have not been paid the amount of payment they agreed on or the amount they deserved for the workforce. They have been subjected to alienation or oral or physical harassment at work.

In a field where there is extensive violation of rights, we had difficulties to persuade refugee LGBTI individuals to make interview with us. Some interviewees agreed on making interview on the condition of hiding their credentials, the place or city they reside or they are forced to reside.

During the research period, it was very difficult to reach lesbian and bisexual woman interviewees. Most of the lesbian and bisexual women we got into contact didn't want the interviews to be published in the book because of the social pressure, exposure or family pressure.

Interviews were made in Arabic, Kurdish, English and Turkish. In general, we didn't intervene in the stories of the interviewees. We tried to narrate the expressions as they are.

Almost all of the Refugee LGBTIs who took part in the interviews declared that they see Turkey as a step to take refuge in European countries. As it is understood from the interviews in the book, Refugee LGBTIs to a large extent have experienced disappointment in Turkey and don't have tendency to make their lives here.

LGBTI REFUGEES

We observed that there isn't any legal attempt against the homophobic and transphobic assaults that Refugee LGBTI individuals in Turkey are subjected to, and against the rape and harassment cases.

Muzeyyen ARAC

In the name of Hevi LGBTI Association

Resources

<http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr>

<http://www.unhrc.org>

<http://www.refugeeinturkey.org>

LGBTI Refugees And Turkey: A Refuge That Gets More Insecure

Today, in the current phase of history, history of humanity is probably having its most complicated, violent and active period after centuries. We have been witnessing people leaving their home countries and migrating to different lands as a result of wars, conflicts, hunger, poverty, torture and in the aim of accessing to a better education, work, health and living conditions, or as a part of it, we find our own way in life. As it is declared that today, in the world, 214 million people live in different countries as migrants³, we come across with a more striking number: Approximately 52 million people⁴ are on the way to different zones either in their own country or in other countries for a safer life because of war, conflict, torture or similar reasons.

When the Syrian civil war started in 2011, Turkey took its part in the middle of this terrifying scene. Although we can say that Turkey is familiar with migration waves, it wouldn't be wrong to say that it is the first time it has experienced such a big one. As of today, while we are telling about the population of the migrants and/or asylum seekers/refugees in Turkey, the fact that now we talk about the existence of more than 2 million people, including Syrians and the ones who have come from different countries than Syria, who have different legal status here made Turkey the country which has the highest number of asylum seeker/refugee population on the world.⁵

Until today, we can say that Turkey have acted according to political conjuncture and its location, instead of operating a complete and comprehensive policy concerning the themes like asylum,

3. This title is a reference to the title of "Unsafe Heaven – Güvensiz Sığınak" report which has been prepared by Helsinki Yurttaşlar Derneği and ORAM (Organization for Refugee, Asylum and Migration) and which reflects the problems of refugees in the most comprehensive way. The report can be reached through: <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/524c114f4.pdf> Date accessed: 27.05.2016

4. Source: <http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2010/11/101129:migrants.shtml> Date accessed: 27.05.2016

5. By 2015, while the number of the refugees who came from different countries (not Syria) and applied for international protection system in Turkey is 216.349 (see: http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/uluslararasi-korumaya_363_378_4712_icerik), the number of registered Syrians is 2.744.915 (see: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>). These numbers are the number of the people who are registered in the systems of UNHCR and Turkey. It is believed that this number is far more, together with the number of the people who are not registered.

migration, immigration, refugee. Likewise, it wouldn't be wrong to say that Turkey has generally been indifferent on the level of government policy except from movements of migration performed within the scope of population and settlement policies from time to time throughout the history. The fact that Foreigners and International Protection Law, which constitutes a legal basis concerning the asylum-seekers and refugees, has been introduced in 2013 reveals this indifference which has continued until lately.

As a result of the extensive migration waves and the humanitarian crisis occurred in the European continent during World War II, The Geneva Convention signed by United Nations General Assembly in 1951 still maintains it characteristic to be the main legal text which is taken as a reference about migration and refugee today⁶. That convention, which was for the European continent when it was first signed, started to involve all of the countries after 1967 Protocol. But Turkey, having geographic limitation because of the expansion that occurred with the effect of that additional protocol, declared that it will give refugee status only to the persons who come from the member countries of European Council.⁷ "This geographic limitation" state that Turkey never abandoned – and looks like it will not abandon in the near future – means an ambiguous future for the asylum-seekers and refugees in Turkey, which has deep effects in social, economic and psychosocial sense.

During the humanitarian migration waves caused by the full-scale wars and armed conflicts in the Middle East such as the Gulf War in Iraq, the regime shift in Iran, the occupation of Afghanistan, Turkey has been a shelter for the people of the neighbour countries. For instance, the extensive migration wave coming from Iran in 90s gave its place first to Iraqis and then to Afghans coming over Iran in 2000. Turkey had started to be a country that hosted more and more asylum-seeker/refugee by every single year, even before the extensive refugee flow caused by the civil war in Syria and as a response to the profiles changing in parallel to the politi-

6. For detailed information about the history of the refugee system in the world and the concepts, see also: "Uluslararası Mülteci Hukuku ve Türkiye". <http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/38/1882/19732.pdf> Date accessed: 27.05.2016

7. It is really difficult to access to the relevant issues about the number of the persons who have been given refugee status by Turkey and the countries they come from. For the issues in access since 2011, see also: <http://bianet.org/bianet/goc/131829-cenevre-sozlesmesi-60-yilinda> Date accessed: 27.05.2016

cal fractions and conflicts in the region in the course of time. The number of the people who have come from Middle East countries like Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and from African countries like Sudan, Kongo, Niger, etc. or Asian countries like Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and applied for international protection over Turkey has reached half-million.⁸

Turkey proclaimed the Foreigners and International Protection Law⁹, mentioned above, in 2013 and started to implement it in 2014. Although we can't say that Turkey has an extensive and protective migration/refuge system, it can be said that it now has a main legal document. Before that law proclaimed in 2013, refuge and asylum applications were held in a process run by the officials in Foreigners Branch on behalf of the Ministry of Interior, instead of administrative arrangements and civil officials, and that lead the refuge and asylum processes which are really critical to be conducted in a security-based way. Although the current situation doesn't paint a different picture, it shouldn't be overlooked that the existence of the new law as a legal basis text still fills an important gap. In the speculative sense, we can probably say that Turkey thought that it didn't have the obligation of offering refugee status to the persons who came from countries out of the European Council especially within the context of international protection because of the geographic limitation in 1967, and didn't see immigration and refuge as one of the most important agenda topics as it is a transition country in that sense. Within the "transition country" position it took, it saw only the residency duration in Turkey of the persons who applied for the international protection system and their legal position during that period as its responsibility and until 2013, it has conducted that responsibility with administrative and short-term regulations.

Although the enactment of a legislative regulation like the Foreigners and International Protection Law is an important step for Turkey to be involved in refuge and international protection

8. For more information about the migration and refugee date in Turkey, see: from "Göç Analiz Raporu 2014" report prepared by TOHAV (Toplum and Hukuk Araştırmaları Vakfı),

9. For detailed information about Foreigners and International Protection Law proclaimed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, see: http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/yukk_327_328_329_icerik Date accessed: 27.05.2016

system, there are still some unsolved problems in practice, and as many experts mention, there are some articles which can cause abuse of rights, too.¹⁰ However, we can say that the most important change which came with the Foreigners and International Protection Law is the establishment of the Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management and the shift of the application process from the hands of the Security unit to that civil directorate.¹¹

But Turkey is still a transition country; the applicants for international protection still have to live an uncertain life, in some examples for almost 10 years, until their application process concludes; the economic, social and psychosocial needs of the persons who come to Turkey to access a safer life are concealed. So although the Foreigners and International Protection Law is an important step, the fact that only a small part of such a multi-dimensional subject is left to legal infrastructure regulation is far away from being satisfactory and efficient.

As it can be seen with a brief look to the current picture, Directorate General of Migration Management started to take over the whole international protection application process step by step over the Foreigners and International Protection Law since 2015, and it plans to take over the whole in a couple of years. But, today, the application system carries on in the same procedure. The other most important actor of the current system is UNHCR. UNHCR's role, in the process which has been carried out from 90s to today and will continue in the same way for some more years ahead, briefly is to determine if the applicants for international protection system can have the refugee status within the context of Geneva Convention, and in the event of realization of the status, to place the refugees to a third country. As a result of the authorization special to Turkey, the legal status of the persons and the procedures they have to adapt during the period they stay in Turkey is determined by Turkey, while executing the operations of refugee status

10. You can check the other articles and reports given in the footnotes for a comprehensive assesment about the positive and negative aspects of the Foreigners and International Protection Law.

11. You can see this link for detailed information about the Directorate General of Migration Management: http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik/hakkimizda_308_309 Date accessed: 27.05.2016. You can also check the link for the report of 2015 operations: http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/_2015_g%C3%B6%C3%A7_y%C4%B111%C4%B1k_rapor_pdf Date accessed: 27.05.2016

determination and resettlement to a third country. The applicants have to stay in the “satellite cities” determined by the Ministry of Interior and give signature at regular intervals until the application process concludes.¹²

But we should make an important note here: the process mentioned above is valid for the asylum-seekers coming from countries except from Syria. For Syrians, “Temporary Protection Regime”, which is in the scope of the Foreigners and International Protection Law but gives a different status, has been in use since 2013, and this regime brings different right and service areas, in relation to the law that persons who come from other countries are liable to.

Above, we tried to draw the general frame concerning Turkey’s situation and refugee system. So we draw the background picture while mentioning about the difficulties that LGBTİ refugees face in Turkey.

We can define the situation of uncertainty in Turkey, which is valid for all asylum seekers/ refugees and seen as a big issue, as the biggest problem for LGBTİ refugees as well. The most significant characteristic of a traumatic situation is that it destroys the inner safety and control feeling of a person and takes the means of establishing them again away. In that sense, the first step to deal with a traumatic situation is re-establishing the control feeling about one’s own life. This uncertainty that LGBTİ refugees, who escaped from traumatic experiences like violence, torture, death threat, etc. and came to Turkey, experience for a long and uncertain time period, in a situation deprived of fundamental rights, without knowing when and how the applications will conclude and without having the necessary financial sources to survive, is a situation which shakes everything to its foundations.

Another fact that fosters this uncertainty is that Turkey doesn’t have a protective system for LGBTİ individuals in legal and social sense, and that the limited life area of the refugees gets even more narrower for LGBTİ refugees. For LGBTİ refugees who faces discrimination in multi-dimensional form, not only the inadequacy of the law on paper but also the dependency of the existing ones

12. To understand thoroughly how the process works for asylum-seekers/refugees, you can reach to the link of the comprehensive evaluation made by Volkan Gorenadag – Amnesty Refugee Rights Coordinator: http://www.amnesty.org.tr/uploads/Docs/1537-hayat_saglik_soylesi.pdf Date accessed: 27.05.2016

on arbitrary treatments make the discrimination iraparable. We are talking about a discrimination which immobilize LGBTI refugees in using the rights – although they are limited – they have had as a asylum-seeker/refugee in time or in operating the relevant mechanisms when they can't use those rights. This can be read as another reflection of the reality lived by Turkish LGBTI individuals as well. Likewise, another part of this discrimination extends along to social structure and debars the LGBTI refugees from the social solidarity networks that they establish with their fellow countrymen both in the country they reside and in the diaspora. This means staying out of the crucial social solidarity which emerges in social circumstances during which the legal mediums underwhelm in solving the vital issues. Micro-solidarity which helps a member of the society not starve easily turns into an alienation mechanism that makes LGBTI refugees homeless and starving.

Access to health services¹³ is one of the most critical issues for refugees. It might be very difficult to benefit from Turkey's complicated and profit-driven (in recent years) health system, especially when specific treatments are needed. Language barrier is also a source of problem for access to health services. Although the hospitals started to provide translation services in Arabic for the last years, both the limited number of hospitals and the existence of Arabic as the only language translated cause the language barrier to stay as an important issue for refugees in accessing health services. For instance, although there is a phone line provided by the Ministry of Health, that gives translation services in many different languages, doctors mostly don't want to use that line during the examination that varies between 5 and 10 minutes. In addition to the general issues mentioned above, LGBTI refugees also face problems like difficulty in accessing to health services that LGBTI individuals need specifically (sexual health services, hormone therapies, gender reassignment services, etc.) and exposure to gender-based discrimination in access to health services. Specific health services that LGBTIs need are seen as a luxury on both social

13. You can reach to the link of the "Türkiye'de Mültecilerin Kabul Koşulları: Hak ve Hizmetlere Erişimleri / Uydu Kentler İzleme ve Raporlama Projesi" report which was prepared by Solidarity with Refugees Association (Mülteci-Der) and provides a comprehensive evaluation about the problems experiences by the Syrian and not-Syrian refugees in Turkey in accessing to basic rights and services: <http://www.multeci.org.tr/belgeler.aspx> Date accessed: 27.05.2016

and institutional level and take part in one of the lowest part of the service chain. Besides, not only on the social or institutional level but also on the level of NGOs working on migration/refuge, access to hormone therapy can be on the bottom of the chain compared to a chronic illness.

As we underlined for several times above, now, there are two different legal systems in Turkey, operating for asylum seekers/refugees who come from Syria and countries except from Syria (Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.). Two different legal systems mean not only two different legal status but also different opportunities and possibilities in access to rights and services. In that sense, access to right to work also differs very much for Syrian and not Syrian refugees. Together with the new law enacted in January 2016, Syrians who live in Turkey officially had the right to work in specific business lines. Although it hasn't come into effect widely yet, we can say that legal regulation fills an important gap. But, for the asylum-seekers and refugees who come from countries except from Syria, it is still impossible to work in Turkey officially. Asylum seekers/refugees who come from countries except from Syria, for almost 10 years and Syrians, since 2013, had to work informally in manual labors, especially in textile and construction field and it is still the same. As they are deprived of any social or legal assurance, they had to and still have to work for low salaries, without any possibility to apply a legal way in case of violence, abuse or occupational accident. When we take the fact that LGBTİ refugees are generally deprived of social support into consideration, it becomes more important that they should work and earn their own financial power, but in addition to the difficulties mentioned above, LGBTİ refugees face situations like finding no job in business fields which constitute a wider business market and require physical power, exposure to gender-based violence and abuse at work, and not being able to ask for their rights. Limited access to limited labour market may force LGBTİ individuals, especially the gays and trans-women to work as sex workers and make them open to sexual violence. For LGBTİ refugees who experience almost the same difficulties experienced by sex workers in general in Turkey about accessing to their rights, in the event of exposure to violence, the rate to apply to legal ways is very low, because of the fear for getting deported.

Although all of the problems we tried to mention above are the ones which effect all the asylum-seekers/refugees who live in Turkey deeply in general sense, LGBTI refugees also face the distinctive problems of being LGBTI and refugee, because of the rooted discrimination against LGBTI individuals in social and political approach. For that reason, it is of vital importance for public institutions and NGOs to take the socio-political, distinctive situation of LGBTI refugees into consideration while designing and practicing the policies and support programs for refugees.

Turkey is a transition country for all asylum-seekers/refugees independently of the number of the years they live here. But for LGBTI refugees, it is certainly a transition country. Although any element about sexual orientation or gender identity is not taken as part of crime in Turkey, not only Turkish LGBTI individuals but also the LGBTI refugees are affected from the social structure which has been getting more conservative in recent years and the political climate which has been getting a way from being rights and equality-based in a similar way. For that reason, in contrast to other asylum-seekers/refugees, staying in Turkey is not seen as an option generally. Placement to a third country which steps in in that condition and mentioned generally above is nearly the only option for LGBTI refugees, and also almost all LGBTI refugees want to reach to a safe third country legally or illegally. The third countries designated for LGBTI refugees are mainly the countries like Canada, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Switzerland and Germany, where the social climate and rights are relatively better and more comprehensive.

But there will be two main issue lines in near future waiting for LGBTI refugees and so Turkish LGBTI organizations, especially about the placement to third countries. While the first one concerns LGBTI refugees who wait to be replaced in a third country by having refugee status, the second one will concern LGBTI refugees who go to Europe in illegal ways.

As we mentioned in the first parts of the article, replacement to a third country is a process which is executed by means of UNHCR and during that process, UNHCR bases on the refugee status criterias determined in the scope of Geneva Convention¹⁴. Although the

14. To see how the process works technically in Turkey, see: <http://www.refugeeinturkey.org/Turkiyede-ilti->

human group involved in that definition expanded within today's conditions, the main logic is that the person needs international protection system as he/she is under the risk of being exposed to death, torture and humiliating practices under the conditions of the country he/she lives because of his/her one characteristic, idea and belief; living in war or conflict zones; and not being able to benefit from a legal and social protection mechanism in the country he/she now lives. In that extent, LGBTİ refugees who live in specific countries are also determined as under international protection system and as "Fragile Application/Documen". This means that they are among the groups whose refuge procedures must be conducted in the quickest way. But as all refugees, they are supposed to prove that they are under the risk of being exposed to death or torture and violent practices in the country to which they flee, and they have no other option except from international protection. For everyone who come to Turkey and apply for refugee status here, this proval period is very distressful, but for LGBTİ refugees, even more distressful. Because they are supposed to prove not only their story but also their gender orientation and/or gender identity. This proval process has often been reported to cause violation of private life and second traumatic processes especially for LGBTİ refugees. Until today, as a result of long efforts and education process, important progress has been made about how the status determination interviews should be done with LGBTİ refugees. The first risk shows up at that point; the Directorate General of Migration Management which was founded together with the Foreigners and International Protection Law is planning to take over the all status determination and replacement to a third country procedures from UNHCR and to carry out them itself, starting with Syrians, for the period ahead. At that point, as being an LGBTİ individual is not among the fragile application criterias under the Foreigners and International Protection Law, how it will be evaluated by the Directorate General of Migration Management in practice and to where the process will evolve is still uncertain.

The second risk we mention above, again, takes its source from the uncertainty of the law and the execution of them. According to the Readmission Agreement between EU and Turkey, which was

LGBTI REFUGEES

carried into effect actively in April 2016, it is predicted that asylum-seekers/refugees who pass to Europe in illegal ways will be sent back to Turkey. It is known that LGBTI refugees are among the ones who are sent back according to this agreement which was carried into effect in spite of having many legal problematics and violating fundamental rights and it is still uncertain what will happen to the refugees who have been sent back. In that sense, there is an important risk factor in front of us.

Today, 52 million people escape from conflicts and wars and set on journeys as dangerous as their own countries to access to a safe life. And the countries they want to arrive respond by raising their borders. Turkey, which promises an uncertain future for the refugees, is designated as a “safe country” and the refugees who take up the challenge are sent back. For all refugees generally, LGBTI refugees specifically and us –Turkish LGBTI individuals-, it is not a wrong detection to say that we are on a complicated and difficult way. But, of course, the fight is not over as well.

This article was written to offer a social and legal background to make the stories told by the LGBTI refugees themselves in that book, and to illustrate the storied told, rather than offering solution suggestions. I hope it reaches its goal.

Ozlem Colak

Lambdaistanbul LGBTI Solidarity
Association/
Volunteer in Refugee Commission

“It is enough for a person to go through the first experience of uprooting, to become uprooted forever.”

Mourid Barghout

RAMTIN ZIGORAT

Congrats To The Muslims!

My name is Ramtin Zigorat, it means “omnipresent”. I am 26 years old. I am an Iranian Azeri who grew up in Tehran. When I was 10, my family moved from Tabriz to Tehran. I lived in Tehran for 16 years. I had been feeling something different in me since my childhood. When I was 16, I understood that I am a gay and realized what it meant. Then a new struggle opened up for my life: being a LGBTI individua...

Apart from that, I had another issue which was confusing me too much; I was questioning the presence of God. I was the child of a multi-sect and multi-faith family. It was confusing me so much that I visited a müşavir.¹⁵ I asked him: “I have feelings for men, what should I do about it?” He forwarded me to a psychologist in the state hospital. From there, they sent me to some other places.

15. Guidance teacher in Iran.

They checked if I was a trans. They told me that I was “a real man” and I needed medicine. My family didn’t know that I had visited a psychologist. I had arranged everything with müşavir. “We will give you medicine and you will be a heterosexual. You will feel for women,” they said. I started using the pills and after six months, they caused depression together with dysmnesia. The pills didn’t have positive effects as the psychologists said, I was still feeling for men.

I was crying till dawn, my family didn’t understand why I was in that situation. I mentioned to the doctor about the depression and dysmnesia. He said that that kind of pills causes side effects in the beginning but I would be ok in time. “You just started using them. In two years you will be a heterosexual. Homosexuality is a hoax of America and Zionists, there is not such thing in Islam. They mislead our Muslim kids. You should continue the pills to be ok.” he said. I continued using them but I started feeling worse by every new day. Then my mother learnt that I was using pills but she didn’t know why. She took me together with the pills to the doctor and yelled at him: “Why did you give these pills to my son. He can’t sleep and cries in his dream.” I told her that I was gay and quitted the pills. “You will recover soon. This happened beacuse when you were small, you always played with your sister and other girls. You are a real lion boy, you are my lion.” she said. I sat next to her for two days listening to the stories she told about my childhood crying. When I was a child, my father and brother used to beat me. They wouldn’t take me out with them and I couldn’t resist. My mother blamed herself about it. “My personal issues are the reason behind your situation.” she said. According to her, I was having those issues because I was keeping myself away from religion and faith. I started to get closer to religion and to pray. One year passed like this but there was no change about my feelings for men. As I grew up, I started feeling for my friends. Other boys were beating me since I liked men. “Are you nancy-boy? Stay away from me.” they said. I narrowly escaped two rape attempts in the school toilet. I was afraid. There were some boys I liked and I was looking at them, they were reacting back: “Why are staring at me?”

I had many problems in my family life. My father didn't see me as "a real man". In families like mine, it is very important and praised thing to be "a real man". Especially for women, it is very praised to be like a man. It is hard for families to bear a "different" man. I lost half of my teeth, my brother and father did it to me. They wrecked my mouth, they beat my mother as well for a couple of times, because of me. One I had sex and my brother understood. He beat me so bad that I lost my conscious for two days and at the end of those days, I opened my eyes in a hospital room. I was always asking by myself, "Why are they doing this to me?" My brother and father didn't let me out generally, I didn't want to go out because I was too afraid. I was spending my time at home and in the garden.

The last year of high school, I visited an internet cafe for the first time in my life. I learnt about Yahoo Massanger. I was surfing in LGBTI chat rooms. There were gay chat rooms but I didn't know the meaning of that word yet. The only thing I knew was that I was a man who liked men. All the people around me referred being a gay as an illness and it was how I saw it as well.

When I started studying in university, a new life started for me. I could go out. My home was away from the university. It took four hours a day to go to the school and come back home. As I didn't inform my family about the timetable of my lessons, I left home in the morning and came back at night. One of those days, I attended a LGBTI part in Tehran. Only gays and transsexuals were there. I was happy among gays. I saw that I was not the only one, there were others like me. But the questioning continued, "God, why am I like this, why am I not able to have kids?" The places of the gay gatherings were checked by sheria officials. I was beaten by them for once or twice. Among the family members, the only one I trusted was my mother. I started to work as a waiter. I was spending some nights in that place and it was a reason to be beaten by my brother. When my mother tried to defend me, he was using violence on her as well. Unfortunately, there is no place for women in our society. I started to stay in my uncle's home, he knew that I was gay. One day, we sat down and talked. He told me what I was going through but I should never give up my school and my family.

I wrote off my father. When he talks to me he always swears.

My brother says, “You are not my brother. I don’t want a gay brother.” I have three sisters, they call me from time to time and tell me that they miss me. They tell me that they cry looking at my photos. It is a beautiful feeling to know there are people who are crying for you.

One day, a gay came to the cafeteria I was working at. I liked him but later I learnt that he had a partner. He invited me to his home to have a cup of tea and I learnt that he was a LGBTI activist. He identified himself as Muslim and studying on this theme. He was examining the versicles. He told me that what was written in those versicles about Lut and Levad are not about the homosexuals but for the rapists. He sent the content of the versicles to important mullahs but never got any response. Later he introduced me to others. They were web-blog writers. I also started writing a blog. I was using a nickname which means “the boy with rain”. Writing blog made me happy but within that period, I was raped twice. In the first case, there were five people, they beat me to death, raped and cut my hair. One day, I got out of the school shuttle in the square and saw one of the transsexuals I knew sitting on the ground. She was wounded. I walked towards her, nobody took care of her. At that moment, my heart hurt. We took a car to take her home. The neighbourhood she lived was very dangerous. I went into that house afraid, I left her to her room and went out to the garden. Suddenly, three people grasped my arm, took me to the room and tied my hands and arms...

After that I couldn’t go out for a month, I couldn’t go to school and didn’t tell my family about it. If I had told them about it, it would be me that they found guilty. If I had told the police about it, it would be me that they found guilty. Because I was a homosexual. In Tehran, if you are a homosexual, you have no rights, that’s it... After one month, I started to get together with my friends again. Wherever we –homosexuals- go, a restaurant or cafeteria, was closed down after a while...

One day, I argued with my family. I wanted to take some fresh air. I walked for two and half hour. There was a park called Tullip Park, we used to take walks behind it. There, two Besic¹⁶ asked me

16. The subbranch of Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps. It is consisted of voluntary young people working for state.

what I was doing and I told them that I was walking around. They took me to Besiç's room, Besiçs have rooms in mosques. They talked to me for a while. Then, they left me with three people. "Either you have sex with us or we send you to jail." they said. They raped me in the mosque. Congrats to the Muslims!

I stayed at home for three week. I was crying all the time but couldn't tell about it to anyone. I was afraid of both my family and the world outside. Noone can go against Besiçs. I gathered in LG-BTI groups again but this time with a higher motivation. We made meetings every week, there were new comers. The top topic of the meetings were that being a transexual or a homosexual isn't an illness. In Iran, homosexuals are encouraged to be transexual because homosexuality is regarded as an illness. And if you become a transexual, you are cured. We started to get ready for May 17 International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. Our friends were leaving pamphlets in front of the houses and on the cars at night. They had to hide themselves very well because the moment sheria officials saw them, they could have been under the risk of death. My friends thought that I was crazy person but I was not afraid of death, I distributed pamphlets during day time. I stayed away from people who looked like fanatic Muslims. Some of the people who took the pamphlets were swearing behind me. Many times, they shouted "Catch that fag!" behind me and I ran away. I was very happy in those days. I could see that people were reading those pamphlets. I distributed pamphlets day and night from 10 May to 21st. We arranged National Day for LGBTI in Iran. That day, I carried a LGBTI flag on my shoulder and walked for 4 kilometres. When they asked what flag was it, I told them that it was LGBTI flag (if the person wasn't covered). If otherwise, I told them that it was a flag of an event for kids. Because it was a game of life. Two years ago, we took photos for May 17, we held meetings one week before it. We made earrings and necklaces with rainbow colors. We wanted to keep those objects in our hands and show to everyone on May 17. It was a difficult wish but an important step for future. At the end of the day, while going back home, I was still distributing pamphlets and sheria officials caught me. I said that I was distributing them for money, I didn't know what they were about. I said that I was not quilty and they accepted. They took my phone

number. “Tomorrow we will call you and you’ll come here.” they said. They took my address. I couldn’t go home because of fear. I called my friends and told them what happened. After that incident, I have never seen my friends again. I still don’t know where they are and what happened to them. I was so stressed, walking around. I visited my grandmother, my friends. In the end, I went to a hotel and my name was registered. From there I met a man who arranged escape operation for LGBTIs. He was supposed to take me from Iran to Turkey. I still don’t know how but they caught me there. Sipah¹⁷ tied my hands and eyes. I said that I didn’t know those men, I was just touring around. They took me to Ikhtilat¹⁸ and torture and beating started. I stayed there for 10 days. They beat me to make me talk and recorded the torture. They shut me in a 2 square meter cell. I don’t remember how many days I spent in that cell, I was unconscious. Maybe 6 or 7 days... They gave me only water, my hands and legs and eyes were tied. I died and returned to life a thousand time in that one week. I urinated on my pant cause I couldn’t go to restroom. The smell was choking me. They didn’t even wonder why I didn’t talk. They played Azan in the cell and I hated its sound. They only talked to me with words like fag or bastard. They took me to court and I was sent to prison. The first time I entered to the jail was very beautiful. First, they put me to the ward of the old prisoners, they were either condemned to death or lifer. I entered the ward and in two minutes I was all naked. One of them were kissing, the other was biting. Two soldiers came and took me out. They gave me a shalwar and took me to the ward of 16 years olds. They were guilty of murder and my “guilt” was to be homosexual. They made me do all the necessary work in the ward. Someone gave a phone card and I called my mother. I said, “Mom, I am dead.” I was crying too heavily that I couldn’t speak. My mother asked, “Where are you? What happened to you?” One of the relatives of my father was a sheria official and he had a voice. My mother paid him 85.000 TL and they released me after 2 months. I stayed at home for 6 months, I never touched the phone, not even once. After 6 months, I started to call my homosexual friends. Noone wanted to contact me and I found them right. It could have

17. Sheria soldiers in Iran.

18. Police Information Center in Iran.

LGBTI REFUGEES

been wrong for them to get into contact with me. I started to work in a home for the aged. In the meantime, I got exterritorial status from military service. After my mother's death, I became much more lonelier. Only my sisters were talking to me, my brother and my father were only swearing at me. Because I was a gay and they thought that was terrible. They took one of the old people to home and offered me to take of him. I accepted. That family helped me so much, especially in the psychological sense. They knew I was homosexual and they never consider it as a problem. That family and my uncle helped me to come to Turkey.

I came to Turkey on May 17. After 3 days of my arrival, I went to Ankara and got registered to ASAM¹⁹. I was sent to Yalova to reside. But I started to live in Istanbul because there was nobody I knew in Yalova. I had a friend in Istanbul. I came here in a very bad mood. My fears were still alive for two weeks, I couldn't even go out. Then one day, I met Zeliş in Taksim. She behaved so friendly to me, made me meet with the association. Until her death, we were very good friends. Her death depressed me deeply. ASAM Istanbul helped me in many sense. Işın Su who is working in ASAM always supported me. Unfortunately, I haven't been through nice things in Turkey as well. They stole my money, my phone, I was raped and neither the police nor the government didn't do anything. I worked in 2-3 different places and they didn't pay me because I didn't have work permit. I was penniless, I was starving. I can't say bad but it is not very good here. The only thing I know is that I will work for LGBTI movement fearlessly.

I have been through so many difficult things as a homosexual that I don't want any person to suffer just because he/she is different.

19. Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants.

SUMA

If You Bring A LGBTI Friend Of Yours, We Will Release You

Hi, I was born in Egypt. I spent most of my life there. I have two brothers and one sister. My mother is alive, my father died 6 years ago. I realized that I was different from other people when I was a child. But I was hidden even from myself because I was thinking that there was no other like me. When I was 14, I learnt that there was a LGBTI community in Egypt and it was the first time I understood that I was not alone. I attended to that community and made friends. One day, while I was talking about a subject with a friend from LGBTI organization, my father heard it. He understood everything that day. He got really angry and started beating me. I suffered from head trauma and stayed in hospital for 28 days, six days in intense care unit. After that I had to go back to home because I had nowhere else to go. My father and I didn't get into any contact. My brother must have been affected from the things my

LGBTI REFUGEES

father told so much that he also didn't talk to me. But my mother believed in me, she thought that it was not like my father thought. It started to get really difficult for me to stay at home...

I passed the university exam and started to study law. I met with new LGBTI organizations in university and started to attend to the activities and studies. I made new friends who understood me but life was hard on us. We were exposed to police and state brutality. In Egypt, it was enough even to say "I am an LGBTI individual". One day while touring on the street, I came across police check. They took me to the police station even though they checked my identity card and saw that I hadn't been involved in any crime. There they asked me many questions to get the answer that I was homosexual but I didn't say anything. Because I knew that they would take me court. I could take the risk of any torture but shouldn't reveal myself. After my graduation, I left home and rented out my own place. I started working.

Although I studied law, I started working as an executive in a commercial firm. I couldn't work as a lawyer, it was difficult for me. I worked for 6,5 years. It was the period that Egypt started to get politically complicated. It was September, 2011. Everything was getting worse. The voice of rebellion and revolution was getting higher and we, LGBTI individuals asked for our rights. So we were on the streets but then unfortunately, we saw again that what was regarded right for LGBTIs were torture and prison.

In 2012, Mursi was overthrown by Sisi. Wich hunt started for LGBTIs. It was getting worse and worse. In 2013, I was taken to Police Station and beaten. They broke my arm in 3 different spots. At the end I fainted. One of my friends helped me to get a lawyer. My lawyer thought that I was dead when he first saw me. The police told him that he could take me now. I had a 6 hour operation in hospital. Of course there wasn't a legal basis behind the things I had been through but those were the days that noone cared about law. When I woke up and saw my arm, I was really happy and started laughing. The people around thought I lost my mind. But I was really grateful that I was alive.

In 2015, they took my closest friend, who is also my workmate, to the station. As they did to me, they tortured him as well. He couldn't resist enough and confessed. But this time, police came

with an offer: “If you bring a LGBTI friend of yours, we will release you.” And he confessed my name and address. When I had been taken into custody, they had come to me with the same offer but I hadn’t accepted it. They came home but I was out. My neighbour called me to inform. The police broke my door, entered my house, told negative things about me to my neighbours and told them that I was transsexual. I sent one of my lawyer friends to learn the situation in detail. He gave bribe to the police to learn everything. After he told me what was going on, I couldn’t go back home ever again. And they beat another friend so bad that he just died there...

They took everything from me, my closest friend, my life, my job. I decided to leave Egypt. I didn’t know where to go, I stayed with my friend for 15 days. My friends suggested me to go to Lebanon but I thought that it was also a very homophobic place. I had been in Turkey before so I decided to come to Turkey. I tried to get visa for 3 days. I paid almost 2000TL. After my arrival, I had problems again in another sense. First I came to Ankara and tried to find out if there was a place for refugees. I was afraid, always crying. I knew no one. My baggage arrived in Turkey. I was told to go to Istanbul. I could go anywhere, the only thing I cared was my safety. I came to Istanbul.

Turkey was a bridge to reach to Europe, but I didn’t know where to stay here. They told me to go to Istanbul and to ASAM. I went there and told all the things happened. I asked for help and they told me that I had to work. I went to police station to get identity card. They told me to bring a receipt for rent. Otherwise it was not possible to get identity card. When I first came, I had sold everything. I had only a little bit of money left. I spent almost all of my money to rent an apartment.

I went to the station, got my identity card. I had spent all of my money. It was Ramadan period, I was fasting and very hungry. For 5 days, I only drank water. I didn’t have money for transportation to go to ASAM. I had internet connection on my phone and one of my workmates in Egypt connected to me. He called me everyday but I was too shy to ask for money. At the end of 5 days, my voice must have sounded so fragile that he asked me what was wrong and I started crying. I told him everything. He said I should

LGBTI REFUGEES

have told him before and I said that I didn't want to upset anyone. He sent me some money. Until then I was able to eat and drink. I bought smart ticket for transportation and went back to ASAM. They told me that they couldn't do much for me, the interviews for abroad were supposed to start after 9 months at the earliest. I had come to Turkey in June so my interview would be in April. Even though I informed them that it was a long time, they said they couldn't do anything for me.

They gave me only 80 TL for 9 months. I was going to the Police Department for fingerprint once every two weeks. But the real problem happened in the last December. In the Police Department, they told me that I had to leave Istanbul. I had to go to another city. But I didn't have money to go.

I was in shock. When I asked why, they told me that it was because of the law and procedure. I went to Usak. Usak Police Department asked for rental contact to make my registration again. "I will stay on the street. I don't have a home to go, I don't have money to rent one." I said. "Then, there is nothing we can do." they said and sent me.

Usak is a very conservative city. I was on the streets. I walked on the streets for almost 5 hours. While walking, I had transphobic attack. I went back to the Police Department. Even though I told them that I was exposed to violence, they didn't do anything. I came back to Istanbul. I needed to wait for 7 days for identification application and I had to make a new rental contact they asked for. I borrowed some money from a friend and went back to Usak. I stayed in a hotel. I gave them the receipt. They sent me back saying "Come after 6 months, then we will give you the identification card."

Desperately, I came back to Istanbul. I was still waiting for identification. Now I work in Istanbul. I am residing a rental house. My friend from Egypt sends me money from time to time. I am not a sex worker and I don't want to be. I don't want to see being a sex worker even as an option.

In Istanbul, we have Refugee LGBTI community. We make meetings and talk about the issues we face. I also attend to them. And I am the leader/speaker of the meetings. As a community, we have projects, we work on them. We are connected to many other

LGBTİ organizations. We carry out work and study for Refugee LGBTİs who had to come to Turkey to avoid them experiencing the same problems. We study especially on residing, living, health and legal transactions. I teach Turkish, English and Computer lessons to make the live and the adaptation process of the newcomers easier. In addition, we are in solidarity with each in moral and material sense. Recently, one of our transexual friends was assaulted by the family and we supported her.

I have been through many things since I come here. I saw that Turkey is also pretty far behind in terms of LGBTİ rights. I was very happy and excited when I heard that there would be LGBTİ Pride marching. But I was very upset after I saw the attacks of the police. The government is not concerned with the issues LGBTİ individuals face.

NADIR

The Police Created An Army Of Guards With A Series Of Cars In Front Of The Door Of The Party Building

I am Nadir. Before the Syrian War broke out, I was living in Homs and studying tourism. I started to identify myself as an homosexual at the age of 12 or 13. Those years were the time of intense denial but my sexual life had started. I had psychological support from the age of 14 to 21 because I was denying my sexual orientation. It was really a hard process for me. I had medical treatment. I was exposed to a sort of “treatment” methods which were really a torture, like electroshock and showing me first a porno and then the photos of my father to create pangs of remorse in me. I also went to a sheik. He promised to “heal” me in six months. After

four months, I was healed according to him. He charged me to heal other gays. After two months, we started to have an affair. I had made researches about homosexuality only from Arabic sources. They were all reviling about homosexuality. Then I checked English sources and of course there came the process of relief.

I learned that first of all, I should be at peace with myself. I met a young woman at my latest visit to psychologist. We got close, we kissed but I didn't want to have sexual intercourse. She asked me to meet again. When I told to the psychologist about it, he said "Congrats! You are a heterosexual now." After the session, I was feeling a great pressure on me and suddenly I started to shout "I am gay! I am gay!" in the middle of the street. I felt relieved. And I never visited the psychologist again. Homs is a really conservative city. "Everything is against homosexuals". After the period of co-education during elementary school, gender discrimination in education starts at the age of 12 – 13. Women and men are separated in different schools. We were 32 students in secondary school, I had sexual intercourse with 29 boys from my class. Most of us were having sexual intercourse. And when we grew up, we continued our lives as heterosexuals as if nothing had happened. According to Syrian law, homosexuality is "against the nature". So police oppression is very high. When they catch you, you are exposed to threat and violence. This is an act which is performed only against homosexuals.

There were gay parties. Attitude of the police is again indecisive. If there is someone among the organizers of the party familiar to "important" someone, the police don't interfere in, they even make up an army of bodyguards in front of the party house. If the ones in the party don't have any acquaintance with the authority, they interfere in the party regardless of the fact that everything is "proper". I organized a party at the age of 18, there were no drugs, no sex. It was a normal party. Police left the place because they didn't understand that it was a gay party. If you are a gay, you always have to stay hidden in underground, in closet.

The riot at the beginning of the Syrian War was the beginning of the revolution. LGBTIs attended to the revolution. Then the government announced the "State of Emergency Law". With the law, police had the right to shoot on the civils. So the civils began

LGBTI REFUGEES

to bear arms to protect themselves. Free army groups evolved into Nusra and Daesh. After the revolution, two of my friends were killed. One was found stabbed on nape. The family was afraid and instead of pressing the issue, they tried so hard to cover it up. The other friend escaped from the army. We had no information about his death. The regime is dangerous not only for gays, but also for the Islamic groups, even more dangerous for them. Because homosexuality is against sharia.

After escaping from Syria, I went to Egypt first. I stayed there for one year. I experienced the revolution also in there. I escaped to Jordan. It was totally full of Islamic groups. I went to university in Egypt and studies psychology. Some Egyptians were attacking the Syrians. They attacked me two times as well. I was not safe in Jordan. Islamic groups were attacking in the middle of the street, shouting "I'll kill you". I left Jordan on March 5, 2014. I asked myself to go to Egypt or Turkey. Egypt was cheap and the language was Arabic. Turkey was expensive and they speak Turkish there. Then I came to Turkey. My friends hosted me in a small house in Tarlabası for 45 days. Then I moved to another place where I would be living with Syrians. But I had problems with them. They didn't want to talk about politics, but only about religion. I moved to Sisli for 2 months. I applied for YDS but didn't get the necessary grade. I started working and had to leave the school.

Finally, Turkish people behave very bad to Syrians. While working and distributing flyers on the street, people come close smiling and after they ask where we are from. When they learn that we are Syrians, their face expression change and they react. This is very humiliating. I want to move to Norway and continue my study on psychology.

ILYAS

ISIS Opened Fire On Us

My name is Ilyas, I was born in Damascus, the capital city of Syria. I am 21 years old and Assyrian. I lived in Syria for 20 years. I grew up in a poor neighborhood so I didn't go to school. I studied only primary school. I had to leave my education after primary school because my parents were very old. I was the only one at home who could work, I had to take care of the family. I stayed in church for a while. They educated us there. I learned English and German in the church. My parents and siblings are still living in Syria. And one of my sisters lives in Austria, Vien. I didn't want to do the military service when my age arrived because it was the civilian war period. So I started to live like a deserter and to stay in different places temporarily. When the war started, there happened many raids and clashes. I was in Damascus. ISIS (DA-ESH), Esad and Free Syrian Army were fighting each other. I was staying in my friend's house as I was deserter. We were playing cards, suddenly we heard a rumble. As were used to that kind of noise, first we didn't care about it. But then the door was opened

LGBTI REFUGEES

and ISIS militants opened fire on us. I don't remember the rest. Later on I learned that all of my friends were dead. ISIS militants thought that we were all dead, so left home. Then FSA militants came to our place and checked if we were alive. As I was still alive, they delivered me to Jordan government and then to a hospital in Jordan. I was in intense care unit for 9 days. My total recovery period lasted for 1 month. I learned all of the process from the soldiers there. I couldn't go back to Syria after my recovery. So I went to Lebanon. I stayed there for 1 year and worked in a hotel. In many places including Lebanon, Syrians are not wanted. Lebanese government started to ask for some arbitrary documents as many more Syrians began to enter the country day by day. We had to buy many of these documents. So like many other Syrians living in Lebanon, I also had many difficulties. After I figured out that I couldn't live in Lebanon any longer, I came to Istanbul, Turkey. I worked in a restaurant. I worked in Taksim for almost 2 weeks. After that I had to quit my job because of some private reasons. I identify myself as bisexual. I had no courage to do anything when I was in Syria. I was interested in men but like other homosexuals in Syria, I kept it a secret. Because homosexuality was not accepted in the neighbourhood I lived. People hated homosexuals. I kept all of my feelings as a secret in myself. After I came here, the situation changed a bit and I had some relationships. The perception of the society about bisexuality as being "indecisive" or having "the wish to be together with everyone" is very wrong. But I am trying not to care too much about it. It has been several months since I came to Istanbul so I don't have a wide range of acquaintances. Unfortunately, there is strong prejudice against LGBTI individuals here as well. For now, I want to live here and if I have the chance, I want to bring my mother and siblings to Istanbul. I talked to them almost everyday and I really miss them. I want to live freely without keeping anything about myself as a secret.

MARTHA

Then I Realized That Homophobia And Transphobia Don't Belong To A Specific Religion

Hello, my name is Martha. I was born in the city of Arog, Iran. I am 29 years old. I identify myself as a transgender. I didn't have operation. According to the law in Iran, I am a transgender. In Iran, if you want to change your identity, you have to get operation first. That is one of the reasons behind my escape from Iran.

I started to study constructional engineering after high school in Iran. I experienced physical and psychological violence because I had long hair. I quited university after 2 – 3 months because I couldn't resist the oppression. I had experienced similar issues in primary school. I was forcing myself to look more “masculine” just to be able to continue my education.

I felt empty after quitting university. As I wasn't open to my family, they were blaming me for being irresponsible. I couldn't

LGBTI REFUGEES

resist the oppression any longer and decided to go into the military service. But after 10-15 days, I ran away from the service. When they learned about my escape, my family started to oppress me more. They oppressed me to go back to service, but for me it wasn't even a small possibility to go back. I didn't feel belonging to there. Anyhow I went back to the service by force of my family and finished it.

After the service, I went to the doctor, but they kept telling me about the operation process. Thinking that I was the only one who could help myself and maybe that situation was temporary, I decided to get married. After the marriage, I was always the foolish, irresponsible "husband". After a while, I decided to divorce. I told my personal history and my wish to divorce to my wife. She didn't cause me any problem, we divorced.

I was too confused and didn't want to live in Iran. In Iran, my whole life was like keeping a secret. In fact, in Iran, the government doesn't embrace the transexuals, it is just a lie and someone who doesn't have an operation can't get a new identity card. In Iran, someone who is gay, lesbian or transgender can't express his/her identity. For someone like me, who is a man by identity but a woman by appearance, life would be really hard there. I could be considered as a terrorist.

I decided to leave Iran and went to Armenia. I made a trans friend there. She told me that the life and the possibility to find a job was very difficult for LGBTI individuals in Armenia. Armenia is smaller than Turkey, I thought that I would be feeling safer there but it wasn't like that. It is a very homophobic and transphobic country. Then I understood that homophobia and transphobia don't belong to a specific religion.

When I left Iran, I had 1000 dollars with me and it was not even a possibility to go back there. I had two options: to go to another country or to commit suicide. I decided to come to Istanbul, Turkey. I was aware of the fact that I didn't have enough money to build up a new life, but I had nothing else to do. At first, I stayed in a hotel in Beşiktaş. I took my dresses and went to Taksim. I shaved and wore my dress. When I was back in the hotel, the people there were in shock to see me like that. They didn't want me to stay there. They told me to go Taksim. There, there were many hotels that

I could stay. I made friends from gay bars and associations. In the meantime, I was trying to get a job. I knew that I could not work as a sex worker, because my body was very masculine.

I went to SPOD (Social Policies Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association) and I met many people there. Friends from the associations forwarded me to Resul from Iran. Resul told me that it wasn't safe to stay here and I could go to Canada or America. I didn't believe him at first. But when he said that I could go after completing the necessary procedures in 2 years, I was convinced. I went to Denizli with his help.

I have been living in Denizli for 19 months. My family doesn't have any clue about either my identity or where I stay. On internet, I met a trans who lives in America. After long conversations on Skype, we are lovers now. We will see each other in America. When I applied to America, they gave me only 300TL to stay in Turkey for 2 years. In addition to this, I take 150TL per month from an association for medical examination. And one of my friends gave me 500TL for depilation.

I have been through bad and difficult days in Turkey. But I always tried to be careful. I didn't go out at night, because it is a high possibility to be exposed to violation on streets at night. And to whom can I make a complain? To the police? But still I feel lucky, I met good people. If I had any plans about staying in Turkey permanently, I would prefer Eskisehir, Denizli or Izmir. But I don't want to. I think Turkey is just lesser evil. I have no job, no identity...

EZDIYAR

I Was Not In Love But He Became A Member Of ISIS

My name is Ezdiyar, I am 19 years old. I was born in Haseki, but lived in Aleppo. My parents are Kurdish. I have one elder sister and one elder brother. My father passed away when I was only 1. After my father's death, we moved to Aleppo, because my mother's family lived there. To tell you the truth, I lived a "normal" life as a child, the only thing that mattered was that I didn't have a father. But also growing up without father wasn't a big issue for me. My mother kept good care of us, also like a father. She is a strong woman, she did everything she could do for us. Alhamdulillah, we inherited a land from father. It was a source of regular income. Even if we were living in a rental house, we got on well. When I started school, I was in good condition. I was a kid loved by friends. I loved my friends and my school as well. My mother gave great importance to education. But I had to drop out from high school.

When we came to Turkey, I told my mother that I am homosexual. She found it hard to understand and didn't want to except at first. My best friend is Amed. We are friends since 7th grade. Now, he lives in Europe. We can't talk that often since last year, because I have been working for long hours. I work in a shampoo factory in Beylikduzu. We produce cleaning products. I like my job and my friends. There is no one that I don't like.

I never worked in Aleppo, I only studied. I started working in Turkey. In Aleppo, we had a dance club at school, I was dancing. I was watching TV 24/7. I speak English, Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish – my Kurdish is not very good. I was learning French at school so I can say I speak a little bit French.

I was in the 9th grade. The actions in Tunisia had begun and everybody was following from the news. There was a kid who burnt himself: "Buazizi". He graduated from school, but they didn't let him work in his own field. So he became a peddler. Police took him into custody. When Buazizi went out, he burnt himself to protest against all of this. Revolt began! After Buazizi, Jasmine Revolution started in Tunisia. My mother always tells me the same thing since my birth: "This people, this government, this life is so bad. Don't live here. This place is not good..." My father was a bookseller and a writer. He had very beautiful ideas, very good ones. He raised my mother's awareness and my mother raised ours. Once she told us: "Just be free, remain distant from religion, you will choose your own lives when you grow up."

I observe the similarities and differences between Syria and Turkey. After all the things I have seen and I have been through, I can say that dictatorship reigns in whole Arab world. Now, there is no life in Syria. People are silent, afraid and intimidated. Government is very harsh, we can't talk about human rights! In Turkey, it is a bit different. I can't say that Erdoğan is a dictator, because I don't know him. But I can see that the government in Turkey is also bad. You also don't have the right to live, there is no life here.

One day, in Syria, the kids wrote words like "Freedom" and "Independence" on the walls of the school. You know that children watch television and absorb everything very quickly. The police arrested those kids. This happened somewhere near Damascus. They say that the police pulled out their fingernails, tortured and killed

them. When the parents of the kids murdered asked “Where are our children?”, the police told them: “Forget about your children. They don’t exist. If you can’t have another kid, I send you someone from here. He helps you to have one more.” Then the protests began.

Too many people died between the years 2010 and 2011. People protested against the murders in the same places, in the same cities where their friends and families were murdered. Then they were murdered as well. The police encircled Daraa to avoid people to come in or go out. It makes my blood freeze: “How can a person do such a thing?” This is called dictatorship! This government is a murderer.

Then the protests spreaded to other cities and finally to Aleppo. Of course there is a reason behind it: People of Aleppo were afraid. Our boys, our youngs weren’t that afraid. My siblings attended to the protests as well. They were on the streets, but the police were using guns to dispel the protestors. They caught and killed too many people. My friend Amed was also on the streets. I attended to the protests for only once. I skipped the school for the protest.

There is war everywhere in Syria, except from Aleppo. For example, there was problem in Sheikh Maqsood, but not in Al Ashrafieh. Life continues in its usual way. Then, of course, opponents arrived and we had to leave. Opponents, PYD / YPG don’t get engaged in clashes in fear that there will be an attack against civilians, but the others don’t care about it. To tell about the tension between Esed and opponents, opponents come to the regions where regime forces aren’t existent. When the opponents arrive and assume dominance, Esed’s aircrafts bomb there. Who are the opponents? The ones who lost their families, the ones who aren’t content with the regime, etc.

I didn’t discover my homosexual identity until the age of 16.

I started the 9th degree. I was going to male high school. We didn’t get a religious education, but, you know, it is the time of adolescence. Young people want to experience and try. I had a friend sitting next to me, I think he was gay. I was not in love with him, I think he was not in love with me as well. We got close but nothing happened after then. One day, I came across him on social media. He became a member of ISIS. And also they throw someone from a building and make others watch. There are not only

homosexuals within ISIS, but also women. I have many friends in ISIS. Moreover, I had a friend, I don't want to tell his name, he went to ISIS's prison. They raped him there. When my friend said to him: "If you don't take me out of here, I will tell them that you are a gay", they released him. Now, he lives in Germany. And about my deskfriend to whom I got close, as I said, I was not in love with him, but I liked him. I liked the way he behaved me, so I thought "Maybe I am homosexual". I logged in porn sites. I watched heterosexual porn. Porn is porn. In the beginning, I enjoyed it. Then, I saw gay porns on the same site. I opened one of them, men kissing men, making love. I liked it. One day, I made my friend Amed watch it in the park. Amed said: "Like a joke! Are you gay, man?". "Yes, I am gay," I said. All of my close friends know I am gay. When I said to Amed that I am gay, he asked me: "Did you have a boyfriend?" I had one. We didn't get sexually close. It is not because I am gay, I don't believe in love. In fact, Amed had corresponded to me positively. I look at other people, I see that they hate us. When I was 13, I was watching porn, but when I ask people "What is gay?", they say "It is something very bad." My mother told us since my childhood: "Don't follow everybody's idea, because everybody's an idiot here."

My friend's family is in Aleppo, not in Haseki. They are in the border of Resulayn. We go there in summer time. In bairam time, we went to Haseki, but we couldn't come back. Because opponents came to Resulayn. So the war started. We were sleeping that night. It was 1 or 2 a.m. We were used to gun shots. Resulayn is like a village. Our house is very close to the border. It is just two streets away. When the day broke, they opened the border and we passed. We came to Urfa. We have relatives there, we stayed with them for 1 or 2 months. Then, we rented a new house. People of Urfa didn't like us. We stayed in Urfa for almost 1 year and it is our second year in Istanbul. We came in the new year time. Even though the possibility to get a job is harder, I worked in many different fields. I worked in restaurants, cafeterias. When I came to Istanbul, I had a higher acceptance about myself and my orientation. I was searching on Youtube about "How do homosexual people live?" I was consistently watching the gay channels on youtube. They talk about LGBTI individuals, then I understood that we are not kind of

LGBTI REFUGEES

people to be hated, that we don't do evil things and we should be peaceful with ourselves.

One day, I was out with my mom, we sat down. I don't remember what we talked about but it must about transsexuals. I opened up the subject. Because my mother doesn't talk or think about these subjects. We talked about Bulent Ersoy. I said "I think she is a nice, innocuous person." When I asked her why she perceives it as a problem, she said that it is not something bad for her. Then she asked: "Are you like her?" And I answered: "Yes, I am." She stood up and laughed. She was in shock. I couldn't tell her "Mom, I am gay." Because it is difficult to say. I only said "Yes, I am." It was like a usual talk. Because all of my family members think in a different way. My mother changed a lot two days after two days. She was crying a lot. We were fighting. "You were not like this. Where did I do wrong?" she said while crying. I didn't cry. I never cried. I just looked around. I thought she understood me. Because I thought she was a very openminded woman. But of course she didn't accept. "Forget about these things, you are not like them." she said. I got tired and said "Ok, I am not like them." Yet we both knew that I was lying.

RUZGAR

At That Moment I Felt My Heart Sank. And The Rest Is Gone

My name is Ruzgar. I was born in Aleppo, Syria. Since my childhood, I was aware that I was different from my friends and that I desired men. My first experience was kissing with my aunt's son when I was 12.

Before the war in Syria broke out, I was working in my father's jewelry store. I was 18, when the war broke out. My family had a house and several cars. I was living in a wealthy family. We started to get poor together with the war. We didn't have any problems until then but with the war, there were constant debates. I started to be subjected to violence within family.

At first, I couldn't comprehend how everything went that fast and perished. At the first stage, the whole business stopped and we

sold all of our vehicles. Then our house got bombed and we had to leave. We stayed in grandmother's house for 15 days. Meanwhile, during this miserable time, I met my boyfriend who left great impression on me. First we were just friends. Then after constituting the trust to each other and to our feelings, we became lovers. We loved each other so much. I had my first sexual experience with him. I insisted on not leaving, when my family wanted to move to another relative's house because of security. I had the biggest arguments with my mom about that issue. I told them that I didn't want to go with them. They left and I started to live with my boyfriend in a house of one of his friends. Against all odds, I was happy with my life and we loved each other so much. It was 2012, my boyfriend was called from somewhere. I gave him my jacket and he left home. Just after he left, we heard a big explosion. At that moment I felt my heart sank. And the rest is gone.

For me, that was the most tragic moment of the war. I lost the man of my life, my boyfriend. I cried a lot, I still have him in my dreams. Sometimes, I live that moment again and again in my dreams. It was a dream for me, a very short dream which lasted for 1 year, and it ended.

I couldn't stay there. War was proceeding, there were explosions and clashes. My only aim was to walk to Turkey border and I did it. I first came to Kilis. I stayed on the streets as I didn't know anybody there. Then, using my limited money left, I came to Istanbul. I started working in a construction in Esenyurt for 30TL a day. I rented a house for 500TL, in a neighbourhood close to the place I worked. I contacted with my family and after learning that they were in a very bad condition as well, I sent them the money left from my monthly payment. Using that money, they were able to come to Istanbul to stay with me.

Even though my parent had divorced long before the war, we have to live in the same house all together.

Living conditions in Turkey are difficult. As I couldn't stand construction job anymore, I started working for D-SMART company for 700tl a month. I still work there. As I have a feminine look, they shout like "nancy boy, fagot" behind me in Esenyurt. Landlords are pitiless, they even kick the door of the house, if we delay the rent for a couple of days. Sometimes, they even threaten

us to kick out of the house. When we go to the hospital, we can't reach to the doctor for days. In the case of a potential fight, the police threaten us unquestioningly, saying "If you fight, we send you back to Syria."

One day, while we were eating in a restaurant, they made fun of me because I am gay. My relative got really angry and they started fighting. My relative got stabbed. We went to hospital. In hospital, also the medical stuff made fun of me. Then they just covered the incident as if nothing happened. Regarding the insults I am subjected to as I am gay, not only the people here in Turkey, but also other refugees make fun about my identity. The same disturbing looks, wherever I go.

In Turkey, I don't have a life as an LGBTI individual. I really don't have friends. I can't make any friend. Because the people I meet here see others only as a sex object. People want to be together only for sex.

Finally, I plan to make up a new life in Turkey for the future. I plan to have operation and work as a sex worker. I identify myself as a homosexual but I feel forced for this to earn money.

ALI

Go, Join The War And Die There

My name is Ali, I am 18 years old. I was born in Aleppo. I have 6 siblings. After my mother's death, my father re-married. Except from one of my sisters, all of my family lives in Istanbul and Gaziantep.

During the time I lived in Syria, I didn't know anything about the word "LGBTI". Before coming to Turkey, I didn't know that others like me lived in Syria. When I was a kid, I used to like playing with girls. I used to behave like girls and like other boys. I don't know if my family realized that I was different from other "boys". I had a very miserable childhood. When they sent me to my uncle's workplace to work there, I was really small. As I didn't like to work, I used to run away from home and work. That's why I was beaten by my boss, by my brother and by my father.

My family learned that I was having sex with men during the time of war. I was having sex with many people, my family

heard about it. My sister is married to my uncle's son and he is a very sociable person. One day, one of his friends told him, "Your brother-in-law has sex with men." And he said it to my family and they did beat me so bad.

I was in love with someone during the war period. I told him that there was a girl who liked him and she sent her notes to him by me. At night, I used to like a woman and got to meet him. It was one of those days that I went to see him, he was sitting in front of the door. He knew it as there was a girl in love with him, not a boy. After I left him, I came across with the opponents and changed my route. They got suspicious and thought that I was a soldier of Esed, so they started to chase me. I entered into a random apartment and started to kick the doors. The opponents came after me. They pulled their guns and shouted, "Surrender and uncover your face!" I uncovered my face and said: "I am a man." They thought that I was a shebbiha²⁰ and took me to an abandoned area and started to beat me. I told them, "I don't know what I am doing. I am not conscious. Look at my arms, I tried suicide for many times." They called my uncle's son and he came. "He is insane, don't take him serious." he said. Then they took me home and prohibited me to go out.

After that, my family insisted me to go to Turkey. I came here in 2013. I started to work. I smuggled into Turkey through border villages. I came first to Kilis, then to Istanbul. After a while, I went back to Syria in illegal ways. I took out a passport in Syria and then came back to Turkey in legal way. I was staying with my uncle's sons and we were having sex. I was working but couldn't get payment. They offered me to have sex for money and I did, but they didn't pay me.

I was really miserable in Turkey. I tried to kill myself many times, by taking pills, drinking bleach and even shampoo. After my latest trial, they took me to Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Egitim ve Araştırma Hastanesi. The doctor asked me why I tried to commit suicide. "I want to die. Even if you save me for now, I will try again." I said. They sent me to Bakırköy Psychiatric Hospital. Before seeing the shrink, my father told me: "Don't tell them anything. Ot-

20 An old-fashioned word used to describe "the ones who do deeds against law, but aren't held responsible for them because of their strong connections with security forces and the state".

herwise they lock you up here forever.” He wanted me to say that I did it to draw interest and he threatened me. When he was inside with me, I told the shrink the same things he wanted me to say. But after he left, I said that I am trans-woman, I wanted to have operation, but my family didn’t let me. The shrink asked me with whom I was feeling free at home. My answer was my aunt. He wanted me to come with my aunt next Friday. But my father didn’t let us. I couldn’t see the shrink again. I wanted to go to psychiatrist to be a woman, but they didn’t accept it as well.

My family tried to send me to Syria by force three times. “Go, join the war and die there.” they said. Even though they support one spesific part in the war, they didn’t care which part I would be. They only cared about my death.

I have been living away from them for almost 4-5 months. All of my relatives learned about my identity and they look for me to murder me. My identity was disclosed by a video taken in a cafe and shared in social media. In that video, I was wearing high-heels and kissing with several people. One of the friends of my aunt’s sons saw that video and informed them. And my cousins sent it to my father. Then I ran away from home. Now, they are looking for me everywhere. They call me to threaten and tell me that they will kill me whenever they see me. On my latest talk with my aunt’s daughter, she told me that everybody came together looking for me to kill. I was in Eskisehir a couple of days ago. In the middle of the night, my aunt’s son called me – he doesn’t call me at all. “Why did you call me?” I asked. “I am in Taksim. Why don’t you join me?” he said. I told him that I was in Eskisehir. He didn’t know that city. I told him that it is 6 hours away from Istanbul. He asked me what I was doing there and I told him that I decided to live there. Just before the conversation ended, he said “We go home.” I asked what he meant by “we”. He said: “Me, your brothers.” My mind was like frozen for a second. I called my aunt immediately and told her about the conversation. “Don’t get shocked by this, there will be much more things to make you shocked.” she said. I can’t go to Taksim because of fear, I can’t go anywhere.

I grew up among a religious, sunni family. But I changed my sect, I became Shiah, Alevi. Alevi families are more understanding towards their children, they care more about their children.

In Muslim countries, living as a LGBTİ individual is almost impossible. It is difficult to live here, but in Syria, much more difficult. Here, I always live with fear. If you work, you are afraid that you won't be paid or will be raped at work. While I was working in the market, I was raped. My workmate raped me in the storeroom of the market.

In Turkey, people don't like Syrians. We are affronted on the street. Whenever there is robbery or an explosion, Syrians are under a cloud. Syrians are regarded responsible for everything. 1 or 2 years ago, we were residing in Ikitelli. They stoned our houses, destroyed our vehicles, ravaged our stores, just because we were Syrians. They broke our windows, we couldn't go out of the house. On the day of the mess, one Syrian boy, at the age of 17 or 18, went out to buy bread, he was wearing a white t-shirt. After a while, we saw people carrying that boy, the t-shirt on him was all red. We learnt that 15 people had beaten him using belts. Compared to Syria, being an LGBTİ individual is easier, I can say. Ignorance is very high in Syria. What people think about LGBTİs is, "They are from Lut, so it is halal to kill them."

Upon my application to UNHRC, I am approved to reside in Canada. But I don't know how long it will take to be able to move in there. And I also don't know where to stay during the waiting period. I wish I could wait with my family. I have two choices: either Syria or Canada.

The person with whom I stay with now will be in Syria for bairam. I will wait until bairam and if I can go to Canada until then, I will be on the way. But if I can't, I will go to Syria with them. I can't wait here any longer. There is no job, no place to stay, my family is after me. I can go to Syria and join the army or work. I just want to leave Turkey. Turkey is now a suitable place for LGBTİs to live. Maybe all of them should leave.

Finally, I want to say that I only wish the war to end. As all of us know, weapons are sent to ISIS from here. Yes, the borders have been opened, they let Syrians in, but in return they sent tons of weapons. I wish the borders weren't opened and those weapons weren't let in Syria.

MISA

I Said, ‘No, I Am Lebanese.’

Hi. My name is Misa. I am 23 years old. I was born in Aleppo, Syria. After my father died when I was 12, I went to Damascus and stayed in an orphanage. Then, I stayed in Darulacaze for 1 year. I ran away from that place because of humiliation I was exposed to.

In the orphanage, people around me were making fun of me because I was a feminine gay. so I ran away. After my escape, I stayed on the streets as I didn't have anywhere to stay. I worked as a sex-worker for 2 years that I stayed on the streets. I had sex for 10 dollars for the first time when I was 14.

I experienced miserable situations during the time that I worked as a sex worker in Syria. Sometimes, my customers didn't pay me, I was raped by the police for several times. I had escaped from the orphanage and started to work as a sex worker when I was 15. I stayed in youth detention center for 7 months for being a sex worker.

For the first one month, I tried to hide my homosexual identity from other prisoners. But when they figured out that I was arrasted

because of prostitution, they started to behave me very badly. They even didn't let me eat. I was beaten many times. I called my mother from the prison. She was working in Saudi Arabia and knew that I was homosexual. I told her about my situation, but she didn't want me.

After getting out of the prison, I went to Saudi Arabia and met my mother. In a short period of time, we talked about our mutual problems and it was partially succesful. I started to live with her. She used to leave home for work really early and come back late at night. I was feeling like I was trapped in a cage. I was always at home, I didn't have any friends, I didn't have anything to do. I was also afraid because of my identity, so I returned to Syria.

After my return, Friday Marches and protests against the government, the first signs of the war, began. Then, I went to Lebanon. My sisters were living there. They were married and working in trade. I stayed there for 2.5 years and went to make-up course. Then, I went first to Jordan, and then to Egypt. I stayed in Egypt for 8 months and worked at a make-up saloon and at a hotel. After Egypt, I returned to Suuid Arabia. One of the customers of my mother was running a tourism agency in Turkey. My mother asked them to give me job and they accepted. I trusted them and with a small amount of money with me, I came to Turkey. I called the person who promised to give me a job for many times, but couldn't reach him. I rented a house with a friend whom I knew from before. I had to start to work as a sex worker again as I couldn't find a job. I worked through internet and generally had Arab customers.

I had many difficulties in my first weeks in Turkey. Shopkeepers are really merciless. After a long time, I learnt that they sell everything to us for more expensive than the real price. I could only pay my rent with the money I earned from working as a sex worker. After a while, I had to leave the house, because my roommates were annoyed by the customers who came home. As I didn't have savings, I had to stay in Gezi Park for 3 days. At the end of the third day in the park, I came across a friend by chance and he took me to his house. It was a small house, so I couldn't stay long. He forwarded me to the Guesthouse for transexuals and I started to stay there. I have been living there for almost 10 months. On weekends, I go to clubs and work as a sex worker. When people ask

LGBTI REFUGEES

me if I am from Syria, I say, “No, I am Lebanese.” Because, here, people don’t like Syrians. They feels antipathy for Syrians.

I work as a sex worker because I have to. If I had any other chance, I would never work as a sex worker. Life is difficult and expensive in Istanbul. We are exposed to homophobia and transphobia. So I want to go to Ankara. I can come back here for holidays.

I want to thank to everyone living here, as the State of the Republic of Turkey accepted us here without visa. But I belive I shouldn’t comment on if I support the real politics of the state. I want to thank you for including me in this project as a transexual.

ALMIRA

Even Your Family Could Be Waiting In Line To Kill You

Hi, my name is Almira. I am 26 years old. I am from Homs. My family migrated to Saudi Arabia when I was 6. I am the youngest member of the family. I lived with my family, until they left me in Saudi Arabia.

I don't even know if my parents are alive. The last time I saw them was the day that they left me in Saudi Arabia. I had a very beautiful childhood. But there was a problem: When I was very small, I told my mother that "I was feeling like a man". I was looking like my sisters. When I was 6 or 7, I was playing with make-up stuff. My mother was yelling at me: "Shame on you! You are a man, don't play with these things." When we go out for shopping for bairam, I wanted to but woman dress, so my father beat me so badly. I wanted to wear woman dress at the weddings.

I was studying. I liked my school so much and I was a very good student. I left the school at the age of 13. Before dopping out, I realized that I went along with girls and I liked handsome men

LGBTI REFUGEES

with beard, 20-25 years old. I continued my education until the 7th grade. The reason I left school was that I was the most beautiful boy at school and that caused trouble. After the age of 13, my father learnt that I liked the men, not the women and domestic issues began. In Saudi Arabia, people learn about where the beautiful boys are and wait for them in front of the schools.

Many men were coming to school to see beautiful boys, I had to drop out because of their abuses. After this process, my mother and my grandmother didn't treat me badly, but my father was beating me. Once, we visited the dentist, me and my sister went into his room. My sister left room and said to my father that the doctor was treating me differently. My father came into the room immediately and started to beat me. I have scars on my body. He didn't only beat me, but also poured hot water on me a couple of times.

After my school life ended, I started to work at my father's friend's phone shop. Later on, I went to fashion design and nursing courses. I was harassed many times at work, especially when my body started to get into shape. But I had to work. I was always think about the future. On the other hand, there was the possibility to go into jail, if my identity was exposed. Gender change operations were not legal in the country I lived. If your identity is exposed, not only the government or the police, but also your own family could be waiting in line to kill you. It doesn't matter by whom, you will be killed for sure.

My family visited Syria from time to time, but they never took me with them. They were hiding me because of my identity. After my brother died in Syria, my family left for Syria and never came back to Saudi Arabia again. I started to live alone. When my family was in Syria, I visited my friend in Yemen. I didn't like it there and came back. In Saudi Arabia, I was going out wearing veil. There was a boy I was in love since 18. I didn't know about love or sex. After we got closer and experienced those, I loved him more. I still love him and will never forget. He was a very nice person and the man of my dreams.

My life was going on very well. I was working in a hairdresser. My boyfriend rented a house, a car and a driver. I even had a maid at home. I was living the life of a married woman. One day, I finished work and as the car was far away, I wanted to take a cab. There

stopped a car behind me. The man in the car wanted to talk to me. I said that I didn't want to talk. I got away from the car walking but he kept chasing me. Someone who saw what was going on called the police and said: "A man is chasing a woman by car and the woman likes it." This somebody doesn't say, "There is a woman here who is harassed by a man." The only way to make the man stop chasing me was to give him my phone number. I gave him my number and took a cab to go home. After a while, a police team came and took me from home to jail. There, they understood that I was a man, so I was beaten so hard. I had long hair. They couldn't find scissors, they cut my hair with something like a big nippers. After that violence, they had to take me to hospital. They sent me back to jail after I recovered in the hospital. All the other prisoners humiliated me, they thought they were the most honest, honorable Muslims. My previous life had started to feel very far away, I was getting hopeless. In jail, they didn't take me to common rooms of women or men. They took me to a singular room. At night, a soldier used to come to talk. I was yelling at him saying that I didn't want to talk to him. He wanted to do some kind of things but because of my reaction, he couldn't find the courage to try. I was in jail for 3 months and 15 days in total.

Afterwards, they sent me to a refugee camp to take me out of the country. There were 370 Syrians in the camp. There were two men, they didn't let anyone touch me. There were many people from all around the world. As I am not a Saudi Arabia citizen, they wanted to send me to Syria. Jail was more comfortable than the place I was sent afterwards. They even gave me whipping punishment. They were treating foreigners very badly. I didn't want to leave from Saudi Arabia. I had a house, a car, 18.000 dollars and some gold. My boyfriend came to visit me and they arrested him because of his visit. He was condemned for 1,5 month in jail. I didn't give them my passport and they tried to send me by force. In the airport, I shouted saying that I didn't want to leave. I had been staying in the camp for one year. They wanted me to leave Saudi Arabia, but I didn't want to go back to Syria. So I told them that I would go only to Turkey by renewing my passport. Then, last June, I came to Turkey.

A friend met me at Ataturk Airport. He wanted to get closer to me. We went to Aksaray, I resided to a hotel. Then I didn't meet this man again. When I got out of the hotel, I didn't know where I was. I was harassed on the street. I called a friend from Saudi Arabia and told him everything. Then, a friend of him came to take me. He took me to a house, they welcomed me there. I had 1000 dollar and 3000 riyal with me. I stayed there to find a job and rent home. I stayed there for one week, then, they moved in to a more expensive place. I lended them 100 dollars. We moved in to a new house, they didn't have any money. I didn't know what kind of job they were working at. One day, I went out for shopping and when I came back home, landlord was there. "Landlord doesn't want you here, either you or us should leave." they said to me. They didn't give my money back. I moved out from their place. I didn't want to go back to Aksaray. I found a hotel in Sultanahmet, it was 100 TL per day. I stayed there for 12 days. After the bairam, someone from Sultangazi called me. He told me that I could stay there in a bachelor pad, but I had to behave like a man. I cut my hair, but noone there believed that I was a man. They thought that I was a woman who was disguised as a man. Meanwhile, I couldn't find a job, as I was a transvestite. I had worked as a hairdresser before, but noone gave me a job as I didn't have work permit. I also didn't speak the language. I stayed in bachelor pas for 20 days. Then I met ASAM through a homosexual friend. I told about my problems to them and they took me to the guesthouse for transexuals. Now, I stay there.

I want to have operation, I want to get married. I am not happy in Turkey, I have to many fears. I am harrassed very often. I am afraid of getting killed. One day, I went our, an undercover policeman came. I was exposed to sentences and questions like "You are very beautiful. How much do you want?" Another day, another policeman showed me his id and asked where I was from. I said, "I am Syrian." "Are you a travestite?" he asked. The translator told me to say "Yes". So I said, "Yes." A policewoman came and searched me. "Why are you wearing like this? Do you wear like this in Syria?" she asked. I said, "I was living like this in Saudi Arabia." Here in Turkey, harassment is very common. I don't have guest papers and temporary identity card. I went to Adana, there was a

HEVI LGBTI ASSOCIATION

friend who helped me. He was supposed to find me a job, but he was also in a bad condition. I stayed there for 5 days. I went out to the city center. As I was harassed, I came back. I want to live here, but there is no future here! I plan to make a life for myself in another country and then, call my parents. I don't have any connection to my relatives as I have never been taken to Syria.

RIZVAN

Policeman: I'm Sure You Did Something To Deserve This

My name is Rizvan. I am from Iran. I am 25 years old. I am from Zahedan, a city located in the south-east part of Iran. I grew up in a Shia family, very strict to religion and culture. I am the youngest one of five children. I have two brothers and two sisters, all married. I studied Cinema and Television.

Since I was a small child, I always had some masculine behaviours and different feelings for girls. I tried to feel them. When I touched their hands and feet, I was feeling something stirring in me. I was feeling our relatives' daughters very close. I liked to dress like boys. My mother and my siblings didn't like my outfit style, we were having trouble about it. I lived a normal life until secondary school.

I was sure about my feelings for the first time, when I saw our physical education teacher. I couldn't even tell my name when she

asked me. My heart was beating too fast and whenever I closed my eyes, I was thinking about her. At first, I couldn't identify that feeling, I wanted to get closer to her but I couldn't. I started to chase her after school. I saw her with a man, a friend. I was so angry that I didn't know what to do. I smoked my first cigarette that day.

I started to visit the gym that she was working at. I wanted to see her, every moment. I saw her talking to the same man again. I went to her angrily and said: "You don't have the right to talk to him." She didn't understand what I meant. She was petrified. She got angry and said: "What do you mean? Why are you talking to me like this?" "I love you," I said, "No one else can love you." She was silent for a moment, then, they kicked me out from the gym and never let me in again. After that, I locked myself at home for two days and cried the whole day.

I don't like living a secret life. So I decided to talk to my mother. One day, I said, "Let's talk." She said, "Ok." We went into my room to avoid others to hear our talk. I didn't know where to start, I was stressed. Before I started to talk, she asked me with an angry face: "Do you like women?" I was afraid and stressed for a moment. I tried to change the subject. As I didn't answer her question, she came up with another question: "Do you use drugs?" I said, "No, I smoke." "It is not my business. Your father and brothers should think about it. But don't forget that no one marries a girl who is smoking. Do whatever you want, after you get married." She said.

My father liked me so much because he thought that I was looking like his sister. So he supported me in many ways. After the conversation attempt with my mother, the only thing stuck in my mind was "to like women". In the place I grew up, it was seen as a very bad thing for a woman to use internet. So, one day, I went to an internet cafe secretly. I researched about "a woman who likes other women" and homosexuality. But the information I got was telling me that homosexuality was a product of Satan and only the sinners did this kind of things. It was written that mothers of homosexuals had committed adultery. Afraid of what I read, I thought that I had to quit to like other women, I started to hate my feelings. It was something horrible for me to go against God and religion and get burnt in hell.

Those days, there was a girl in the school, I liked her and wanted to get close to her. I was looking at her to create a close friendship. My wish was recognized by others. They kept me asking why I behaved that close to her and wanted to learn if I was in love with her. But she wasn't annoyed by that. I hesitated about getting close to her, because of the things I read about homosexuality on internet and I was feeling bad after the times we got close. I was contradicting myself and feeling very stressed. One day, we decided to meet at home. At home, she embraced me and started to kiss. I was shocked and couldn't stay at home. I started to love her more after that.

Our meeting at their home became more frequent. One day, we went home, drank alcohol and then had our first sex. We constantly met at home and had sex. We graduated from high school together. We were accepted to the same university in Tebrizi. By the way, my family wasn't aware of the situation, because she was a person who used to cover her hair and go to mosque. Even though they saw me kissing her once, they didn't say anything. They thought I would get religious with her effect, they were happy about our friendship.

We went to Tebrizi together, for university. We were accepted to the same department. After we went there, she became more interested in men and tried to end our communication. One day, I saw her kissing a boy and my heart, my love and everything for me broke apart. I wanted her to explain it to me. She told me that as she had a religious family in Tahadan and she could experience sexuality only with woman, she has chosen me. She told me that she was comfortable enough in Tebrizi and wanted to continue her life with a man. She was thinking that she was right about that and continued her life as if nothing had happened. Our friendship and love which lasted for year ended up this way.

My life turned into a lie, I had had many plans about future. I was thinking about committing suicide but I couldn't do it. I quitted university and returned to my family's house. They asked me: "You were so happy in the university, why did you come back?". They saw my return as something not normal. Within the family, they were always talking about a relative who was lesbian and that I was behaving in the same manner. "We wish you are not like her," they kept telling me. There was another male relative who made

make-up, they were condemning him. They were always talking about those subjects at home. It made me feel so bad and I wanted to run away from them. I was mentally depressed, so I began using drugs. As the city I was living was very close to Pakistani, it was very easy to find drugs. Some friends with whom I was talking through internet were inculcating and trying to raise hope in me. In the meantime, I was accepted by a university in the city of Ramser, located in the north part of Iran, to the department of Cinema and Television.

It was like a second life for me. I decided not to take anyone into my life. I had been dissatisfied by love two times. A friend from internet suggested me a friend of hers. She was living in Tehran. We became friends and got closer by each day. We decided to see each other. I couldn't help myself feeling for her, even though I tried so hard. On our first meeting, she looked very different from the person of whom I saw the photos. Even though there was someone else in front of me, I was feeling the same things to her. We kept seeing each other. She tried to show herself very "virtuous" and told that she loved me so much, but she didn't want to have sex. She took my family members' numbers from my phone. At first, I couldn't understand why she was doing that. She saw sex as something that puts love to a wrong place and something as corruption. I started to get tired about it and I wanted to break up. She was always borrowing money from me. She was only telling me that she loved me, but she didn't do anything to show her love. When I talked about breaking up, she threatened me saying that she would tell my family and everybody that I was lesbian. I was too tired and afraid that I thought about suicide again. Because it would be the end for me, if my family and university friends learned about my identity. At the end, I committed suicide, I cut my wrist. I just remember the moment that I fainted. When I opened my eyes, I learnt that I was lying in a hospital room for 3 days.

After I was released from the hospital, I went back to my family's home. My mother kept asking me: "What happened to you, why did we find you in a hospital?" I told her to come to the city I lived together with me to learn why. She came to the house I lived in Ramser. At the end of the first day, I told her everything. I told her that I was lesbian, I never liked men and would never liked

LGBTI REFUGEES

men. She didn't speak even a word to me for 4 days. She took the number of the woman who drove me to suicide and called her. "All the family knows that our daughter is lesbian. It is ok for us, stay away from my daughter," she said.

She took me to psychologists. They defined my situation as tediousness. According to them, I was homosexual, because I was away from religion. They told us that homosexuality was a disease and could be cured by medical treatment. The doctor gave me six different pills to "cure" my homosexuality. I started to use the pills by the force of my mother. I used them for six months. After six months, they caused hallucination and sensory loss. I was very depressed and couldn't go out of the house. I was having a nervous break down just before falling asleep. My mother, who witnessed all of it, still wanted me to continue using the pills. I didn't know what to do. I had a gay friend whose name was Samiyar. To let me escape from the pressure of my family, he said, "Meet me with your family as if I am your boyfriend, show them that you are treated with the pills, so you can get rid of both the pills and pressure on you." We did what he said. Although this didn't satisfy my mother one hundred percent, I felt the pressure on me decrease.

I started to take the pills less and less. In the meantime, I visited the doctor and said that the pills were affecting me badly, so I was using them less and feeling treated. I wanted the doctor to talk to my mother about discontinuing the pills. He told my mother that I was treated. I met a girl named Mona, we fell in love. One day, my mother came to my home in Ramser. There were some photos on the wall, showing me and Mona kissing. She saw that photos and the problems started again. She secretly took Mona's number from my phone and called her. She insulted Mona and her family asking "What are you doing to my daughter?" I was about to graduate from university, she sold my furniture and took me home by force. Mona was having big problems as well, her family was bullying her. We were both having the worst period of our lives, think about what to do. Someone told us to escape and that Turkey was appropriate for refuge.

I had my passport in one month. In the past, in Iran, a woman needed her family's permission to get passport. We arranged some money and came to Istanbul from Tehran. We went to Ankara to

register to ASAM Ankara. They told us that we had to live in Denizli, so we went to Denizli after getting our documents. We moved in the house of a friend who had been living in Denizli for 2 years and was about to go to Canada in 2 weeks. We started to live there with a gay friend. He warned us about the men in the neighbourhood.

On the second day, the door bell ringed. I didn't open the door, but talked behind it. The man behind the door said that he was an undercover policeman and needed to check inside. In the meantime, our Iranian neighbour came and intervened in, sending the man away. We called the police. Officers came and told us that the man who pretended to be an undercover policeman was not indeed. They said they would work on it to blow his cover. After almost one hour, three people stoned our windows. Me, my girlfriend and the other friend hid in the toilet with fear. My girlfriend fainted, we were afraid that they would enter home and do bad things to us. After half an hour, police came. Our neighbours had called. We told them that they were the neighbour kids. They asked the neighbours if they had done it. "No, we didn't." they responded. So the policeman said, "I'm sure you did something to deserve this." and blamed us.

In this country to which I came because of security problems, I am in a worse situation. I couldn't find a job, I am penniless, and my girlfriend left me. I sold my two cameras and one tablet. Now, I will sell my mobile phone and live on that. I am living in very difficult conditions, but I don't know if the consequence will be good or bad.

JOSEPH

I Am Ready Even To Sacrifice Myself

My name is Joseph Keyorkiyan. I am Armenian. I was born in a small village called Hilaliyan in Qamislo, Syria. I am 23 years old. My father has four marriages in total, I have 4 siblings. I lost my mother at 3 and my father at 5. After my father's death, my eldest brother (Muslim) came to take us. He took us to Aleppo, to the house of my step-mother. I started to live there. Afterwards, as they didn't want me there, I was sent to an orphanage in a church in Armania. It was an Orthodox church but I was Assyrian.

I was just 7 or 8. I stayed in the orphanage in Mama Mother Teresa Church in Yerevan until 14. The nuns were taking care of and educate us. I had an ordinary live until the age of 14. I was just reading. The religious education of the church was not so dominant. They mostly taught us about what kid of a person Jesus was and that we should be like him. It was 2004 or 2005 that my brother came to Armenia to take me. We returned to Aleppo. I

stayed with my brother. I continued my education in madrasah in Aleppo. I started from the 8th grade there. Madrasah was a terrible and dominant school for me. They always talked about Islam and I didn't know anything about it. I learned most of the things about Islam after I started my education in madrasah.

In madrasah, the education language was Arabic. I studied there for 8 years. When I was 16, we were talking about girls with the friends from school. I don't know why, but I didn't like those conversations at that period. You are just 16 and opening up to the world. I never liked talking about girls, but I didn't tell about it to anyone, because I was embarrassed. I was feeling something else in me, but didn't really know what was it and the reason of it. I was just having some kind of feelings for men and this made me scared.

In the madrasah, I got close with a friend. I felt that he was different from others, just like me and then told him, "I have feelings for men." I trusted him and something deep down in me was telling me that he was like me. One day, we were walking home with my friend after school. We were still talking, when we arrived home. Just when he was about to leave, I kissed him and at that moment my brother went out of the house. He beat me and I fell to the ground. My friend ran away.

I never saw my friend again. My brother took me in home and started to beat me with anything he grasped. I could do nothing, but cried. I didn't have my mother or father with me. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't tell anyone. He started to threaten me everyday. "I will kill you, you are an animal, you are not a normal person. In Islam, your punishment is murder." he kept saying. I told him that I was not Muslim. Now, I was just going to school. After that, everyday was like a hell for me. He was always beating and humiliating me. Afterwards, I didn't want to go to school with the fear that my brother would tell people around. According to Islam, I should have been punished and I was studying in a madrasah which is the school of Islam.

I ran away from home on the last year of university. I couldn't stand anymore. My brother used to beat me almost everyday and sometimes punish me by not letting me eat anything.

In May, 2010 (I remember clearly because it was close to mothers' day), I packed my book and some of my dresses and ran away

LGBTI REFUGEES

from home. I had a friend whose mother was disabled and father had died before. He used to love like me very much. "Could I stay with you for a couple of days?" I asked him. I didn't tell him I was homosexual but told him that my brother used to beat me and so I couldn't go to school. My friend and his mother helped me very much. I started to live with them. I got registered to distance education programme and had my graduation. While I was continuing to stay in my friend's house, I started to work with a computer operator. I did well in the university exam. I went into English Language and Literature Department in Aleppo University.

There were places like guesthouses near the university in Aleppo, I started to live in one of those guesthouses. I both studied and worked at the same time for 3 years. On the 3rd year, I received call-up papers from military. The problems had already begun in Syria.

My paper had gone to Qamislo. As I was in Aleppo, the necessary procedures couldn't be made. So I was a deserter. They rushed me to military service. When I said that I wanted to study, "You can study in distance education programme." they said.

I was in military from 2010 to 2012. I was in boot camp for 6 months. We were doing military practice all the time. After 6 months, I went to somewhere else and continued there. For 2 years in total...

I learned Hebrew in military. As I spoke Hebrew, I stayed in a mountain near Israel border for 5 months. my mission there was to listen Israeli soldiers and to relay information. One night, in the border, I escaped from the fire attack of Israeli soldiers and got on the motorbike to inform my commander. I didn't see the tank coming toward me through the darkness, we crashed. I don't remember the rest. When I woke up, I was in the hospital. My wrist was broken, my head and face was wounded. It was the heavy period of the war. There was a new attack everyday in Syria. I accessed to my brother's phone number and learned that he was in Istanbul. I called him and told him everything. "I will send you to Qamislo, there are familiar people there. They will help you cross the border and you come to Istanbul." he said. After I left hospital, I went to Qamislo directly. I called the number that my brother had given to me. A middle aged man with beard took me with his motorbike, we

went to his home and ate some food. In the evening, another man came with his car. It was around 01.30am. Two women, 2 kids and I arrived in a Syrian village close to Nusaybin, close to Turkish border. The checkpoints were very strict. I were hiding ourselves, when the soldiers came. The kids and the one of the women got caught. At that moment, I was very scared. When the dust settled, we crossed the border walking. Finally, I was in Nusaybin. A man came and asked me, "Are you Joseph?" and I said "Yes, I am Joseph". He took me to his home, I ate and slept. He woke me up at 7 in the morning and told me that we would go to the bus station. We went to Mardin by car. I didn't know what to do when they left me in Mardin station. I called my brother, but his phone was off. I reached to internet somehow and sent message to him on Facebook. After almost 1 hour, he called me on my phone and told me that there would come a nun to take me, that I need to wait a little bit more. The nun came and took me to a church in Midyat. They gave me some clean clothes and food. In the church²¹ I stayed, almost everybody was from Syria: Armenians, Assyrians, Muslims and Kurds. We were about 300-400 people. They gave us Turkish lessons. I stayed there for almost 5 months. I learned to speak Turkish during that period. I was always willing to learn a new language since my childhood. I speak 7 languages (Arabic, Syriac, Kurdish, Hebrew, Armenian, English and Turkish). Afterwards, I talked to my brother again. He told me that he would go to the USA and I needen to go to Istanbul.

When I arrived in Istanbul, my step-brother who had learned I am homosexual and used to beat me, took me from the station. He took me to his home in Basaksehir. I stayed with him for 4 months. At the end of the 4th month, he kicked me out saying "I can't take care of you anymore, you don't work." After I talked to my brother in the USA, I learned that my step-brother had taken money from him to take me to his home.

After I left Basaksehir, I didn't know where to go or what to do. There was noone familiar in Istanbul. I walked till Bagcılar and started to work in a shop selling woman dresses for 900TL. I found a guesthouse in Caglayan with the help of a friend from work. I was the only Syrian staying in there. Then, many Syrian refu-

21. Za'fara

gees started to come to stay there. It was very difficult to come to the guesthouse from Bağcılar. I started to work in an internet cafe which was close to the place I stayed, with the help of a friend from the guesthouse. I learned more in the new job. I was working in additional jobs from time to time. I translated some official documents and texts into Turkish.

One night, I went to Ankara at 1.30 a.m. for an urgent situation. Although I asked for a one day day-off from my boss, when I turned back after 2 days, he deducted 800TL from my salary and didn't take me to work again. I became jobless because of that reason which didn't have anything to do with me in fact. As I didn't have money, I talked to trans-guesthouse and began to stay there. At first, they just let me stay there for 20 days. In the guesthouse, I was only reading, playing games on my phone. I stayed there for 1 month in total. I found a job in a hotel in Karakoy. We agreed on 1,750TL for the beginning. I worked hard. The owner of the hotel raised my salary to 2,000TL. As soon as I started to earn enough money, I rented a house. I didn't need to stay in the guesthouse anymore and I knew that there were other people who needed to stay there. I rented a house in Omer Hayyam for 800 TL and moved in there. I still live there.

As a Syrian homosexual, I sometimes hesitate to say I am Syrian. I had a boyfriend for the first time in my life. If I were in Syria, I could never do it. I never had a relationship in Syria, not in the military time as well. In Syria, they take homosexuals into military service, but destroy them there. I mean there is rape. I hid my gender identity during my military service, because I was very scared. There was a commander who liked me very much. He helped me a lot, as he knew that my parents were dead. And I taught English to his children. After some time, I learned that the children got good grades in English, I was very happy.

It is my third year in Istanbul. I contacted with ASAM²² here. It was the first time that I could tell openly that I am homosexual. After I arrived in here, I figured out that there are big problems here as well. It is more difficult to live as a homosexual-refugee. I have a project in my mind about atoms and atomic bomb. I want to go to Canada to realize that project and to be able to have a more

22. Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants

comfortable life as a homosexual. Because Canada is more interested in these kinds of projects.

My brother is living in the USA now. I can only talk on the phone with him. One of my sisters moved to Lebanon after the war broke out. I have a brother in Iraq, he is a poet. He lives in South Kurdistan. Our family which had already dispersed under the effect of the war dispersed much more. I don't even have a slight contact with any of them.

I am against one night stand kind relationships both for heterosexuals and homosexuals. If you want to be with someone, you need to trust in him/her, you live everything with him/her. He/she will be the only one for you. But here, it is not like that. In Syria, there are no clubs and cafeterias like those here, but Turkey is much behind of Europe. For example, I met some transsexuals and homosexuals who escaped from war just like me, some of them were raped, beaten here.

In Syria, I had homosexual friends, but we were pretending to be heterosexual in social life. Because I had heard about police raids. When it happens, they first take you into jail and torture. Also, there are some regions that when you enter once, there is no way to go out again. So I didn't want to experience anything in Syria.

Finally, I want to say that the religion a person believes in is the one which will save him. I am a Christian who believes in Jesus and I believe that he saved me from the difficult conditions I experienced. I didn't have a mother, but I always believed that Jesus took care of me and saved me. The majority of the population into which I was born was Muslim, but we could live our own belief. I know that everybody loves the place he was born and want to be able to live there. I also would want to be able to live in Syria but I can't. In spite of all the things happened, I believe that, one day, the Messiah will come and all these terrible things will come to an end. I wish the wars end everywhere. Believe me, I am ready even to sacrifice myself. To tell one last thing about my homosexual identity, like all other, I came to this world as a result of love. God created me like this and loves me as he created me. God is not a bad creator, as in many people's mind. It is we, humans, who make this world a heaven or a hell.

“Legal Violence” Against The LGBTI Community Continues

When I review the practices concerning the asylum and temporary protection regulations in Turkey with a critical approach and gender sensitive point of view, I confront with legal violence and different forms of constitutive violence.

In Turkey, Foreigners and International Protection Law, which is the first legal regulation on legislation level concerning immigration and asylum, came into operation in April 2014, and Temporary Protection Regulation, which was prepared afterwards, in October 2014. Those fundamental legal regulations which determine the status of the Syrian refugees in Turkey, evolve into a legislative violence level for the lives in exile.

Foreigners and International Protection Law determines various international protection status under the titles of “refugee”, “conditional refugee” and “secondary protection”. To sum up without entering into the legislative details, Turkey doesn’t offer “refugee” status to the persons who come from a country which is not a mem-

ber of the European Council. These persons are offered the “conditional refugee” status, in the event of the determination of the presence of the conditions in the UN Refugee Agreement and are allowed to reside in Turkey until being placed to a third country. The persons who are not defined as a conditional refugee after the assesment process are offered “secondary protection” status, if they are under the risk of death penalty; of exposure to torture, inhumane or humiliating punishment or treatment; or of exposure to serious threat due to indiscriminating violence movements in the event of an international or country-wide armed conflict, when they are sent back to their home country.

It is clear that the persons who have escaped from the civil war in Syria and come to Turkey are supposed to be defined as “conditional refugee” or taken under international protection under “secondary protection” status, in the event that the relevant law is executed for them. However, Turkish government has decided not to execute the Refugees and International Protection Law for the persons who have come from Syria, suspended that fresh law for Syrians who constitute the biggest group among the ones waiting for asylum in Turkey, and declared that they will be subjected to another exceptional regime called as “temporary protection”.

According to the EU Temporary Protection Directive, which is showed as the legislative source and inspiration for the Temporary Protection Regulation that regulates the principles of that regime, temporary protection must be “temporary” in accordance with its name. Temporary protection doesn’t resolve the international legislative responsibilities of the countries and it can not be used to prevent the persons to apply for international protection according to 1951 Refugee Act. But the Syrian refugees in Turkey have been exiled into an extraordinary legislative regime defined as “temporary” for an unpredictable period and prevented from access to international legislative protection. Because, according to the “Temporary” Protection Regulation’s “temporary” article no. 1, the persons who have come from Syria to Turkey since April 2011 have been taken under temporary protection even though they have applied for international protection, and during the period that they are under temporary protection, their individual international application is not put into operation. UNHRC doesn’t make registration,

status determination or placement to a third country for the Syrian refugees in Turkey. Syrian LGBTI individuals are among the limited groups who are accepted as “fragile” Syrian refugees and are allowed to apply to UNHRC to be placed to a third country. But access to international protection is an actual state and can continue depending upon Turkish State’s appreciation. And in specific periods, limitations can be in question.

Turkish government suspended not only its own regulation, but also the execution of the international agreements of which it is one of the parties, while locking the Syrian refugees in temporary protection regime. The most important of those might be the European Council Istanbul Convention Agreement. According to that agreement, countries are obligated to take notice of violence against women and gender in terms of the determination of the “refugee” and “secondary protection” status. Some of the women who have come from Syria to Turkey were exposed to gender violation, when they were in Syria. Many women and girls have been sold to Turkish men as home and sex worker under the name of “marriage”, after arriving in Turkey.

Turkey’s obligation, as state party of the Istanbul Agreement, is to carry out evaluation to decide if the gender violation, that those women were subjected to, constitutes the base for the determination of conditional refugee status or secondary protection. For this, regulations which enable those victims to apply for international protection must be made. Temporary Protection Regulation’s Temporary article no. 1, which categorically blocks the way for Syrian women under temporary protection to international protection application without deciding if they are the victims of gender violation or not, is clearly contradictory to the Istanbul Agreement.

Turkish government has locked the Syrian refugees into the legislative “buffer zone” named as “temporary protection”, which is contradictory not only to its own national regulation, but also to the international agreements of which it is state party.

Field research of the book “Sürgünde Toplumsal Cinsiyet”, prepared by me and Nurcam Ozgur Baklacioglu, reveals the fact that the silence on the level of regulation creates a conscious violence on refugees.

The data obtained at the end of that work:

Experiences of the Syrian women and LGBTİ refugees in Turkey indicate a deep impoverishment, deprivation, and confrontation with a legislative and constitutional violence.

As a result of the war and the exclusionary asylum policies of the countries in which the refugees are obliged to refuge, women and LGBTİ refugees become the target of violence and psychological, economic and sexual abuse, both in the war zone, on the borders during the process and in the countries they take refuge in. Escaping from war and taking refuge don't offer a safer environment to women and LGBTİ individuals. On the contrary, these groups continue to become the target of legislative and economic violence, social exclusion and hate speech in the countries they take shelter in. Heterosexist legislative and constitutional executions also hinder the progress of the consciousness about the international protection for women and LGBTİ individual who are the main victims of the wars.

The limited number of women's and LGBTİs' shelters in Turkey should be increased and they should be directed by expert social organisations which have the consciousness in gender issues and work on the base of human rights. And the government should cover the expenses of those shelters in accordance with the national regulation of Turkey and the international legislative obligations. In addition to this, the schedule concerning the placement to a third country for Syrian women and LGBTİ refugees should be improved.

To fight against hate speech toward Syrian refugees, which spreads rapidly and becomes the main topic from time to time as a result of the local conflicts, urgent legislative and constitutional precautions should be taken.

Besides, it is very important to convey the voice, experiences, worries and expectations of the Syrian refugees and LGBTİ individuals to the public, without any mediator or comment, and to establish a transparent dialogue with them, to be able to make the public to know them in the right way. In this context, it is important that the refugees organize and develop their own solutions and establish an association for this. Legislative obstacles before the immigrants and refugees concerning establishing association and their membership to those associations should be removed.

LGBTI REFUGEES

It is an urgent necessity that all the legislative and constitutional obstacles before avoiding the exploitation of the body and labour of women, LGBTI and children refugees, enabling them to access their rights and liberating them by expanding their spaces in life.

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Acknowledgements

When starting the book, we want to express our endless thanks to:

The members of Hevi Refugee LGBTIs commission, who never let us alone,

Hevi LGBTİ Activists and volunteers, who took part in the interviews,

Ahmet YILMAZ, Salih CANOVA and Tugce YILMAZ, who offered their editorial contributions to the book,

Prof. Dr. Zeynep KIVILCIM and LAMBDA activist Ozlem Colak, who showed their kindness and contributed to the book,

Aghyad SHEKHO, for Arabic translation of the book, Mamoste Osman KOSUT, who provided full support for Kurdish translation of the book,

Murat KAYA, who prepared the cover word of the book, Cuneyt and Ali Can, who made the graphic design for the book.

Special thanks to Mehtap Cakır who translated the book into English and to Michael who helped with the editing

Endless thanks to Zafer Rifat IRMAK who developed the English e-book version to the work.

*In the Name of Hevi LGBTİ Association
Müzeyyen ARAC*