



MIGRANTS ARE HUMANS

An ELSA Spain Book in collaboration with
CEAR, la Comisión Española de Ayuda al
Refugiado and Refugees are Humans

ELSA DAY. "All different, all together"

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The European Law Students' Association

SPAIN

Dear all,

One more year, on the last Wednesday of November, the entire ELSA network unites to celebrate ELSA Day, a day in which we work, simultaneously and jointly in our commitment with Human Rights (“all different, all together “). ELSA Day was born with the idea of jointly demonstrating our commitment to Human Rights, bringing this issue closer to young people today. ELSA Day allows young law students to learn more about each of the different subjects that are discussed annually for this celebration, while allowing them to develop a critical spirit and opinion. Our vision is: “a just world in which there is respect for human dignity and cultural diversity” and one of the best subjects to defend this, is Immigration Law.

We are facing the biggest migratory crisis in history. Thousands of people are stuck in refugee camps. Children drowned in the Aegean Sea. Families separated by war. And nobody does anything. This is something we must solve, show society; especially the young law students, the reality of what is happening. We all know how easily the sufferings of others are ignored or even take advantage of their vulnerability. But we are also aware that these crises can awake the best of us. We could see that with all those volunteers who are in the main refugee camps. There is always someone who can help us. In this project, ELSA Spain has collected a series of testimonies, experiences, people who have lived, or are living in an asylum situation and have had to leave their country, their friends, their family, their home; looking for a better future. Sometimes this type of crisis has to occur, so that we realize what happens, however, since the beginning of humanity there have been migrations and over the years have been increasing situations of people looking for asylum. That is why, in addition to testimonies of refugees from the war in Syria, we have also included testimonies of people who have applied for asylum because of their sexual status (since homosexuality is punishable by imprisonment or death in their countries) and people who escape from their country as a result of being victims of gender violence. Surely, the majority of us did not stop to think that there are more applications for asylum than those who escape the war.

Finally, I would like to thank Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR), which, since 1979, has worked with migrants, refugees and provides them with accommodation, psychological and legal assistance and, as this project, tries to get people, the situation of migrants. Thank you for your work. And Guillermo Fernández-Mardomingo, a young student, who this summer went to one of the Mediterranean camps to help, and not only did that, but spoke with the people there and know their stories, their dreams, their fears. We do need more people like you. From ELSA Spain, we hope you like this book that we have done, but above all what we would like, is that after reading it, we all reflect, we think about how lucky we are; but think about how we can try to help and end this crisis and this suffering that no one should suffer. We call them refugees, but they are humans.



“Together we can make it better”

Edu, Eduard, Jon, Eulalia, María, Sergio
ELSA Spain 2016/2017

Appreciations:
CEAR, Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado; "Refugees are Humans" Facebook Page.

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Photography
CEAR, Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado; Guillermo Fernández; ABC; Annenberg Space; Aljazeera; Burn Magazine; Eikon; Hyperallergic; Light Box; ScoopWhoop; UNHCR; World Press Photo;

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REFUGEES ARE HUMANS

"refugees are humans" facebook page.



Abdullah, 37 years old, from Lattakia (Syria). He used to be sells man of clothes.

ABDULLAH, 37 YO.

“I have no imagination, I lost all imagination. I don’t know if I will stay more time here (in the refugee camp), go to Europe, or going back to Syria. I am still in a tent after months of pledges and hopes.

But I have a dream. I have three children who remained in Syria (they are 9, 13 and 14 years old). I want to see them again, and some day, see how they become independent. They were the reason why I left, for giv-

ing them a better future. But there were problems with my ex wife, and I couldn’t bring them with me.

And that is my nightmare, how they are, because for the ones who have fled Syria like me, the worst has passed, but for the ones who are there, the worst is about to come.”



Art Blart

How do you
imagine your
life in 5 or 10
years?

What do you
miss the most
about Syria?

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Hevi is a 14 year old young lady who is from Syria, currently in Greece, but hoping to join her mother in Germany soon.

HEVI, 14 YO.

“I miss school a lot! I want to be a doctor who preforms surgery one day, so school is very important for me. I really would like to help people. But these last five years I have not been able to go to school. While I was in Turkey I had to work the whole time in a sewing factory to help my family. I hope to go to Germany to be with my family altogether again and also be able to study again.”

Ibrahim is 25 years old. His hometown is Raqqa (Syria), but since the summer of 2013, this city is also the capital of Daesh (aka ISIS). Since that moment, the life of this young student changed immediately, and after two months living under the jihadist control, he decided to leave, although his parents remain there “wishing to escape soon”.

IBRAHIM, 25 YO.

“I lived in a normal place, but with the invasion, everything changed. I literally couldn’t do anything. I couldn’t study, I couldn’t smoke, I couldn’t express freely. If you smoked, they would make you clean the street, give a very expensive fine, and a hard physical punishment. And if you said bad things about them...

...I had a friend who was caught by the Daesh police criticizing the group through whatsapp. He was sent to jail, so his parents called to know when their child would be sent back home. The police said that the day after. The

day after, the family of my friend received two mails with pictures : In the first one, the head of my friend, in the second one, his body.

They think they are Muslims, but they are not. If they would really read the Quran, they wouldn’t do what they do. What kind of Muslim commits a terrorist attack in our Holy city Mecca? What kind of Muslim kill his brother?”

How did your life change with the invasion of Daesh (ISIS)?



What was it
like to be in the
Syrian army?

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Imad is a thirty year old registered nurse from Syria. Growing up without a father was hard for him and his seven siblings, but he was still able to finish high school and go on to university. After working for one year in a hospital, the war began and he was drafted into the military.

IMAD, 30 YO.

“I was in the army for two years. In the beginning it was good. I was stationed at various check points in Damascus, monitoring who was coming and going. But as the fighting grew, things got worse for us. I didn’t want to kill anyone, but we started to get sent to different villages and ordered to raid them, looking for terrorists. It didn’t matter what we found, we were commanded to kill everyone: men, women, and even children. I hated this! We were always on the frontline, where there was a lot of fighting. Soldiers would bring people to be beaten in front of us all while we were forced to watch. It all made me very sad, and I knew I couldn’t stay or it would keep getting worse.

I was a sergeant when the Minister of Syria died. Following his death many strong orders

came down to us. If I stayed I would be forced to kill people, but if I left, I knew they would find me and kill me! I had a good relationship with my commander. I tried to always make him happy, giving him a lot of gifts. Because of this, he liked me a lot and tried to reward me for my hard work. I was given four days of vacation, but they kept my ID as an assurance I’d return. But I went home to my family and didn’t come back. The government began to send messages to my family that they would kill me, but because of the jurisdiction where I lived, they were not able to enter that area to find me. However, my mom was very scared for my life, so she sent me away to Iraq.

I worked odd jobs, just trying to survive there. But after some months I was able to start work-

ing with Doctors Without Borders as a nurse. For two years I worked there with them, and it was good during this time. I married my wife and had my little girl there. But soon ISIS invaded that area, they were one kilometer away from where we were, so we had to flee to Turkey. After realizing there was no long term hope for us in Turkey, we came to Greece.

My brother had to join the military the same time I did. That was six years ago. No one has heard anything from him during this time. We don’t know if he is alive or dead. After what I did by leaving the army, I can never return to Syria. I can’t go try to find my brother or go home to help my mother. I am stuck here in Greece, hoping a way forward to a better life opens soon.”

Khaled is a 45 years old Kurdish man from Syria. He is currently stuck in a camp in Greece with his four daughters, while his wife is alone with their son in Germany. As a little boy, Khaled's father would have him cut his hair and give him a shave. Khaled enjoyed doing this so much, that he decided to study to become a barber. Life in Syria was very different in those days!

KHALED, 45 YO.

"I love my profession! Nothing gives me greater joy than to use my gift to help someone with their style. It wasn't easy to achieve this level of expertise. It actually took a really long time to get good. My father died when I was 20 years old. This pushed me to become the leader of my family, needing to earn enough money for us all to survive. I was making only \$300 at the

time, but I was able to take some of that and go to study more.

In 1994 I moved from Syria to Lebanon, which is a famous place for fashion and models. I was able to study more and take a certificate to open a shop there. It was a very good time!

My dream is to settle some-

where in Europe with all my family and open a shop. First I want them to finish their studies, but after that I want to train them all to work with me. I can cut the hair, someone can do the eyebrows, another can specialize in the masks, etc. It would be so good to be all together again and living this dream!"

Which is
your pas-
sion?



What do you
want to do
when you grow
up?

Marc Hors Photography

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Maher is 16 years. He comes from the city of Hama (Syria), one of the most devastated ones by the war.

MAHLER, 16 YO.

“I want to be a Doctor, because doctors helped me, and doctors secure the humanity. That is more satisfying than money, because money is good, but money is not everything in this life.”



Mahmoud and Fariza. They are a married couple from Damascus (Syria), where he used to work as a Bus driver, while she was in charge of their large family (five daughters, one son, and twenty one grandchildren).

MAHMOUD AND FARIZA



“We were 22 and 17 years respectively. My mom told me that a good friend of her had a beautiful daughter, and they agreed to meet one day to know each other. As soon as I saw her, I knew that it was love what I felt (says Mahmoud). When we left from the place we met, I told my mom that I fell in love with him (says Fariza). We were engaged for one year, and it was amazing. We used to go to a private garden in the center of Damascus, where we were not allowed to be, and while we spent time laid down on the grass talking about life, we stole grapes and peaches.

And then, during the nights, I received romantic letters at my home (says Fariza). Since then, we have been married for thirty eight years”.

We only dream with being a normal family again, with being together again, drinking coffee and talking about our lives and routines. Reunite with our children and grandchildren who are already in Europe, because they are the product of our love. Without them, our love is incomplete.”



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How did you
meet each
other?

What was the
dream for your
life when you
were in Syria?

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Mohammed is 24 years old. He comes from Amuda, Syria. Even though he and his family are living in very poor conditions in a refugee camp, he is spending his days loving and serving those around him: teaching children and helping translate for others. There is a light in his eyes that war and suffering cannot take away!

MOHAMMAD, 24 YO.

“When I was young I always wanted to be a doctor, but the government stole that dream by not allowing me to pursue these studies. I started university instead studying economics. I wanted to be a professor in this one day. But with the war in my country, they would not give me the stamp to bypass going to the military to finish my studies. I had to leave for Iraq with my family quickly, and I was unable to get the document needed to show what I had already finished in school. I had only one year left until I was done.

In Iraq I took the exam to test out of some courses, and they said they would contact me, but after two years I still hadn't heard anything.

During this time I had to work every kind of job, often for 13 hours a day for very little money. Finally in my third year there, I was able to work a job that I enjoyed doing management for a housing agency. But my father wanted me to have a better life and to finish my studies, so we began the plans to come to Europe.

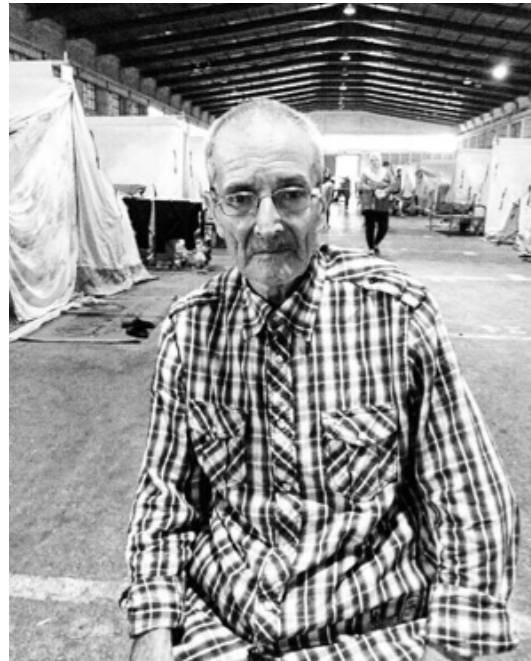
It was along this journey, while we were in a camp that was like a prison in Turkey, that my father had a heart attack. We were yelling for help, but the police would do nothing for him. By the time the ambulance arrived it was too late, he had died. Now I was the oldest man in the family, so I should lead things. I was in shock about what had happened. How could my father be

gone? What should we do now?

The night before my father died, we had a conversation. He told me that it was his hope for me to continue to study and get a good job. Since this was my father's last wish for me, I decide it is best for my family to go forward to Europe where there are better opportunities for us all. Now, the way that seemed to be the right one is blocked indefinitely. But I will make real the wish of my father, he is blessing us.”



Mohammed, 74 years old. Like the rest of the people from this camp, he is running away from the Syrian war. However, he is not Syrian, and this is not the first time that he has to run away from the war in his life. When he was six years old, he and his family scaped from Palestine with the War of 1948. And now, the history repeats itself, although this time as the father of twelve children.



MOHAMED, 74 YO.

“I left Palestine very young, but that is my only homeland. I won’t forgive those who expelled us from there, who killed relatives of mine, who attacked us when we didn’t have means of defense, and who never allowed me to go back. But I cannot hate all jews or Israelis, because that wouldn’t be fair.

In 1974, Yasser Arafat (Palestinian leader who fought for the Peace between Israel and Palestine) addressed to the United Nations saying: «I come to you bearing an Olive branch in one hand, and a freedom’s fighter gun in the other. Do not led the Olive branch fall from

my hand» he said. I am sure that the olive branch of the peace will be always the right way.

Never more innocent blood spilled, the right of the Palestinians is a right for the peace, and even if they continue attacking us, I won’t have other response but the peace. Respond to the violence with more violence is the origin of the wars. And the wars are the reason why we are here.”



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After having been expelled from your two homelands, do you have hate in your soul?

If you would give only one advice to your children, what would you tell them?



www.aljazeera.com

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Montasea, 27 years old, from Hama (Syria). He used to work as an Electrician.

MONTASEA, 27 YO.

“Don’t leave your country, never leave home. There is no country, no city, no place like home.

If I did it was not for option, but for necessity. I didn’t plan to leave until I saw my house completely destroyed by the air strikes.

The only think I haven’t lost yet is my family, they were my biggest treasure before and after the war. I am blessed for that”



This is Nour. She is 65 years old and comes from Damascus (Syria). Her name, Nour Alhuda, means “The Fight of the Gods”, and that is what she has been doing all her life, fighting with deep faith. With 37 years old she lost her husband and had to take care of their eight children, and now, being in wheelchair with uncountable health issues, she made the difficult journey from the Syrian war towards Europe with two of her children (one of them is also in wheelchair).

NOUR, 65 YO.

“Because my children are all I have left in this life. Having lost my husband and with my old age, they are the main reason to live, and while alive, I will never leave them alone. Furthermore, I couldn’t stay in Syria, we were arrested by the Police, then stolen by the Military, and five of my children are in other countries (four in Germany and one in Turkey).

I wish to arrive to Europe, but above all, to be reunited with my sons and daughters, all of us together again. That, and God, are the things that give me the strength to continue in this place and continue this life.”



What gives you
the strength still
right now after
so many years?

Which is
your favorite
game?



Central European University

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Rama, 8 years old. Syrian/Palestinian. Like her brother Maher, she wants to be a doctor when she grows up, pediatrician exactly.

RAMA, 8 YO.

“What is your favorite game to play? ”

“The slide, I used to be playing the whole day in the slide”

“And here?”

“Nothing, there is nothing to do



Rami is 20 years old. He used to study Medicine in the devastated city of Aleppo, a place where nothing is left, but ruins and impossible dreams of people like him. He composes rap music, and his group is called ‘Wejdan’, after his girlfriend, who was killed in an air strike.

RAMI, 20 YO.

“Two kinds of people go to war: Those who are obligated, or those who have nothing left and know they will die anyway.

Of all the many lives lost in this war, the most devastating was my girlfriend. I was meeting her at a square, and after waiting five minutes we were suddenly bombed by airplanes overhead. When the

bombing stopped some people screamed that there was a girl seriously injured which I saw was her, my beautiful Wejdan. I took her to the hospital as soon as I could, but she was so badly injured. At one point, she told me: «I am going to die, please take this», and she gave me her ring which had her name engraved on it. I still have it, and would rather die

than lose it.

There is nothing rational to war; it is just suffering, suffering and more suffering. If losing my life would end this war, I would give it.”



I have never seen a War, I have never experienced a war. How would you explain me what a war is?

Shaba, 16 years old. Aleppo, Syria. She studied at High School until the war came. She dreams of becoming an Electric engineer .

SHABA, 16 YO.

“I am at home, doing my home-work. Suddenly, I start hearing bombs and explosions, and few seconds later, that explosions are closer . Everyone at home becomes afraid, and you have the feeling that you can die at any time. Your thoughts freeze and you cannot think, you cannot react. The same thing day after day. The sound of the air-

planes coming was the worst, was like listening the death approaching. And one of those air strikes, took my grandpa to the heavens.

If I were 10 years old again and I could change something, I would go to other country.”

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Wahiba is 35 years old. She comes from Deir Al-Zour (Syria), but she is all alone in charge of her six children. Her husband, that she doesn't see since two years ago, is in Berlin, and they ran away from the war because he was wanted by the Government of Al-Assad. Her favorite time of the day is the moment when she can talk through whatsapp with him.

WAHIBA, 35 YO.

"I didn't need three, but there were two which I couldn't live without: The food, for my children, and the documents. That's all I needed, keep my kids alive, and get the asylum for living in a peaceful place like Europe.

But, what was supposed to be a short waiting, is turning into an eternity. I am alone with

these kids who have grown up in the war and in the camps, who cannot get more education than what the volunteers teach them, and their dreams are disappearing.

I have suffered so much with this situation here, that I have forgotten the drama of the war in Syria."



Which were the three things that you brought with you before running away from home?

If you had someone of Daesh (ISIS) in front of you, what would you say to him?



Zaidan is 21 years old. He comes from Mosul (Iraq), where he was studying Pharmacy at the Medical Institute. His life suffered a dramatic change when Daesh (aka Islamic State or ISIS) invaded his city: “The great life we had in Mosul turned into hell. We went from being free to having no life, trapped in a city where we could barely breath.”

ZAIDAN, 21 YO.

“I am Muslim, everyone in Mosul is a Muslim, but not them. Some of my classmates joined ISIS, and they had never gone to a Mosque or believed in God. Indeed they were the worst and most problematic people of the community.

And then, once ISIS occupied Mosul, while I was working at the pharmacy, it was very usual that they came in to steal all kind of drugs and narcotics,

and thus fighting under a fake sensation of power and invincibility.”

“Feelings, only feelings. When I was a small kid, I thought Europe was paradise, the example of humanity. But now, I feel disappointed. I feel Europe is a big lie: They told me to come when ISIS occupied my city, and now I am here stuck at this camp, without receiving asylum. I only want to have a

normal life, because up to this moment, it seems that I only have two options, or dying at Iraq, or dying in the camps. If I had known before fleeing Iraq what was about to come in the camps, I would have stayed in the war. The Europe of my dreams is fake.”



REFUGEES IN SPAIN

CEAR, Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado.

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Graphic designer of Palestinian origin. He decided to leave after two years of war in Syria and seek refuge in another country. His destiny, like that of many other Syrians then, was to travel to Algeria, from there pass the border of Morocco and then the one in Melilla.

He acknowledged that traveling to Algeria was easy, since then a transit visa was not required between the two countries. The route was complicated when it tried to enter Morocco, for what he had to obtain a false passport that costed about 2,000 euros.

He spent three and a half months at CETI, from where he was transferred to Madrid. “My whole family is in Syria except my wife. I had to wait two and a half years for him to come”

His wish is to be reunited with his family as soon as possible, so he is writing a letter of invitation so that they can come to Spain, even

knowing that the process of family reunification is virtually paralyzed in Europe. His father, mother and younger brother wait in the middle of the war for the approval of his request.

Amjad is noted that he misses his country when he talks about his current situation in Spain, since many things remind him of his daily life in Syria when there was no war: “The temperature, food and kindness of the people”.

He is currently working in the kitchens of the CEAR reception center in Getafe. He can not return to Syria because he does not have the nationality, so his idea is to endure five or six years and get Spanish nationality and thus “travel around the world”. He looks more pessimistic when he is asked about when there will be peace in Syria: “The war will not end until 10, 20 years ...”



AHMAD. Still relies on family reunification



AL KURAMI. The runaway of an entire family

REFUGEES IN SPAIN | 45

Can you imagine to run away from your country with 26 members of your family? This is the refuge story of Mohamed Al Kurami, a 45-year-old electronics engineer who never imagined that his life and of his loved ones would become an endless odyssey since the war in Syria broke out; “When you leave your country, you can not look back.”

He speaks Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic, English badly and learns Spanish since he arrived in Europe. He fled in mid-May by taking a plane from Turkey to Algeria, while still issuing an entry visa for the Syrians in this country and the route through Spain was relatively affordable.

This last stage could only complete it with his wife, his mother and his sister. “Everyone leaves a lot of money to get to Europe.” In their case, they would have had to pay more than 40,000 euros for all the family could

leave Turkey. He chose Spain because it was the cheapest trip, before you could travel to Algeria with a visa and then pay 1,000 euros to get to Morocco. But above all, because it was the route where they least risked their lives.

The other routes are more expensive and dangerous. For example, you can buy a fake European passport for more than 10,000 euros per person that allows you to go anywhere in Europe. Crossing the Aegean costs 2,500 euros per person just to get to Greece (for a trip of only 21 km in some cases) and from there you have to pay a lot of extra money to go to another European country. “In the end you need between 4,000 and 5,000 euros.”

When he arrived in Spain, he was at the CETI (Short-Term Center for Immigrants) in Melilla. A center prepared for about 400 people where there were almost 1,500 people at that time. “They are not prepared to receive so

many people.” He spent there with his family for 15 days, although he is considered fortunate, because other people he met took up to six months.

Although in Syria he worked as an electronic engineer with solar panels, he knows that now he has to adapt to the new circumstances to be self-sufficient. He has spent six months in the reception center of Getafe, with his family, now four members, in two rooms. He also receives transport and clothing aids, in addition to 90 euros per month for the expenses of his whole family.

To hide her face for fear of future reprisals, Dima uses her cell phone with a photo of her favorite place in Damascus, the city where this 36-year-old Christian woman lived. A neighborhood symbol for decades of the coexistence of people of different religions and beliefs.

Dima lived a quiet life in the Syrian capital working as a teacher of Arabic with her husband and her two children until she was hired in Kuwait temporarily. So when the war started in Syria, the family knew that they could not return to their country.

In 2013 her husband's contract ended and the situation in Syria was becoming more dangerous due to the war, so they decided to go to Europe. "We chose to go to Sweden where most of my family is." But once there, they verified that Dima and her family had passed through Spain. So because of the application of the Dublin Convention, "from Sweden we were sent to Spain" where they asked for asylum.

After a month, the family was sent to a reception center in the Madrid town of Alcobendas. "The professionals there worked with us a lot, they helped us in language courses and courses to work." After almost a year of stay they left behind the center. It was then that CEAR offered them a social accompaniment program that includes financial aid to cover housing and food expenses, Spanish classes and job search support. A period that Dima remembers as very complicated due to all the expenses that the family had to face, the language barrier, the lack of work. 3 years rebuilding her life.

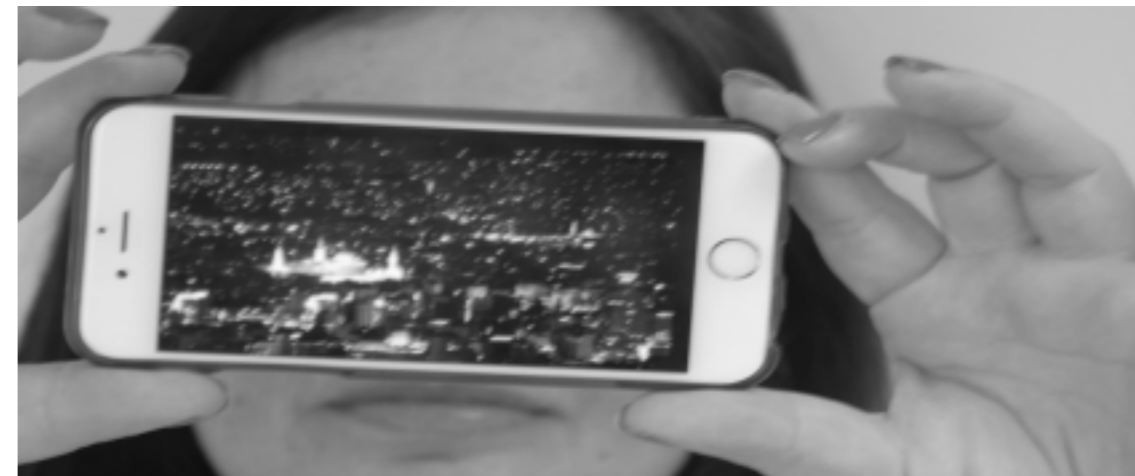
It's been three years since Dima arrived in Spain. She has a job, she can communicate with people and is happy of have been integrated into Spanish society. "Now is another life," she says.

Dima says that she feels "more calm" since she is in Spain, but on the other hand she is "very stressed" because there is still part of her family that continues in Syria and hopeless

to see the news that come from her country. This young teacher has only one wish, "that this war does not affect the children there".

Although she has managed to rebuild her life in Spain, Dima does not forget people who, like her, have had to escape. "I really feel sorry for the people who live on the borders of Syria: in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, life there is very hard." And it also reminds all those who have had to risk their lives to reach Europe through Turkey. "These people have had to do this for the war. I hope we have peace in our country and we can return because we had everything: home, work, car ... we lost everything for the war"

Dima says that when the war ends, her desire is to return to her country, although she doubts that her children want to leave Spain.



DIMA. A life broken due to the war



JUAN JOSÉ. The lawyer who rebelled against the drug trafficker

REFUGEES IN SPAIN | 49

The hands of the image are from Juan José in front of a mural of a center of reception of CEAR, next to the hands of his two children, who at the end of the interview do what they do the children of their age (4 and 6 years): flutter between his legs and ask him complicated questions and impossible requests. The only difference is that neither they nor their father can appear in the photo because they are threatened by a cartel of drug traffickers.

Juan José (fictitious name), is a 28-year-old Mexican lawyer, lived with his wife, also a lawyer, and his two young children. His life changed when he became involved in a self-defense movement: a group constituted by neighbors, who, due to the passivity of the government, came together to confront the violence established by the drug traffickers. “We started with this movement against the cartel.”

Soon Juan José felt himself indicated not only by this cartel but also by the Mexican government itself. “There are networks that show that drug trafficking with the government is hand in hand,” he says.

The law firm of Juan José filed great part of the lawsuits of individuals against the drug traffickers. The cartel members stormed sev-

eral times in his office with threats to him and his clients to withdraw those demands. In turn, Juan Jose reported that to his colleagues in the Self-Defense Movement to combat this situation.

The self-defense group was able to cope the cartel since they knew the places where it sold its drug, as well as the points where it carried out the kidnappings. “It was basically a strategy to dismantle drug trafficking. We were an armed force at the beginning,” he explains.

After suffering a kidnapping, Juan Jose decided to flee with his family. First they passed from the state of Michoacán to Guanajuato. “I passed my son first, then my daughter and then my wife.” From there the entire family flew to Cancún and then to Spain; Something that was not premeditated. Soon they realized that the resources with which they counted were enough to live a few days.

At the beginning Juan José appealed to the Ministry of Interior that led to social services and these in turn to a reception center of CEAR. “I do not feel worthy of being given that money. I do not like demanding money or like to demand support, I like to earn more from day to day with well-done work,” he laments.

For Juan José and his family it has been very difficult to get used to day-to-day life in Spain: customs, food, schedules ... “but there are people who make it very bearable that way”. After having gone through a traumatic and unexpected escape, Juan José says that what he values most is “the refuge, the one that you receive in a comfortable room, the security that an institution gives you, and all those supports that we have had for training . We will have to renew here in Spain. “

Now he only thinks of being able to achieve economic stability for the sake of his children and reiterates that his dream would be to be able to return to Mexico. “Who would not want to be in its country?” Something that he is pessimistic about, because of the lack of support from your government.

“I am surprised that you can receive people from another country and think that it is something good that you are supporting people coming from Syria,” says Juan Jose referring to the host system in Spain.

And finally, make one last request. “If I would ask an opportunity for all of us. I know that all people come with a good goal: to leave their country to seek their peace and security.”

She has been in Spain for over 10 years, along with her children. Before fleeing her country she worked at school as an English teacher, had her own house and lived quietly. After the fall of the president in 1991 everything changed. “There was no peace, only fear and massacres every day.”

In 2003 he starts to think of running away with his seven children, and one year later she managed to send the four elders, who were still minors, for fear of being forced to join the militias fighting between them. “I couldn’t see my children die like many others who belonged to these armed groups”

“When they went to Kenya I knew that they were in good hands because I told them to go directly to UNHCR to explain who they were and why they had to flee. Thanks to that, they are alive. “ He says that afterwards they gave her many options of host countries, but they asked to come to Spain because she had a sister living in our country.

She was able to leave with her three young children arriving to a refugee camp on the border of Somalia until her sister arrived and

went to the Spanish embassy to request asylum. She arrived in Spain and lived one of the most emotional moments of her life: “When I met all my children at the airport we cried of happiness”.

They were welcomed in CEAR centers before they could rebuild their lives. “It helped us a lot. We have received psychological support, to get ahead, to learn Spanish and even work. Today I am where I am for them. It saved our lives, if we had to go back we probably would not be alive. They helped me to pay rent and buy books for my children until I got a job. “

She keeps in touch with her mother who did not want or could not flee. “She tells me that the situation is a bit better, but sometimes armed groups put bombs. People try to make their lives normal under fear and insecurity. I do not think I will return, but I wish there is peace because it is my country and I want it. “

What she likes the most about Spain is that there is peace and security. To be able to live without fear of someone putting a bomb that reach their children. Of course, not everything has been a bed of roses at this time: “It has

taken us very hard to get work and during the crisis, young people do not have work opportunities.”

They feel fully integrated in the Spanish society, to which they thank their hospitality. Proof of this is that one of her daughters has married a Spaniard with whom she has two children. “When I see her, she gives me hope and I feel happy. With me, are still living five of my children, and the three little ones study and get good grades. “

She wants to imagine a future in which all her children can go to college so they can have “a better life” than she had . She doesn’t want to think in a future (or a present) in which the doors are closed to people who try to flee from an almost certain death: “It is cruel to close the borders so that they die outside. I ask the world to open the doors and the heart to the refugees, because no one runs away from home for nothing. To go out to spend so much danger at sea you have to flee from something that has given you much fear.”



SULEIKA. The fear of seeing your children becoming “child soldiers”



GENDER REFUGEES

CEAR, Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado.

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ABIONA, fled from sexual trafficking.



Trafficked women are often forced to cross the desert on foot to reach Europe.

Along the way, many of them become pregnant; Either because they have been forced to prostitute or because they have been raped. Abiona arrived in Spain shattered, she did not want to speak.

All she said was that she wanted to die.

I have seen her smile for the first time recently, Abiona tells me many things about her family; Misses her little brother and worries that she knows nothing about his family.

She loves to cook typical food about her town and talk about the landscapes.

AISHA, genital mutilation.

When my older sister, she had her first daughter Aisha, she didn't stop crying. No one knew why.

Then I asked him, "Why are you crying?"

She had a beautiful girl, who had brought joy to all. She explained that when she was 15, our mother and aunt cheated on her one day with the excuse of a family visit. On the way,

they had laid her down by a dry river, pulled out a knife and cut her clit.

He had suffered, had cried, bled, and almost died of pain. What made her cry was to think that the same thing happened to her child.

That's why they fled.



FÁTIMA, fled from forced marriage.



Her family in Pakistan, when she was 13, forced her to marry his cousin; much older than she and she hasn't meet him before, but she was in love with a childhood friend so refused. The family told her she had spotted her honor, they did not talk to her, they did not want to know anything about her. She lived in the streets and because of that she decided to flee. Over time Fatima has become a great friend, and tells me that she is considered a lucky person And that is incredible.

LUBNA, fled from the violence of her husband.

And they lost his suitcase, but it was empty, because she had taken it just to hide it, because he had to run out of there.

She had the saddest looks I've ever seen.

And she did not know where to go, I asked her I needed help. And she told me that her husband beat her and forbade her to leave the house, had burns in some part of body .She had

been told that could apply for asylum; I had no idea, and I began to ask.

I've never seen anyone shake that way.

A person who has suffered ill-treatment, has self-esteem for the floors. When you understand that, you can understand their fears, that at first when she was going down the street she was looking sideways all

the time or she had the feeling that someone was going to hurt you.





LGBT REFUGEES

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AHMED, IRAN

Vértice

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“I was born in Tehran in 1984. There I lived my whole life with my parents and my little brother. At the age of 16 I was aware of my sexual orientation that I hid in the early years from my parents, friends and teachers.

At that age I started to have sex with a boy from my neighborhood in secret. One day, in a forest in Tehran, while I was with this boy, I was discovered by a police car. We were told that we were suspects of being homosexuals because we were hugging each other. They asked us how we called and asked for our phone number and our address. Then another car appeared with more policemen. We were mounted to two different cars and taken to a police station.

We were locked up 48 hours. They did not let us tell our families or talk to anyone. When we were hungry and thirsty and asked for food or drink we were beaten with a stick. After two days we were taken to a court. We were sent to prison accused of being homosexual and awaiting trial. In that prison I was 40 days im-

prisoned. Within 20 days of being in jail I was finally able to notify my family from the pay phone. My parents had been looking for me at hospitals and the police, but no one informed them of our whereabouts. It was horrible.

The jail was divided into four different zones depending on the crimes committed. I was in a cell where there were twelve beds but they would not let me use the beds and I was forced to sleep on the floor.

The first week, I lost about 7 kg. Although there was a yard, due to my depressive state did not leave the cell. I did not use showers for fear of being assaulted. I was only 16 years old.

After the 40 days they took me to the court, whose judge was my uncle's friend. Through my uncle and through a bribe I got my prison sentence changed by 18 lashes and a very high economic fine. In the courtyard of the court there is a special room to receive lashes. That room has windows so people can see how they get their lashes. I normally should have

received 80 lashes, but thanks to the influence of my uncle I received only 18. My friend did not have the same luck as me and spent a year in prison, he had no one to intervene.

Since I came out of prison, I can not maintain any affective relationship. Since my family knew my sexual orientation I had to avoid them. I was not accepted by my family. My family wanted me to get married, they said I would forget. They even came to find a girl for me. I was so depressed by this situation that one night I took many pills with alcohol to try to take my life. I was transferred to a hospital in an ambulance. There I had a stomach wash and I was hospitalized one week.

For 5 months my mother sent me to a psychologist who determined my level of homosexuality. In 2008 I decided to leave Iran with fear of being sentenced to death because in Iran homosexuality is punishable by death. I crossed Turkey by car and got a Bulgarian passport. When I arrived in Spain, I applied for asylum in October 2010.”

AMANDA, HONDURAS

“Even though I was born with a man’s body, I always felt like a woman. When I was a little girl, my brothers laughed at me for being different, my mother beat me and asked my father to punish me because she said that my behavior was not “right”. In the neighborhood people criticized me and I had to leave school at age 11 because of the aggressions I suffered from the other children calling me “ladybug” and throwing objects at me.

When I left school I began to sell consumer goods through villages with my mother (news-

papers, gums, etc.). I used to paint and make-up myself. When I was selling with my mother in the streets sometimes people said to me very offensive things. My mother felt ashamed and began to cry. Until I was 15 I did this with my mother.

When I was 16, I was sexually assaulted by a member of the police in my country. Since then, insults, harassment and discrimination by society and especially by the police have been a constant in my life. Several times I was arrested. I was put in a cell without clothes

without knowing if it was day or night with other transsexual women like me. We were hit on the legs with the tip of the boot, in the mouth, they broke my teeth. They put out cigarettes on my skin and in my eyes.

The State never did anything to protect me or to recognize my rights. For all this, in 2014, I decided to flee to Spain where I applied for international protection.”



Benjamín Luis Alcarraz Buleje

DIMITRI, RUSSIA

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“Between 1994 and 1996, I performed military service in a Russian city. During those years, due to the extremely hostile climate towards people like me, I was forced to hide my sexual orientation. After military service, I started working in a small food establishment. In this work, I had to lie constantly and pretend my attraction to women as the boss was openly homophobic. During that time I lived permanently with afraid of being identified as homosexual and therefore I pretended to be a different person to avoid losing my job and social disapproval.

In 1998, I began to participate in a very small organization of young gays who met in my city, where I met my current partner. Each time we had to meet in a different place for fear of being persecuted. People belonging to extremist groups and ‘skinheads’ appeared into these meetings with the aim of assaulting us. These acts were also perpetrated by some members of the police who, upon learning of these meetings, intervened and began to beat the participants.

In 1999 I moved with my partner to a larger city to enroll in the University. At the end of this year, when leaving a party at night with

some friends, we were stopped by a police car. They started to insult, they called us “fagots” and one started to hit my friend Alexander violently kicking throughout the body. The attempts on my part to help my friend were of no avail, the two policemen rushed brutally against me as well. After moving away to ask for help, I returned to the scene of the attack but found neither my friend Alexander nor the two policemen. Frightened, I decided to return to my house and days later I reported the incident to the police. However, police told me that I was wrong I thought that police could waste their time in helping “people like them” and told me to give thanks that they do not hang them from the trees. Even though the police officer said that a complaint was not going to change anything, I signed the complaint.

From then on the problems started. In fact, me and my partner started receiving calls first home and later on the mobile. Different voices told us to withdraw the accusations with insults towards our sexual orientation and with death threats.

Later I received a call from the police to introduce me to the central hospital morgue to

identify my friend Alexander and his personal belongings. I recognized my friend Alexander, and he had traits of brutal violence.

At the end of October I received a visit from two policemen, and I was able to recognize one of those who beat my friend Alexander the day of the aggression. On that occasion I was attacked and received death threats if I did not withdraw my complaint. Acts of aggression and threats against life didn’t finish that night, returning home one day I was assaulted by three burly men that threw me to the ground and assaulted brutally and insulted me referring to my sexual orientation. On that occasion they threatened me with a knife threatening to kill my partner without anyone knowing.

A month later I was summoned by the police to communicate that the data in the complaint did not correspond at all with the results of the forensic examination, which concluded that Alexander had died from an accident.

In 2005, I decided to flee my country to seek protection in Spain.”

MAMADOU, GAMBIA

“When I was a child I lived with my mother in Gambia since my father passed away. I started to study, but unfortunately I had to drop out of primary school to get to work and help my mother with her small business selling food products. The little free time that I had was devoted to playing football.

In December 2011 I met Abdoulaye and felt drawn to him immediately. I had never been with anyone before or had ever had a boyfriend or girlfriend. At that moment I did not think that that attraction could cause me problems in the future, I saw it as a natural feeling that I liked.

Abdoulaye and I started a relationship even though we hid and never showed our relationship in public. The people who knew it warned us that under no circumstances should people know about us.

My partner lived alone because his family threw him out of the house when they knew he was gay. Many times we went to places for tourists in Gambia where the people of the country could not see us or identify us as a couple.

Over time, the sexual orientation of my partner Abdoulaye began to be well-known. The problems started one day when we were both in a disco. Someone advised the police to report that a person was behaving “homosexual” and the police came and arrested my partner. He was detained for more than three months. During this time I knew almost nothing of him and after his departure, in tears he told me that he had not had a lawyer and had not gone before the judge nor had a trial been held. My partner had to bribe the police to get out of prison. After his release, we were only in private and never went out together

for fear of being arrested by the police. A few months later Abdoulaye was arrested again. I was not with him at that time so I was looking for him for days because I did not know where he could be. Then his neighbor confessed to me that he had been arrested and told me to be very careful because they knew that I too was a homosexual and that I had a relationship with Abdoulaye.


From then on I started to hide and decided not to leave the house. After a while my mother helped me to leave Gambia. She cried a lot because she only had me but I knew that knowing my sexual orientation life would be very complicated in Gambia for me.

In 2014 I left my country and traveled to Spain to seek protection..”

World Press Photo



MIMI, ETHIOPIA



“In 2005 I started to have contact with a gay association in my country. We were not many but step by step more people joined. We met in clandestine places where we chatted, like houses of refuge. For me to find this site was a balm. This association gave us guidance, moral support, how to act not to being recognized as gay or lesbian, rather how to hide from society. One day an intellectual-looking man came to the scene. He said he was gay and a teacher at the university and wanted to belong to the association. He was with us a long time,

pected that he was a police infiltrator and he had all the data of us.

My family knew that I was a lesbian when I was arrested in 2008 with a friend and they took us to the police station. From that moment my calvary began. My mother kicked me out. She said that I was possessed, that the devil was inside me and that I was not her daughter. My brothers were even worse than my mother. They were worried about what others might say. There began the insults, the aggressions and pressures so that I left our neighbourhood as soon as possible and that nobody knew.

Then it completely disappeared, and we sus-

After being detained for 15 days and being kicked out of my house, I went to live with my friend in another part of the city where we were always hiding for fear that the police would arrest us again. Faced with this situation I decided to flee to Spain. I traveled to Madrid on August 15, 2009. In Madrid I spent a few horrible days, I did not know anyone, I wandered through the streets. In Puerta del Sol I met a woman who was an Ethiopian, I recognized her by her physical appearance. She took me to her house. She told me that I had to go to the police. Finally I applied for asylum.”

OMAR, PALESTINE

Palestinian refugee in Spain who fled of persecution for being a homosexual and for his Palestinian nationality.

He understands his case from a double problem: “Being Palestinian and gay is the worst thing you can be.”

And, even though he is not a practitioner, Islam prohibits homosexuality, which makes him feel very guilty.

Omar assumes that the asylum application becomes a way for its story to be recognized, to

make visible that there are many people seeking international protection persecuted for reasons of gender and that are not reflected in the official figures. It also assumes it as an opportunity to talk about its story and resignify the lived experience, and to realize real awareness that they can and should exercise the right to be protected. However, he admits feelings of frustration and injustice in the process.

Indeed, Omar does not believe that the role granted by a State will ensure that nothing changes, and admits that the Refugee Statute

has not changed his life, has simply allowed him to be in Spain. From the beginning he understood that he has done nothing wrong in life and that he has the right to be here. His hard experience of living the occupation, far from having destroyed it, gives him much strength to go ahead and makes him more creative. He feels almost obsessive about resistance. However, he says he feels guilty very easily and that makes his recovery difficult. He believes that, sometimes, he denies himself the right to be happy.





SERGE, CAMEROON

“When I was in school I realized that I liked people of the same sex. In my country homosexuality is prohibited by law so I always had to keep my relationships secret and hidden. In several neighborhoods of my city there have been attacks on homosexual people with terrible consequences.

A few years ago I met a man with whom I decided to go to live in the city where I come from north-west Cameroon. On February 19, 2015, being in my house, people from my neighborhood who were aware of the relationship that we had came to our house throwing objects and breaking the windows and car with stones and burning my house later . My

partner and I were beaten by these people until the police came and we were taken to police stations, where we stayed for 4 days.

On the fourth day we were taken to the Council of State, within which there is a department where homosexual people are awaiting trial, among other people for other reasons. In this place I was separated from my partner each in a different cell and we both received maltreatment, vexations, throwing boiling water and not feed. I had to bribe one of the night guards with money so that me and my partner could escape from prison.

Finally on August 9, 2015 I fled to Yaoundé

and got a passport with which I got to travel. During the time that I resided in Yaoundé I kept hidden in the house of a friend who lent me money and made me aware that in the press they gave the news of the search for two homosexuals escaped from the prison.

That is when I decided to flee and I traveled to Spain and applied for asylum at Madrid Barajas Airport.”



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