

**CHALLENGES OF THE ASYLUM PROCESS IN
THE MAIN EUROPEAN HOST COUNTRIES:
ORIGINS AND RESPONSES**

**AT FIRST HAND AND
FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE**



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INTRODUCTION

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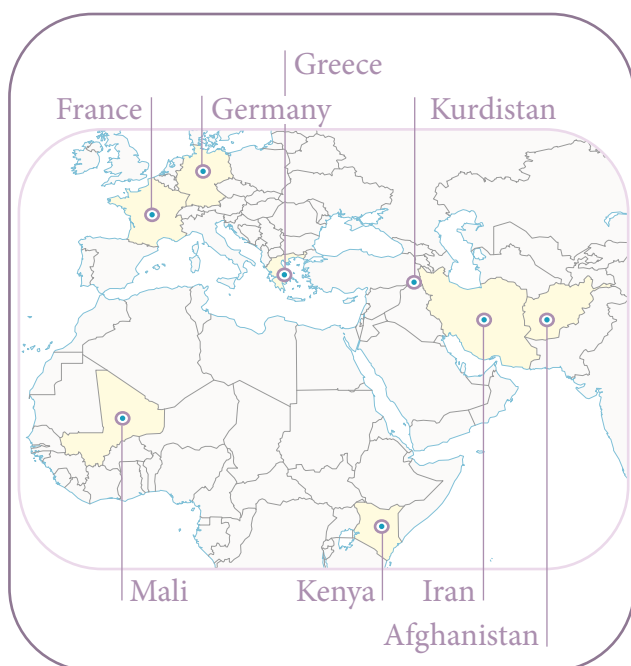
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This report is the result of a research project carried out by EREI Elkartasunerako Elkartea, through interviews that were conducted in France and Germany to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These two countries are the two main host countries of Europe, which means that they receive most of the asylum applications in Europe. According to data published by the European Commission [European Commission, 2022], Germany received the highest number of asylum applications in 2021 (148,200), while France received 103,800, at second place. That is why the research project focuses on analyzing and making visible the challenges of the asylum process in these two countries. Besides, and taking into account the previous work of the association EREI, as well as its previous research project performed in Greece about the migratory realities at first hand and from a gender perspective [Association EREI, 2022], most of the people on the move known and interviewed in Greece shared their intention to continue with their asylum process in Germany or France. Therefore, on the one hand, this research project aims to continue the previous research work, making visible the challenges that exist in other European countries, after passing through Greece. On the other hand, the research project focuses on the main host countries of Europe, due to the number of asylum applications they receive, which can offer a relevant picture of the migratory reality of Europe.

In order to carry out the research project, we interviewed 18 people: 10 women and 8 men from Afghanistan, Iran, Kurdistan, Mali and Kenya.

In France, the interviews took place in Paris, Caen, Rennes and Lyon, while in Germany the cities visited for interviews were Friedberg, Düsseldorf, Greven, Berlin and Leipzig.



The interviews were focused on three major points, which consist of the sections that conform this report:

The realities in the countries of origin

The country of origin of most of the people interviewed is Afghanistan and one of the main nationalities of those who applied for asylum in the European Union in 2021 was Afghanistan (the second nationality, after Syria) [European Commission, 2022]. Therefore, the report includes the political and socio-economical reality of the country, as well as the consequences of the economical globalization on its reality, on the environmental situation and on the migratory fluxes. In addition, and taking into account that many of the Afghan people interviewed were born or raised in Iran as refugees, the report will also address the reality of Iran. This section is performed from a gender perspective through the systematization of the information gathered in the interviews and completing it with the information obtained from reference bibliography.

Challenges in the host countries

The interviews covered the difficulties and challenges existing in the main host countries: Germany and France. The people interviewed shared with us the situation they experience in these countries as asylum seekers, refugees or migrants,

regarding access to housing, education or work, as well as structural racism. Therefore, this section will socialize the challenges and difficulties that migrant people have to face in Germany and France, at first hand and from a gender perspective. Besides, the nationality and the transit through Greece are also considered, since most of the people interviewed arrived in Europe through Greece.

The responses to challenges: activisms and emancipatory projects

There are many difficulties in the hosting countries. However, a lot of responses are also created in order to face these difficulties and to defend human rights, and especially women's rights. During the interviews, we gathered information about some initiatives and projects that raised as a response to the challenges existing in France and Germany. These projects are also sometimes a means to guarantee an economical support and a tool to build an emancipatory future. In this report, projects based on a social and solidarity-based economy are prioritized, where human rights of all people are respected and where the aim is to reduce inequalities. In addition, the interviewed people shared the actions that they carry out in defense of human rights and in defense of a society free of racism and xenophobia. Some of the women interviewed are activists that fight for women's rights and to build an antipatriarchal society. In this section some activisms that are carried out in migratory contexts are shared, and specially activisms led by women.

02

**THE REALITY IN THE
COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN**

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AFGHANISTAN

At war for decades

“It is many years that we are dying and trying to live in Afghanistan, dying and trying to live in Afghanistan”. (Man, 25)

The recent history of Afghanistan is characterized by war and occupations, which have influenced prominently the political and socio-economical reality of the country, as well as the consequent migratory fluxes. In 1979, the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan to support the newly formed Afghan government led by a communist formation and out of fear of the growing influence that the United States (US) had exerted in the country in recent years [El orden mundial, 2021b]. At the same time, the United States feared that communism would settle in the country and therefore, they supported economically and trained the mujahidin, who declared war to the Soviet Union. The word mujahidin means “people who make jihad” and in the Islamic context it is used to refer to fighters with strong religious convictions or Islamic fundamentalists [Ara, 2021].

After nine years of war, the Soviet Union left Afghanistan and the country was left in a civil war between different factions of the mujahidin. It is in the context of the civil war that the Taliban emerged in 1994. They introduced themselves as students-warriors and became another militia in the country’s civil war [BBC, 2021]. Soon they gained popularity and in 1996 they occupied Kabul. They formed the

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and imposed the sharia or the orthodox interpretation of the Islamic law. The public executions became frequent and the cinema, theatre and television were censored [The New York Times, 2021].

The Taliban also prohibited the access to education for girls from the age of 8, banning the enrollment of young women in secondary and university education. Besides, they also prohibited the access to work for women, with few exceptions for workers in the health system. Women had to wear the burka and always be accompanied by a male member of their family. These restrictions had an even more devastating impact on women who did not have a male family member to accompany them, since they could not leave home, or receive essential medical treatment. Such cases were common (up to 25% of women), as many men died in the civil war. In many cases, these women had serious problems feeding themselves and their children [Leclerc and Shreeves, 2023].

“In Afghanistan there is a strong relationship between religion and patriarchy. Patriarchy is not only about men, but also about women.

It is many centuries of patriarchy, and I think that the Islamic religion is really a patriarchal religion”. (Woman, 38)

Taliban controlled Afghanistan until the invasion of the US and NATO in October 2001, one month after the attacks of 11 of September in the United States. The Taliban leaders took refuge in Pakistan and in rural and remote places of Afghanistan [El orden mundial 2021a], where they continued controlling part of the country and fighting against the United States. At the end of 2001 a transitory government led by Hamid Karzai was appointed. Hamid Karzai was a politician from an influential pashtun tribe and was the president of Afghanistan until 2014. In that year the NATO officially ended the fighting operations in Afghanistan, even if the conflict did not end until August 2021.

Regarding the Afghan civil citizens, more than 45,000 people died due to war during the occupation of the United States [Aljazeera, 2021a]. Moreover, the Human Development Index of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) continued to be negative: child mortality, short life expectancy, gender inequality, food insecurity, etc. According to experts on human rights issues, the balance of the US occupation of Afghanistan was very negative: the number of victims was very high in the 20 years of occupation and the armed groups, the Afghan army and the foreign forces committed human rights violations with total impunity [Eldiario.es, 2021].

“In 2003 I enrolled at Kabul University, at the Faculty of Arts, and started studying theatre. Later I met a French theatre director, who came to Afghanistan with her group to teach French comedy to Afghan students. After more than a month and a half of workshops, she selected 22 students to learn theatre with her and invited us to France. We performed several plays in Afghanistan and Paris and travelled around the world. But in 2009, one of my colleagues, she was arrested by terrorists, killed and cut, put in a hole. We found her two weeks later and we understood that it was time to leave Afghanistan”. (Woman, 38)

The Taliban’s return to power

“The former president, Ashraf Ghani, sold the country. The soldiers didn’t fight against the Taliban and didn’t let the people to fight against them. More than the half of Afghanistan fought, but many that were connected to the system, like Ashraf Ghani, didn’t do it. Obviously, the president sold the country and since August 2021 the Taliban took the power”. (Man, 25)

Since 2015 the military presence decreased and the NATO took a secondary role, focused on training, advising and assisting Afghan security forces and aiming to move towards national reconciliation. Nevertheless, the peace negotiations between the Afghan government, led by Ashraf Ghani, and the Taliban were not productive. Even if a peace agreement between the Taliban and the government of the United States was signed in February 2020, the withdrawal of the US troops in August 2021, ended up with the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan [Bargués, 2021].

“The United States put the Taliban in power in Afghanistan. What does it mean? They took whatever they wanted from Afghanistan, and now don’t they care about it? They put the Taliban in power to kill people and make people kill each other. They rape, kill, steal, make the people flee their homes...” (Man, 25)

“In Afghanistan, with the Taliban, everything is black. So it’s not enough to talk about this, because it’s more than this. Much more than what I have to say”. (Woman, 22)

Since the Taliban are back in power, restrictions on women's rights as well as freedom of expression have increased. Besides, the extreme poverty increased: according to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 47⁰/₀ of the Afghan citizens lived in poverty in 2020, whereas in 2022 the percentage increased to 97⁰/₀. In addition, drought, flash floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters aggravated by climate change have exacerbated the country's humanitarian crisis. In turn, the Taliban have carried out arbitrary arrests, torture or extrajudicial executions, generating an atmosphere of fear [Amnesty International, 2023a].

“We have many groups of people in Afghanistan. For example: Hazaras, Pashtuns... The Afghan government pays attention to the Hazaras because they have different relations, different way of thinking, different objectives, different plans...”
(Woman, 18)

Different ethnic groups live together in Afghanistan and one of them is the Hazara community, one of the ethnic groups that most persecution suffered during the history. The Hazara community stand out because of their religion and life form, and the majority of them are Shiite Muslims. The height of the persecution dates back to the end of the 19th century, where a genocide campaign was carried out, with about 60⁰/₀ of the Hazara population being executed. Since the Taliban are back in power, the Hazara community is again dealing with attacks and discrimination, just as it happened when Taliban ruled Afghanistan in the 1990 decade [Atalayar, 2022].

“Education is very important. Especially Hazara girls and young women want to study. It is their first goal in life”.
(Woman, 18)

Since Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, the Islamic State - Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), an affiliate of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Afghanistan, claimed responsibility in 13 attacks against the Hazara community. In these attacks at least 700 people were killed and injured. The Taliban did not seriously answer to these attacks. They did not provide the necessary help to the victims of the attacks and their families, even if they have the responsibility to protect the communities that are in danger [Human Rights Watch, 2022a]. Moreover, the Taliban performed attacks directed towards the Hazara community, making clear that they continue persecuting, torturing and extrajudicially executing people that belong to the Hazara ethnic group [Amnesty International, 2022a]. These attacks happened in schools, work centers, public spaces or mosques. It should be pointed out the suicide attack perpetuated in a school in Kabul, in September 2022, where at least 50 people were killed and more than 100 people were injured. The attack took place in a neighborhood where mainly people from the Hazara community reside and most of the victims were girls and young women [El País, 2022].

Women's and LGTBIQ+ rights

“Because now, after the Taliban took power in Afghanistan, women cannot study. It's unbelievable how this can happen, how they can't be educated, how they can't even leave their houses. I heard the news that women can't even bake bread and sell it. Before, women could bake bread and sell it. But now, even baking bread at home and selling it to people is forbidden. Because this means that women are working, and they can't do it”.
(Woman, 19)

Regarding women's rights, the secondary education is prohibited for girls and women. Moreover, women's participation in public life has been extremely limited. The Taliban imposed a dress code, forced women to be accompanied by a man in public spaces and banned women and girls from accessing public parks, gyms or public baths. Besides, the Taliban imposed restrictions regarding women's right to work outside home, affecting the ability of women to obtain income [Amnesty Internacional, 2023]. Women are banned from working in sectors that do not belong to health or primary education. Moreover, the prohibition has extended to the work in NGOs [Leclerc and Shreeves, 2023].

“In Koran is written that when a woman is 9 years old, she can get married. You are a baby. I imagine my daughter being 9 years old and I can't imagine her marrying an old man. It is impossible for me. But in Afghanistan it is true and they practice it, it happens”. (Woman, 38)

The Taliban closed the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Therefore, the mechanisms that women victims of gender-based violence could use have reduced and the domestic violence and forced marriages have increased [Amnesty Internacional, 2023a].

Since the Taliban control Afghanistan, women have been arrested and detained for reasons including appearing in public without a male escort or failing to comply with strict dress codes. These women have been accused of committing “moral corruption”, have been denied access to legal services and have been subjected to inhumane treatment and conditions in detention [Leclerc and Shreeves, 2023].

“Because of religion, many women in Afghanistan became patriarchs, not matriarchs. Women accept their roles and transmit them. It is inside them. For instance, when I was pregnant, the mother of my husband asked me to kill my baby, because she was not a boy. I didn't accept it because I love my baby. I don't care if she is boy or girl, she is my baby”. (Woman, 38)

Through these practices, the Taliban have once again systematically and institutionally excluded women, violating their rights. This has caused an atmosphere of fear and persecution. It is not only the Taliban who persecute women, but the families and communities themselves control women as well. While many women and girls protest against the violation of women's rights, many others condemn themselves, reinforcing the conservative gender roles [Leclerc and Shreeves, 2023].

“In the Afghan society, in Afghanistan, the LGTBIQ+ community has no right to exist. I know a man who started a campaign to eliminate a right that the Taliban had: to kill all people from the LGTBIQ+ community (gays, lesbians, transgender people...). For them, these people are monsters or sick people. For them, they have no right to live”.
(Woman, 38)

The LGBTQ+ community suffers serious human rights violations under Taliban rule, including threats, attacks, sexual assaults, detentions, etc. In addition, it is feared that the Taliban will once again perpetuate past practices, including the death penalty for those suspected of engaging in homosexual relations [Amnesty Internacional, 2023].

“I hope the power of women will come back, they already have the power. If the Taliban let them be free, they can show their great power. I think the Taliban are scared of women. Because if they let them study, if the Taliban let women improve, then the Taliban will become nothing. This is why the Taliban stop them. And it is the power of women”.
(Woman, 22)



And why so many wars and occupations?

“Why are there so many wars in Afghanistan since such many years? Because of its resources. Why did they come from so many countries to Afghanistan and killed so many people? They need the resources of Afghanistan. For me it is like this, and they don't care about the Afghan people. Only about its resources”. (Mujer, 22)

According to the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum of Afghanistan that was running under the occupation of the United States, Afghanistan holds at least \$3 trillion worth of untapped mineral resources. It is believed that Afghanistan holds 2,2 billions of tons of iron, 1,3 billions of tons of marble and 1,4 millions of tons of rare-earth elements. It also yields valuable metal reserves, building material reserves, industrial mineral resources and petroleum and gas areas [Aljazeera, 2021b].

“Let me tell you about it. It's all about business. Since 100 years, colonization is something very big. Afghanistan, if you search about it, it's the biggest, richest poor country in the world. Why? Because of the mountains. Not mountains, what it's inside the mountains. Because of the stones, because of the gas, because of the petroleum. They take all the resources and they go. This is all about that. This is death. This is killing, making war. It's all about it. This is all about business. Uranium. Afghanistan has it. Big number of uranium in the mountains. It's about business. People are not important in these countries”. (Man, 25)

Afghan population in exile

After the Taliban takeover, many Afghans continue to flee their homes and the country. According to data recovered at the end of 2022, it is estimated that more than 3.5 million of Afghans are internally displaced and at least 8 million live in the neighbour countries [UNHCR, 2023a]. Besides, 2.6 millions of Afghan refugees are registered worldwide, of which 2.2 millions are registered in Iran and Pakistan [UNHCR, 2023b]. Around 750,000 Afghan refugees are registered in Iran, while 2.6 millions of Afghans live in Iran without being refugees, but having participated in the headcount that the government carried out in 2022 [UNHCR, 2023b; European Commission, 2022]. Among Afghan population in Iran and taking into account the information issued by the Iranian government in 2022, around 1 million Afghan people arrived in Iran after the Taliban's took over Afghanistan in August 2021 [UNHCR, 2023a].

In addition, UNHCR estimates that 500,000 Afghan people live without documents in Iran [UNHCR, 2023c].

In 2021, almost 100.000 people coming from Afghanistan applied for asylum in the European Union [European Commission, 2022] and according to data published in January 2023, only the 52% of the asylum applications of Afghan individuals received recognition as refugees in the European Union [EUAA, 2023]. In spite of being in danger in Afghanistan, some countries continue pushing back Afghan asylum seekers and refugees. Moreover, many Afghan migrants are denied the right to apply for asylum, are pushed back upon arrival at the border or suffer other human rights violations in host countries [Amnesty International, 2023a].



Iran: a refuge for Afghan people?

According to data published by UNHCR, in August 2022 Iran was hosting one of the largest refugee populations in the world, of which the majority were Afghan refugees. The Afghan population started to migrate in big numbers to Iran after the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979; between 1980 and 1989, 2.9 million Afghans fled their country to migrate to Iran [EUAA, 2022]. During this period, the migratory politics of the recently founded Islamic Republic of Iran were welcoming, since almost every Muslim that was fleeing from the Soviet invasion was given refuge. From a religious perspective, welcoming the Afghan population meant helping Muslim brothers and sisters [Naseh et al, 2018]. The Afghans had the right to access health, education and food, as well as work and investment opportunities [Siavoshi, 2022].

However, beginning of 1990 the migratory politics started to be more severe and restrictive. The Iranian government signed a repatriation agreement with the Afghan government and UNHCR after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan. Many of the social services that were given to Afghan refugees were removed, restrictions were imposed for the allowed job categories and the access to public education of the migrant children without documentation was prohibited [Siavoshi, 2022]. In addition, Afghans that were seeking refuge in Iran had to prove that they were persecuted in Afghanistan, so that they could be accepted as refugees [Naseh et al, 2018].

“I grew up in Iran, in Isfahan. Yes, I was a guest in Iran most of my life, but they did what they wanted. And they still do what they want. As Afghan refugees, we are paying for our own breathing in Iran. We pay for the right to breathe”. (Man, 25)

The Afghan civil war and the first Taliban government caused big migratory fluxes again from Afghanistan to Iran. Despite the more restrictive

migratory policies, the geographical proximity and the language and culture similarity, made Iran the destination of those who were fleeing the country. After the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States, the restrictive migratory policies led to the signature of the second repatriation agreement between the Iranian government and the Afghan government and UNHCR in 2002. At the same time, Iran reinforced the east borders of the country and adopted measures that affected specifically to Afghan refugees. Iran introduced the temporary registration cards (Amayesh), that limited the time that Afghan refugees could remain in Iran and where they could live [Naseh et al, 2018]. Iran restricted the freedom of movement of Afghan refugees out of their province of residence, as well as the access to work. Afghan refugees could only work in four categories of non-specialized work [Siavoshi, 2022].

“As an Afghan in Iran, you can work, but in the lowest level of society. I almost became a lawyer, I was in the last year of studies to become a lawyer, but I am not allowed even to pass the exam to become an official lawyer. They don't care how many years we study, or that we speak almost the same language as Iranians, that we have the same history, the same beliefs... We have to do the most difficult jobs. Even when you want to apply for the university, you have to sign a paper that says that whenever your studies finish, you have to leave the country”.
(Man, 25)

The restrictive politics worsened after 2005. The government deported around 100,000 Afghans and some provinces and cities prohibited the entry of Afghan people. The east borders of the country were strengthened and detention centers were established to regulate, register and control migrants. Besides, the nationality of the children of Iranian mothers and Afghan fathers was denied [Siavoshi, 2022]. The government introduced more restrictions to issue Amayesh cards to Afghans that were not

documented and stopped to register as refugees those who were arriving from Afghanistan. Since 2007, only the Afghan people that were previously registered with a valid Amayesh card can renew the card and live as documented refugees in Iran. The lack of documents can cause the arrest and deportation of Afghans [Naseh et al, 2018].

“For an Afghan woman education in Iran is difficult. Because I was there, and it was difficult for me. I couldn’t study my favorite subject, I couldn’t study. They said: you are a refugee”. (Woman, 18)

“We could not go to school because we didn’t have documents”. (Woman, 16)

Since 2015, the migratory politics softened slightly and the right to education was given to every Afghan child, independent of their documents. In 2019, children from mixed marriages in which the mother was Iranian were granted Iranian nationality [Siavoshi, 2022].

However, from 2019 onwards, migration policies towards the Afghan refugee population were again tightened, increasing the number of repatriated or expelled Afghans. When the Taliban took over Afghanistan, another migratory flux was generated towards Iran and the Iranian government announced that no new Afghan refugees would be accepted. The Islamic Republic continues with the strict restrictions and deportation [Siavoshi, 2022]. According to UNHCR, 65% of Afghans arriving in Iran to seek refuge are turned back by the government [UNHCR, 2023c].



Politics and religion: the Islamic Revolution or Iranian Revolution

“The structure of the Iranian government is weak. It resembles the Taliban’s way of thinking, because the government structure is also Muslim. Politics and religion go together in Iran. And politicians say you have to wear the hijab, you have to be a Muslim. This is a problem for people. Because people want to separate politics and religion, they are two different things, they are not connected. And we need freedom for everything: for the clothes we wear, for our way of thinking, for expressing ourselves...”
(Woman, 18)

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 meant a big change in the Iranian society and the religion started to be the central part of the State. Iran came from an authoritarian monarchy aligned with the Western countries, which was supported by the United Kingdom and the United States. This monarchy of the Pahlavi dynasty dates back to 1926, when General Reza Khan Pahlavi staged a coup d’état and proclaimed himself king of kings (Shah). During his reign he carried out Western-style reforms, most notably the prohibition of women from wearing the veil in public. Besides, his repression campaign against every dissident caused displeasure within the population and the clergy. During his son’s, Mohamed Reza Pahlavi’s rule, the Shah allowed the exploitation of oil by the United Kingdom, which caused a big disapproval from the citizens. As a result, the political organization National Front nationalized oil, but two years later the United Kingdom and the United States, with the support of the Shah, carried out a coup d’état to recover its exploitation. From then on, the Shah was associated with the Western

countries and toughened its policies against internal opposition [El orden mundial, 2022]. The displeasure of the population increased, who accused the Shah and his family to lead a tyrannical and corrupt regime. The Shah responded to the demonstrations by increasing repression. Behind the protests, there were a big range of people with different ideals, who were united due to their rejection to the monarchy. There were liberal students, communists and also Islamic fundamentalists. The last ones gained power during the protests, since they gathered a big number of Iranian because of the religion [France24, 2022].

The demonstrations intensified and in 1977 the Iranian Revolution started. These protests overthrew the Shah and 2,500 years of Persian monarchy. The clergy’s leader who opposed the Shah was Ruhollah Khomeini, who came back from exile in 1979. He proclaimed the Islamic Republic, which was ratified by the 99% of the population. Iran became a republican, authoritarian and anti-Western theocracy, ruled by the Islamic law [El orden mundial, 2022].

“The only reason the Revolution happened 44 years ago was religion. Khomeini and his government controlled everything, they put limitations, the same way the Taliban are doing in Afghanistan. The same thing happened in Iran. Since the first presidential elections in Iran, since 1980, there were demonstrations, once a year, twice a year. They killed a lot of people. They executed people, but not together. Every time in a different place or different area, killing people”. (Man, 36)

Women's rights in Iran

During the Islamic Revolution and after the Islamic Republic was proclaimed, hangings and massive imprisonments were carried out. Thousands died and hundreds millions fled Iran. The Islamic Republic implemented new restrictions: media was controlled, the Iranian population was isolated from the Western influence, sex segregation was established in public spaces, women were forced to use the veil, alcohol consumption was prohibited, musical instruments were banned in television, etc. The morality police enforced all these prohibitions. And it continues to do so today [The New York Times, 2019].

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic, women lost many of their rights. They began to be totally dependent on men: first on their father or brothers, and afterward on their husband. Women had to ask permission from men in order to study or travel [France24, 2022]. They lost the right to divorce and the legal age of maturity was reduced to 9 years for girls and 14 years for boys. This change was inserted in the constitution and meant that girls began to be given in marriage at the age of 9. Besides, the temporary marriages or pleasure marriages stopped to be legally sanctioned and even started to be encouraged openly. This meant that men could marry temporarily outside of their permanent marriages. These temporary marriages could last from one hour to 99 years [Hoodfar, 2009].

“Both Iran and Afghanistan, as well as many other countries, use the name of Islam to do what they want. To be in the power, and to do what they want, and not leave women grow up”. (Man, 25)

In addition, the Ayatollah Khomeini announced that women could not be judges and established the inferior condition of women, since two female witnesses were equal to one male witness. Besides, the sex segregation was set up in beaches, public events and public transportation. Moreover, and with the purpose to hold women inside their homes, the regime closed the childcare services [Hoodfar, 2009].

In the context of constant violation of women's rights, women organized demonstrations and protests. The protest carried out by thousand of women on March 8, 1979, one month later of the establishment of the Islamic Republic, can be highlighted. Activist women of different ideologies came together to confront the repressive actions imposed by the regime. As a consequence, many of the participating women were imprisoned or forced to exile [Hoodfar, 2009].

Women continued organizing and fighting for their rights and they achieved some improvements. A turning point was the end of the Iran-Irak war (1980-1988) and Ayatollah Khomeini's death. In the early 1990s, a law was passed that provided wages for domestic work, so that women divorced after many years of marriage could be economically compensated for their household tasks. The activism led by women continued and their protest were often repressed [Hoodfar, 2009]. Besides, the outfit turned to be a form of resistance and some women decided not to use the veil correctly [BBC, 2019].

“I think the situation in Iran is very difficult. Being a woman and also an Afghan refugee, it is very difficult to live there”. (Woman, 19)

Nowadays, women's rights continue to be violated and women and girls are still treated as second class citizens in Iran. By law a girl can marry at the age of 13, but with parental or judicial consent even younger girls can marry. According to Iranian government data, 16,000 girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were married in 2021 [UN Human Rights, 2021]. Besides, married women cannot leave the country without their husbands' consent [Human Rights Watch, 2015]. Sex outside of marriage is criminalized with beatings if unmarried and death if married. However, this law particularly impacts women, as pregnancy serves as evidence of a sexual relationship. In addition, women who report sexual violence can be prosecuted if the authorities believe that the sexual relationship was consensual. Regarding the rights of the LGTBQ+ population, homosexual relations are punishable by beatings or the death penalty in the case of men [Human Rights Watch, 2022b].

Women are forced to wear the veil or hijab in public and those who are seen without the veil in public can be imprisoned, beaten or fined. These laws apply to women and girls older than 9, which is the minimum age of criminal responsibility for girls in Iran. In practice, the authorities have also imposed

the veil to girls who are 7 years old and start school [Amnesty International, 2022b].

Wave of protests over Mahsa Amini's death

The morality police is the responsible to guarantee that women's outfit is appropriate. Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, was detained in Tehran due to the obligation of wearing the veil. Mahsa Amini died in police custody on September 16, 2022 at Tehran hospital, three days after she was transferred in a coma from the detention facility [Amnesty International, 2022b] and a series of protests led by women began in the wake of her death.

“Women are taking power with the women's revolution that is happening. They are taking decisions, they are taking the streets, they are speaking loud...” (Woman, 19)

“It is a women's revolution, led by women for the first time. On the one hand, I am very proud, but on the other hand, it is the Islamic terror regime”. (Man, 36)

“It is a very strong protest. When I see that the government is killing people, I think the people who are participating in the protests are very brave. I hope it is worth it, because they are paying for the protests with their own lives”. (Woman, 22)

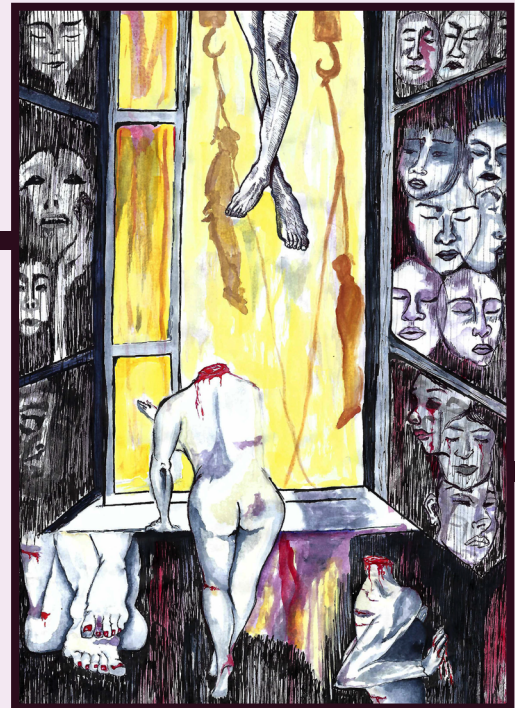
The protests were brutally repressed by the regime. Human Rights Watch documented that the security forces used shotguns, assault rifles and pistols against the protesters, who were demonstrating peacefully and often in large numbers. On November 14, 2022 human rights groups were investigating the deaths of 341 protesters, including 52 children. Moreover, in the context of protests over the death of Mahsa Amini, Iranian security forces have detained hundreds of women's rights activists, human rights defenders, students, lawyers, journalists, etc [Human Rights Watch, 2022b]. According to Amnesty International, between 15,000 and 16,000 people were arrested in the first weeks of the protests. The authorities continued to arrest protesters arbitrarily and have admitted that the number of people arrested is more than 22,000. In addition, the Iranian authorities are using the death penalty as a tool of police repression and as a pressure measure to prevent citizens from participating in protests. Four protesters were executed in December 2022 and in January 2023 [Amnesty International, 2023b].

“The focus is on women in Iran, but the situation of refugee women in Iran is difficult. I am talking to my friends and they are not sure what they should do, they don't know if they should support this movement, because no one is sure what will happen to them if they demonstrate. The danger is greater for refugees. They may be deported or killed because they are Afghans”. (Woman, 19)

The fear of Afghan refugee women to participate in demonstrations is understandable because of the repression they have experienced over the past decades in Iran, as well as the discrimination and violence that minority ethnic and religious groups are suffering [Amnesty International, 2023c]. However, this women-led protest is creating new ties between Iranian and Afghan women.

“After what happened in Iran, I think it really connects us in another way, especially women. Women in Iran and Afghanistan feel really connected. Before I always felt we had no connection. I was born in Iran, I lived there for 15 or 16 years, but I never had an Iranian friend. And after this, my friends also say that Iran is changing a little bit”.
(Woman, 19)

“I think the women of Iran and Afghanistan have broken the rules and are doing a great work to connect these countries. They are starting to rebuild the relationship that we had many centuries ago. I think it's a good movement”.
(Woman, 26)



The protests from Germany

“I think the movement in Iran took a lot of attention. When we talk about “Women, life, freedom” with Germans, they try to engage, because media also focuses on that and they are talking about it. But with Afghans is different. When you talk about it, they don’t want to engage”. (Woman, 19)

“Since the protests started, I felt connected and I started with my actions in social media or even participating in demonstrations. When I would spread it and show it on social media, men would say to me, ‘What are you doing, why are you supporting them?’ They are Iranians’. This reaction was coming from Afghan men, even Iranian men. But Afghan and Iranian women were supporting me”. (Woman, 26)

Iran today: human rights and climate change

Today, according to a report published by Amnesty International in early 2023, Iran continues to violate freedom of expression, association and assembly. In addition to the protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini, other protests and demonstrations have been repressed and protesters have been arbitrarily detained. Authorities have censored TV channels and as of September 2022 added WhatsApp and Instagram to the list of blocked and/or filtered mobile apps (which include Facebook, Signal, Telegram, Twitter and YouTube). Minority ethnic groups and religions (Kurds, Baloch, Turkmen... and Christian, Jewish, Sunni...), as well as refugees and migrants, continue to suffer discrimination, their access to education, work and adoption is restricted, etc. Besides, in 2022, death penalty executions increased and public executions restarted after an interruption of two years. Moreover, the authorities are unpunished, as no public official has been investigated or held accountable for extrajudicial killings or other deaths, torture, forced disappearances or human rights violations in 2022 and previous years. In addition, the authorities have covered up the actual number of people killed by security forces during the protests and in some cases, including cases of children, have claimed that the deaths were due to suicide [Amnesty International, 2023c].

“Zarina, 16 years old girl. They took her, 8 people rapped her, and then threw her from 8 floor building. Then they said that she killed herself. And this is not the only example. Protesters are also taken to prison, held for two months, then released and after two or three days they commit suicide. They inject them with morphine, strong morphine, and after 2-3 days they die from that, they don’t commit suicide”. (Man, 36)

On the other hand, environmental experts have criticized the lack of policies aimed at addressing the

environmental crisis that Iran is experiencing. Iran is losing lakes, rivers and wetlands, and deforestation and air and water pollution are influencing the climate crisis. In July 2022, Iran was one of the eight countries that abstained from the United Nations General Assembly resolution, where access to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment was declared a human right [Amnesty International, 2023c].

“There were lakes in Iran and the government could do something to protect them, but it didn’t. There was a very famous lake that dried up. It was important. I think it was the biggest salt lake in the world and it was very touching for many climate activists. They just didn’t care and it dried up. There was also another river in Isfahan, it was very big and used to attract a lot of people to its shores, and it also dried up. On the other hand, the Iranian leopard was endangered and the government could have done something about it”. (Woman, 19)

“Pollution is huge”. (Woman, 26)

Air pollution, lack of water and desertification of agricultural land are factors that can significantly influence population movements in search of more sustainable homes and livelihoods. Water shortage is already affecting farmers and many are abandoning their homes and villages to move to settlements on the outskirts of cities [Khani, 2022].

Many of the people interviewed coming from Iran are Afghans and their main reasons for fleeing Iran are the violations of their human rights as refugees living in Iran. Likewise, human rights and women’s rights violations are also behind the migration flows from Iran. In turn, climate change and the environmental crisis are factors that are having an increasing impact on population movements both internally within the country and beyond its borders.

The gas in Iran

“Iran has really big reserve of gas, it’s actually one of the biggest place in the world having gas, but these days the government has stopped it and people don’t have the right to use gas”.

(Woman, 26)

“And now in winter is very cold, and they have problems with gas, they don’t have any gas”.

(Woman, 19)

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**CHALLENGES IN THE
HOST COUNTRIES**

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General context: asylum applications, international protection and residence

According to data published by UNHCR in mid-2022, Germany is the world's third largest host country for refugees: 2.2 million refugees are registered in Germany [UNHCR, 2023d]. In 2022, 244,132 people applied for asylum in Germany, increasing the number of asylum applications received in the years 2021 and 2020. The main countries of origin of asylum seekers were Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, Georgia and Iran. At the end of the year, 136,448 asylum applications were still pending. Of the asylum applications that were resolved in 2022, the recognition rate was 72.3%, with 27.7% of asylum applications denied [AIDA, 2022a].

Taking into account that a large number of people interviewed come from Afghanistan and Iran, it should be noted that 41,471 people from Afghanistan applied for asylum in 2022 and of the applications that were resolved, 23% were granted refugee status, 5.1% were granted subsidiary protection and 71.2% were granted humanitarian protection. 7,350 people from Iran applied for asylum in Germany and of the applications processed, 55.1% were rejected, 39.1% were granted refugee status, 4.1% subsidiary protection and 1.7% humanitarian protection. In turn, 72% of asylum applications were not resolved before the end of the year [AIDA, 2022a].

	Applicants in 2022	Pending at end of 2022	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Humanitarian protection	Rejection
Total	244,132	136,448	40,911	57,532	30,020	49,330
%			23.0%	32.4%	16.9%	27.7%
Afghanistan	41,471	27,594	8,539	1,903	26,499	260
%			23.0%	5.1%	71.2%	0.7%
Iran	7,350	5,274	1,252	133	53	1,768
%			39.1%	4.1%	1.7%	55.1%

Individuals who have been granted international protection, are allowed to reside in Germany for a certain period of time:

- Individuals with refugee status have permission to reside in Germany for 3 years.
- Individuals with subsidiary protection have a residence permit for one year (renewable for two more years).
- Individuals with humanitarian protection have a residence permit for 1 year.

In order to renew residency in all three cases, the reasons for which the permit was granted in the first instance must still be in force [AIDA, 2022a].

“I don’t have real asylum. They let me stay here only because of the situation of my country at the moment. Since the situation in Afghanistan is not good now, they let me stay here for one year”. (Man, 27)

For long-term residence to be granted, there are two paths for individuals with refugee status: 1) After three years of obtaining the first residence permit, they have to have C1 level of German, be able to cover a large part of the living costs and have enough space to live together with their families, 2) After five years of living in Germany (including the time the asylum process lasted), they have to have A2 level of German, be able to cover a good part of the living costs and have enough space to live together with their families. In the case of individuals with subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection, they can apply for long-term residence if they have lived in Germany for at least five years (this

includes the time the asylum process lasted), if they can cover the full costs of living and have enough space to live together with their families. In addition, they have to prove that they have been paying taxes for at least 60 months, which means that they have been working for at least 5 years [AIDA, 2022a].

“Most of the time you get rejected and then they will see what you do, if you are going to school, if you are finding a job, if you can support yourself. Then maybe you can have this chance to get a residence here. But automatically you don’t get it”. (Man, 27)

In order to obtain German citizenship, in most cases asylum seekers are required to have lived in Germany legally and without interruption for 8 years [AIDA, 2022a].

“The system here is like everything is planned. There is a plan and there is a way that you must follow if you want to stay here”. (Man, 27)

“In Germany you need time. Specially at the beginning, when you don’t know the country, it’s very difficult. Once you know the country, when you know the way, when you know the procedure, then you can find your way”. (Woman, 22)

Applying for asylum in Germany: reception and accommodation

Asylum applications are made at reception centers or facilities and once asylum seekers have registered, they have to be issued with a certificate of arrival. Then, they are informed which region or Bundesland is applicable to them [AIDA, 2022a]. In some cases it coincides with the region of registration, but not always.

“When we arrived, we went directly to a camp.

When you apply for asylum here, you are assigned a camp and you stay there for one or two weeks. Then they will examine you: your body, your health, your blood. Afterwards, you have to go to the official asylum governmental office (BAMF). They ask you basic questions and enter your name into a refugee distribution system to see which region has space for new refugees. They can send you to another region, apart from the one in which you have applied for asylum”. (Woman, 19)

The freedom of movement of asylum seekers is restricted, they do not have the right to choose their place of residence. Moreover, they have to remain in the region where their reception center is located and cannot leave the assigned area without the permission of the BAMF. Some regions may extend the geographical restriction to include other areas or regions to which asylum seekers may travel [AIDA, 2022a].

“They don’t care if you have family or not. The family of a friend of mine came separately. She, her mother and some brothers were accepted in Berlin, but the father and another brother were sent to another city, because they came later. They had to do a lot of office work until the father could come to Berlin. But the brother is still far away alone. He is in Hamburg”. (Woman, 19)

“There is a rule. In this region you can only move inside the region. You can’t go to another region”. (Man, 36)

In terms of housing, asylum seekers have to stay in the reception or arrival center for a period of up to 18 months [AIDA, 2022a]. Many asylum seekers call these reception or arrival centers camps.

“Most of the people have to go to the camp [reception or arrival center], when they arrive in Germany. In this first camp they register themselves or their families. All the registration documents are done in the first camp”. (Woman, 22)

“It is allowed to go outside of the camp only for 3 days and if you don’t come back to the camp, then your asylum process will start again from the beginning”. (Man, 27)

“It’s not easy. They say that we have a kitchen in the camp. It’s a lie. Yes, there is a kitchen, but they lock it. No one can use it. There is also a “cinema room”, which is a TV room for 10 people, opened every night from 21:00 to 22:00 or 23:00. Out of 500 people, only 10 can go. And which language? In English”. (Man, 36)

Once the obligation to stay in the reception or arrival center ends, asylum seekers must be accommodated in collective accommodation centers, which are usually located in the same region [AIDA, 2022a]. Many asylum seekers refer to collective accommodation centers as Heim (German for shelter or residence).

“At first you have to go to the camp and stay there for a while, but there is no exact time for that. In different cities there are different rules. In some cities you can get out of the camp after 6 or 7 months, or even more. It

really depends. Then you have to go to the Heim [or collective accommodation centers]. Here they call it Heim, but it's like a camp. It's better than the primary camp [reception or arrival center], because you can cook. It's a little bit better, but not that much". (Man, 27)

"We passed two camps and now we're in a Heim. But the Heim is like a camp. The only difference is that we can cook. In the camps they provide the food". (Woman, 22)

"Now we are in a Heim. We were transferred here after being in 3 camps. I had never expected that from Germany. Because I heard that after 3 camps or after 6 months we would be transferred to a house. But they transferred us to the Heim and it's not good. And for some people is even worse than for us. Imagine, the toilet is out, so you always have to go out to go to the toilet. That is difficult. In Greece we had the toilet and the kitchen in our container, but here we have to share everything". (Woman, 19)

"It's not clean. And when you go for a shower, you have to go out, because the showers are in another building. In the winter is terrible". (Man, 23)

After the Heim or collective accommodation center, it is possible that asylum seekers are moved to an apartment or decentralized accommodation, as it is called by the BAMF. However, according to data published by the German NGO ProAsyl, there are difficulties for asylum seekers to obtain an apartment. These difficulties become more evident when compared to the statistics of accommodation of Ukrainian refugees. According to ProAsyl, 74% of refugees from Ukraine live in private apartments, while only 9% live in collective accommodation centers or Heim. In addition, individuals who fled Ukraine also have the possibility to stay with relatives, friends, acquaintances or in other private accommodation. However, the reality for asylum

seekers coming from other countries (Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, etc.) is different. They must live in reception or arrival centers (or camps, as the asylum seekers themselves call them) for up to 18 months. Only when they are recognized as refugees or individuals with subsidiary protection may they have the possibility to live in a private apartment provided by the government. In addition, asylum seekers are not allowed to live in private apartments of relatives, friends, etc. or in other private accommodations [ProAsyl, 2023].

"Later you can get a house. At the moment this is difficult, because many refugees from Ukraine came here and they took all the places and apartments". (Man, 27)

"When you receive the documents, you can apply for a house. But the government will tell you in which house you should live". (Woman, 19)

ProAsyl also denounces that in camps and collective accommodation centers, people are isolated, deprived of their privacy and without guidance or other help [ProAsyl, 2023].

"In the room you are 4 or 5 people from different nationalities, no privacy, no TV, no internet, nothing. No school, no work. 16 months spending like that, it can make everyone crazy. No matter where you are from. When you go out, you always see problems. People are crying". (Man, 36)

"There is a camp in Schneeberg (in Saxony) and it's really a nightmare for refugees to be transferred there. To go to the market you have to cross a jungle and you need 45 minutes to reach it. There are no buses". (Man, 36)

"We go to the camps and offer accompaniment to women that are living there. When you are in the camp, it is difficult to know your possibilities, to know which steps you have to follow. We offer this help and guidance". (Woman)

Access to education and employment

“I used to go in front of the camp every week and talk to people, give them cards. I used to tell them that they have to fight for their rights. They don’t know their rights. If you know them, you can fight for them, but if you don’t know, how would you fight for something that you don’t know what it is? Social workers should tell them what is the purpose of the camp, which are the rules, to know the society. But they do nothing. Nothing, not even a class, a language class”. (Man, 36)

In case the asylum seekers obtain international protection and have refugee status or subsidiary protection, they do not have to continue living in reception centers or collective accommodation centers. However, and especially in large cities, it is difficult to find accommodation and that is why many people with international protection stay in collective accommodation centers for a longer period of time. In addition, and since 2016, refugees and individuals with subsidiary protection are generally obliged to continue living in the region where their asylum process took place [AIDA, 2022a].

“We can leave the region to travel and see friends, but we can’t go to live in another region. We have to be here at least 3 or 4 years. Even people who get asylum have to stay in the region for 3 or 4 years. And then they can move”. (Man, 27)

“In Germany all minors must go to school. There is this rule”. (Man, 27)

Although regardless of their status the obligation to attend school applies to all children under the age of 16 or 18 (depending on the region) in Germany, in practice the reality is different for asylum seekers. Access to education is particularly problematic in reception or arrival centers, as in many cases children do not have the possibility to go to school throughout their stay in these centers, as several NGOs have denounced [ProAsyl, 2021].

For the young and adult population, the first step is to learn German. According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), there are two types of courses for asylum seekers: integration courses for asylum seekers who have good prospects of being accepted as refugees (people from Eritrea, Syria and Somalia, and Afghanistan since the beginning of 2022) and an initial orientation for people with unclear prospects of being accepted as refugees [BAMF, 2023]. However, in many cases the waiting time for access to such courses is very long.

“It wasn’t fast to access German classes, because there are so many refugees here. And Ukrainian refugees are here too. So, it’s a little bit difficult to make a German course for my family or myself. That is why I first started by myself with YouTube videos. I was learning and I could speak a little bit and I was able to find solutions to my problems. But when I started school, it was much better for me”. (Woman, 18)

“In Berlin they have a system of welcoming classes to learn the language up to level A2 or B1. And then you go to a regular school, depending on what you want to do. But my friend was telling me that in other cities there are no welcoming classes. They go directly to the school or attend the German course and nothing else. And in some regions you can’t

even attend German classes, the government doesn't pay for them until you get asylum. That's why my friend was here for two years and couldn't go to any classes. She learnt German on YouTube. So, it depends a lot on where you are". (Woman, 26)

"I arrived six months ago and I still haven't been able to join a German course, I'm still waiting. And I have tried many times to join German classes, but I have not been able to. They tell me I have to wait because there are so many refugees. And if I can't speak German, I'm out of society and it's easier for one to feel bad and have depression. It is very difficult". (Woman, 22)

"Refugees have to first go to German classes, which are separate classes for refugees. First, they have to learn the language and then, they can go to normal classes with German students". (Man, 27)

"In this school I'm going to, there are refugees and Germans together. Because we are not from Germany and we can not speak very well German, we have to spend some time, around one year, to study German with 3 or 4 teachers. And after that we have the chance to make an exam to continue with the studies and you can choose what you want to do: you can continue the school, you can continue with work, you can continue studying for university... you have every chance here". (Woman, 18)

Asylum seekers have the right to access professional training (Ausbildung in German). However, the permission to stay in Germany for asylum seekers is renewed every 6 months and considering that professional training lasts 2 to 3 years, many applications are not accepted due to the fear that the training cannot be completed in case that asylum is not granted [AIDA, 2022a].

"People who want to learn a job, go to Berufsschule [professional training] and the ones that want to go to university, have to do the Avitur [the university entrance exam]. You can choose, but as a refugee they insist that you go to professional training school. When I was in the welcoming classes, the teacher asked me what I wanted to do, and I said that I wanted to do the Avitur. They told me that the Avitur is too hard for me and that I can not do it. That I am now in Germany and I have to learn a job. That I have to give the country something back. Because there is lack of professionals and they need them. That's why they are pushing me to go to the professional training school". (Woman, 19)

"They want to make the students ready for work. Germany needs workers. And the access to university is very difficult, specially for people who don't speak German well". (Woman, 18)

Although studying at university is permitted for asylum seekers, in practice there are many difficulties. Asylum seekers with a permit to stay in Germany can access university, but the requirements from the university make access difficult: a university entrance certificate, knowledge of the German language and insurance coverage are required. In addition, asylum seekers who have permission to stay in Germany are not entitled to receive the financial aid that students receive [AIDA, 2022a]. These difficulties and Germany's need for skilled workers complicate asylum seekers' access to university.

"Germany is a country that needs workers. That is why it is difficult to access to the university. They want that students go to work". (Woman, 18)

Regarding access to employment, as a general rule, asylum seekers in reception or arrival centers do not have the right to work. It should be noted that for most asylum seekers, the maximum length of stay in such centers is 18 months, or even 24 months in some regions. After leaving reception or arrival centers, asylum seekers may work if they have been in the region for more than 3 months. However, in practice there are many limitations, as asylum seekers have to apply for a work permit every time they want to work and the employer has to certify that the asylum seeker will be employed if the permit is granted [AIDA, 2022a].

“When you are in the camp you are not allowed to work. They pay you 32€ per week. That it’s not even enough to buy bus tickets for 5 days. Going to the city and coming back costs 7€ per ticket. You can’t eat the food, so you have to buy the food, you smoke, you drink, you need clothes, you need internet, you pay the lawyer. With 32€. How?” (Man, 36)

“When you are in the camp, it means that you don’t have permission to work, no permission to study outside, not even insurance. After leaving the camp, it took me two months to get a work permission. Two months of fighting”. (Man, 36)

“I am an English teacher and I am 4 years in Germany. And I am not able to teach, I am not allowed to teach. I have to work in DHL, in Amazon, in automobile companies... there you are allowed, because they need labour. It is a new version of slavery. When I was working in BMW, there was not even one German working there. Half were refugees and half for Czech Republic and Poland. Why? Because Germans would never work for 10-12€ per hour”. (Man, 36)

“And after working 5 years in BWM, they wanted to deport me. They put you in the labour system and after 5 years they want to deport you. It is a new version of slavery”. (Man, 36)

Challenges and difficulties as an asylum seeker in Germany

Inclusion in German society and having to start all over again is one of the challenges that interviewed asylum seekers report.

“You have to start from zero. Because you are in a new country where you don’t know the language, you don’t have a job, you don’t have money [...] And it can be worse when you don’t know any people here, when you are alone. You have many challenges in front of you”.
(Man, 27)

“Here, you are with yourself. Specially you can not connect with most of the German people. They help you, but you can not make close contact with them”. (Woman, 18)

“The biggest challenge when I arrived was that I was flying, I was in the sky and my feet on the ground, I spent a week crying and happy. I was here, next to my family. For me it was great. I just needed time to understand where I was and what I was supposed to do. My mind was empty. My biggest goal was to come to Germany and I had no plans after that. What should I do, what was the next step. It was really hard for me. The biggest challenge was about myself”. (Woman, 26)

“It’s difficult in Greece, it’s difficult in Germany. When I came to Greece, in Moria there was not much hope, but I kept active. The same in Athens. And I didn’t want to come to Germany, because I was in a theatre group. This had happened to me before in my life, that I had to stop my projects to migrate. But this time I was very close to the performance and I wanted to participate. But my parents wanted to come to Germany. So, at some point I thought I would start again. I came to Germany, I will study German, I will be able to contact with everyone and many doors will open. I have hope”. (Woman, 22)

“Living here is already a challenge. Going to university is a difficult challenge for me. I always think: can I do it or not? I am not sure. Working here is also a challenge for me”.
(Woman, 18)

“In general everything is very difficult here. Learning the language, getting asylum”. (Man, 27)

Coexistence

“Germans don’t care about the difficulties we have. Or maybe they don’t want to know about our difficulties. Maybe they think that refugees live like them or that we don’t have challenges”. (Woman, 22)

“German people are not aware of all these rules that exist for refugees. They don’t know the steps that we have to go through in the asylum process”. (Man, 27)

In addition to the fears and difficulties of arriving in a new country and starting from scratch, there is the uncertainty about the decision of the asylum process. The fear that asylum will not be granted and deportation are other difficulties for people arriving in Germany in search of international protection.

“The main challenge is to get asylum. Because if you get asylum, everything will be easier for you. Because you can decide if you want to access to professional training or not, the way you want to live, where you want to live, and so on. But the problem is that they don’t give asylum so easily”. (Man, 27)

Dublin Regulation

“I heard that some people came here, it was very difficult and they killed themselves. Maybe because they got tired of being in the camp and not getting any documents”.
(Woman, 22)

“Generally, if you get rejected, everything will be more difficult for you. Because as an adult person, when you don’t get to school, it’s very difficult for you to learn the language. There are some German courses, but it’s also difficult to take the course. When you don’t take a course, you can’t learn the language, and when you don’t know the language, it’s impossible to do professional training. Everything is getting worse and worse”. (Man, 27)

“I am a woman living in the Heim, I am married, I work and I contribute with my taxes. And like me, there are many other people who were working and paying their taxes, others were also doing their professional training, but they ended up being deported. They deported a whole chartered flight full of people to Kenya. And this is very destabilizing. It also tells us clearly that we are not safe, even when we are trying to integrate, even when we are trying to be independent, when we are trying to be part of the society”. (Woman)

In addition, dealing with the Dublin Regulation is an additional difficulty faced by asylum seekers.

The Dublin Regulation sets out the criteria for deciding which country should be responsible for studying and processing asylum applications made by a person on European territory. The criteria that determine which country should take responsibility for the asylum application include the asylum seeker’s family or cultural ties to the country or having a visa or residence permit in a member state. Another determining criterion is the country through which the asylum seeker entered the European Union. In fact, this is the criterion most commonly used in the Dublin Regulation, allowing asylum seekers to be deported back to the country where they first entered the EU [UNHCR, 2018]. In the case of most interviewees, the country of entry to Europe was Greece.

“If you have already the asylum in Greece, it affects the situation in Germany very much. The chance that you can get asylum here is lower. It is almost impossible to get asylum here again. People who want to stay here, they do it through professional training to find a job. One more thing is the Dublin cases here. Germany is in the centre of Europe and of course people who come here have passed through other countries. So when you are here, most of the time you are a Dublin case. And there is another challenge for Dublin cases. They have to wait some time, it can be 9 or 18 months, before they can apply for asylum here again. During this time, you can be deported, because it is as if you are illegal. And they deport you to the first country that you entered in Europe”. (Man, 27)

Arms production and Germany's responsibility

“It seems that there are no problems in Iraqi Kurdistan, but here they don't know what is going on there. I have been trying to find a safe place for 9 years: 3 years in Turkey, 4 years in Greece and now I am in Germany. And they want to deport me to Greece, because I have my passport and my fingerprints there”.
(Man, 23)

In addition to the difficulties involved in the asylum process itself, the reaction of German society and racist attitudes are also a difficulty for asylum seekers and refugees.

“For me racism is the biggest challenge. It is a cancer”. (Man, 36)

“There are some German people who don't like refugees. They don't want to accept us. They don't do anything against us, they just say: we can't accept them, they are from another country, why we have to share everything with them”. (Woman, 18)

“People here in Germany are tired of refugees, because in the last years many refugees have come to Europe and especially to Germany. But you know? What people in this country don't know is that governments make this situation for refugees. Germany is one of the leading arms producing countries in the world. They are sending these weapons to make war. Especially they are doing business in Asian countries and in Africa. And people have to leave their countries because of the wars, otherwise they will be killed. So you create this situation, but then you don't accept the refugees, and you think they are responsible for their situation. And they don't take that responsibility. This is something that people here don't know. But governments do it”.
(Man, 27)

On the other hand, finding one's place in the small society that makes up the family is also a challenge, especially for women, who in many cases are responsible for the family care.

“One of the challenges I am facing is the responsibility I have towards my family. I am learning German and I know a bit more than my family. I have to tell them where they have to go, what they have to do. And with this I am having difficulties. I have to find the point for my family and for myself”.
(Woman, 19)

“I am responsible for my family, so I have to learn German fast. I am the oldest and my brother, my sisters and my whole family expect something from me. This is my responsibility, I have to help them”. (Woman, 18)

And the specific challenges as a woman?

The Afghan women interviewed refer to the cultural differences they experience as women in Europe, compared to their country of origin (Afghanistan) or the country where they were born and raised (Iran).

“You have to find yourself again as a person in German society. How you define yourself, or how you think you are and how you are seen as a person. And what you want to do in the future. And integration, especially as a woman. Because we change a lot. As a Muslim, Afghan, refugee woman, we have changed a lot. We have not been wearing the hijab for a year now and we started to question everything”.
(Woman, 19)

The obligation for women in Iran and Afghanistan to wear a specific dress code leaves its after-effects even after they migrated. The influence of social and family pressure is also evident.

“I was the last person in my family to take off my hijab. It was really hard for me. Because all the time I was afraid that if I do it as an adult in my family, who has to support the family, I was afraid that if I took off my hijab, the others would follow me. But they did it before me. I had a big fight with myself, what would happen to me if I put it away? I was worried about heaven, about hell, I would go to hell. And on the other hand, I felt a lot of responsibility for the rest of my family in Iran and Afghanistan. Because they asked me to take care of the family, as a big sister. Not to be a bad influence”. (Woman, 26)

“The hijab issue affects only women. Men are not affected by that. The first thing that you care is how you dress. And men don’t have this pressure. So, most of the time they don’t question it at all. They are Muslims, but they drink alcohol, they smoke, they have sex. And for them it’s normal. But as a woman, every move you make, you really have to reject it or accept it. And this creates a lot of identity crisis, much more for women than for men”. (Woman, 19)



They also question the equality between men and women that is assumed in Europe and criticize the patriarchal society.

“When you come to Germany as an Afghan woman, as a Muslim woman, you can feel something from society. It is hidden, but you can feel it. They tell you that you are in Europe, that you have freedom, that you can do whatever you want. But it is not like that”.
(Woman, 22)

“As a woman, you have to be like a drop in the ocean. Because they can’t feel you, they can’t understand you, they can’t see you. They say to themselves that there is equality because it is Europe. But for me it is not like that. For me there is no equality, it is not enough”. (Woman, 22)

“As women, our experiences are different. In the welcome classes we were only two women and all the others were men. They laughed at us, they bullied us. It’s so inside the society, that sometimes it’s hard to identify it”.
(Woman, 19)

“We are in Germany and we have to change our minds. But most of the refugees from Afghanistan don’t do that, they have the same thinking as in Afghanistan. They change nothing. And this is why I am fighting for women’s rights, for freedom”. (Woman, 18)

Despite the difficulties women have to face simply because they are women, some of them transmit words of hope at finding themselves in a European country being Afghan women.

“When I came to Germany, I had a very powerful feeling: I am a woman from Afghanistan, but now I am in Germany and my situation is different. Here I have more freedom. I can decide what I can do. I can realize how active I can be. And when I think about my future, I feel that I can do many things that women in Afghanistan or Iran cannot do. I have a good feeling of being a woman here. I am a woman and I am here”.
(Woman, 18)

2

FRANCE

General context: asylum applications and accommodation

France was the second European country of destination for asylum seekers in 2022, after Germany, with 15.6% of applications in the European Union [Eurostat, 2023]. 156,455 people applied for international protection in France in 2022, and among the resolved applications, 72.6% were rejected and 22.6% were granted refugee status. It is worth noting that at the end of 2022, 142,940 asylum applications were still pending [AIDA, 2022b].

The main country of asylum seekers in 2022 was Afghanistan, followed by Turkey, Bangladesh, Georgia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Considering that the majority of people interviewed in France were Afghans, it is worth noting that in 2022, 23,755 Afghans applied for asylum in France. Out of the applications that were resolved in 2022, 11,585 people were granted refugee status and 5,235 applications were rejected.

	Applicants in 2022	Pending at end of 2022	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Rejection
Total	156,455	142,940	29,305	6,235	94,195
%			22.6%	4.8%	72.6%
Afghanistan	23,755	23,605	11,585	75	5,235
%			68.6%	0.4%	31.0%

Climate crisis, climate refugees and the arms industry

“We have to stop the production of weapons and the financing of war. And we have to concentrate our energy to the ecological crisis, which is a very big problem globally and which generates many climate refugees. And we are not ready to welcome everybody. We are in 2023 and I think capitalism made the war and financed war. And it has generated money to inject into the system. The people who benefit are servants of the system. But everyone who wants to make money is part of the war. And we are all involved. Because we all use the money that comes from the arms industry [...] And when do we protest against the arms industry? We never do. And there are always protests related to the refugee crisis, because they don't accept refugees. But if Europe didn't sell its weapons and didn't help wars, there wouldn't be so many refugees. And I think we have to start with this today. We have to start mobilizing against the production of weapons and the start of wars. And we should communicate and prepare the world to receive climate refugees. We have to start today to prepare to welcome all these people, because pollution and ecological crisis is our disaster”.

(Woman, 38)

“There are different ways to come to France. From Mali to Gabon we went by plane and from Gabon to Turkey as well. From Turkey to Greece we went by boat and from Greece to Italy by plane. Finally, from Italy to France, by bus”. (Man, 24)

“My journey from Afghanistan to France took almost 23 years. From Afghanistan to Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Greece, Spain and France”. (Man, 25)

The border between France and Spain has become the main entry route to France since 2018 [AIDA, 2022b]. One of the borders between these two countries is located in the Basque Country and although there is no visible wall, black and Arab people are subject to police controls at the border separating the towns of Irun and Hendaye. Since 2015, the French state has once again controlled the country's internal borders under the pretext of a terrorist alert, encouraging systematic pushbacks based on racial control. Border control and the resulting pushbacks lead to the search for even more dangerous routes. During the years 2021 and 2022, at least nine people died trying to cross the border and continue their journey to France [SOS Racismo Gipuzkoa, 2023].

Arriving in Europe

“Coming to Europe is difficult. Everything looks nice from the outside, but when you see it with your own eyes, it's something totally different.

And if you are not prepared for it, you will have a problem. That's what happened to me and that's what happens to 90% of refugees [...] It's unbelievable. Because nobody can imagine fleeing their country to get to death. Some people say that it is very difficult to cross the sea [referring to Greece, his country of entry to Europe], but it is only the beginning.

No one is prepared to see death in front of your eyes every day [referring to the camps in Greece]”. (Man, 25)

Once a person who seeks international protection is on French territory, he or she has to register as an asylum seeker. Although the law dictates that appointments to register as asylum seekers must be issued within a maximum of 3 working days, in practice there are many delays, especially in the Paris region, where appointments are granted by telephone. Some NGOs have reported that the telephone is saturated and that as a result, on average, the registration procedure takes more than a month [LDH, 2019]. This has a negative impact both on the possibilities for accommodation and on the resolution of the asylum process itself. Asylum seekers must register as asylum seekers within 90 days of entering the country. If they fail to do so, their case will be analysed through the “fast track”, which has worse prospects for granting asylum [Gisti, 2021].

After registration as an asylum seeker has been made, the French authorities have 6 months to take a decision, although this period may be exceeded by an additional 9 months [AIDA, 2022b].

“It took 9 months. It’s not normal, but there was a mistake in my case. Normally it is faster. It takes 6-7 months. It depends on your case, your situation, your country of origin. Unfortunately, because of the situation in Afghanistan, it’s a little bit faster for Afghan people”. (Man, 25)

In some cases, however, asylum applications are not reviewed, because the asylum seeker is associated with a Dublin case, which determines which other EU country has the obligation to review the asylum application [Gisti, 2021].

“When we arrived in France, we went to the registration office and they saw that there was a problem with our case, probably because of the fingerprints in Greece. So we didn’t get any support in France, no accommodation, no money”. (Woman, 16)

“We had to live on the street for 6 months. We lived one full month on the street and the next 5 months we found a place to sleep. A very dirty place, in very bad conditions, sharing a room with another family. In this case, an African family. At 6:00 in the morning we had to leave the place and we were back on the street. We went everywhere to ask what we should do. With the cold and the rain, everything is more difficult”. (Woman, 16)

The lack of accommodation does not only affect the Dublin cases. Delays in registering as asylum seekers make it impossible to access accommodation provided by the French state. In addition, those who have already registered as asylum seekers also experience delays in accessing accommodation, which means that many of them have to live on the streets.

“I registered as an asylum seeker 5 months ago and I still don’t have a place to live. That’s why I decided to find someone I could live with. If it wasn’t for my friend [he lives in his house], I would be under the bridge. Normally, you have to stay in Paris, under the bridge for a month or two months. When I went to Paris I met a lot of people living under the bridge and I asked them about their situation. It is very bad”. (Man, 28)

“My daughter and I live in a house with two other women and their daughters. They come from different African countries and it is difficult to live with two other families in the same house. When I arrived in France, I waited almost two months before they found accommodation for me. During this time I stayed with my brother, but if they were not here, I would have had to sleep in the street or in a tent in the park. And it doesn’t matter if you are a woman or a man, or your nationality, you have to be on the street until they find you a place to live”. (Woman, 24)

The French authorities have the obligation to offer accommodation to asylum seekers in reception centers. If there is not enough space, they must offer emergency accommodation and to have access to it, one must call a telephone number [Gisti, 2021]. However, both the accommodation and the emergency telephone numbers are overcrowded and about 1,000 calls a day go unanswered [Infomigrants, 2022].

“In Lyon there are many people living on the streets. I saw an African man and talked to him. He told me he had been in Paris for a while and decided to come to Lyon, hoping to get somewhere to live. Up to that point, he had been living on the street for 20 days, he couldn’t get anywhere. And yes, this happens to a lot of people. They call every night to ask for a place to sleep, but they are told that everything is full”. (Man, 28)

When the authorities provide accommodation to asylum seekers, it does not have to be in the same region where asylum was requested. In addition, the asylum seekers have to present themselves at the place of accommodation within five days. If they do not do so, the offer is considered to be rejected and they will not have the possibility to access any other accommodation. According to data from the Ministry of Interior, only 62,000 individuals out of 142,940 registered as asylum seekers were in accommodation at the end of 2022 [AIDA, 2022b].

“Normally you can apply for accommodation when you register in the asylum process. But you don’t know when you will be provided with accommodation. Maybe in 2 months, 5 months... and in the meantime you have to be on the street. When they provide you with accommodation, they can send you to a small town or wherever, and you have to accept it and be silent. You will have accommodation, but what kind of accommodation? A small room for 5 people, for example. And you have to stay there for a certain period of time. If you get asylum, your situation may improve slightly. But anyway, access to accommodation is one of the biggest problems in France. There are many empty houses, but not for us. The government pays French families to take Ukrainian refugees. But if you take an African woman, they look at you badly. Racism is deeply rooted in the government”. (Man, 25)

“A friend of mine was in the camp, which is 2 kilometers far from the city. One day I went to visit the camp and the reality is that the kitchen was full of insects. And the living room also. It was very dirty and there were a lot of people of different nationalities. In the camp you have a small room for yourself and you have to share the bathroom and the shower”. (Man, 28)

The process and the possibilities of obtaining accommodation is complicated for asylum seekers. However, there are also people who migrate to France and decide not to enter the asylum process. For these people, living in France becomes even more difficult.

Access to education

“I don’t think I will apply for asylum. Most people who come from Mali don’t apply for asylum, because they do not get it. That’s why I don’t want to apply for asylum [...] When you go to apply for asylum, they will tell you that there is no war. I don’t know what to do to get the documents [...] I want to look for a job and I want to get my documents. I have to be careful with the police, with transport, with everything. I can’t live a normal life, because I’m not normal”. (Man, 24)

Broken expectations

“When you arrive in France, the situation is such that you wish you had never come to France. You end up on the street, with temperatures of 0, -2, -3 degrees. I taught more than 500 teenagers living on the streets in one year. Why do they have to sleep in the street?”
(Man, 25)

“The only thing I can say to people who are not yet here is not to come here and to look for another place. It took me more than two years to get here, so I’m going to try to find something here. But if I weren’t here and if I had had the opportunity to know this reality before, I would have never come here”.
(Man, 24)

“I thought France would be like paradise: peace, a normal life, going to school, having a place to live. But when we came, it wasn’t like we had imagined”. (Woman, 16)

In France, all children between the ages of 6 and 16 have the obligation to attend school, although in practice there are limitations that make it difficult for asylum seekers to access education. Some schools require an address before children can register and this can be a problem for asylum seekers who do not have a personal address. Another obstacle is the lack of specific French language courses, which makes the learning process itself more difficult [AIDA, 2022b].

“We have been living in a container since one month ago. But we still don’t get any money. And I’ve been going to school for two months. It’s a mixed school, where everyone speaks French. In France, there is a right to education. Even if we don’t have a place to live, we can study. I and all my siblings go to school. But here in France the teachers don’t care if you don’t follow the lessons. Now I have a French friend in class. She speaks English and helps me”. (Woman, 16)

“In France they don’t provide you with any French classes so that you can learn the language. And I don’t know of any organizations where you can learn French either. And this is very important, they should provide it. Because if I get asylum and if I speak French, I can find my way. But if I don’t speak French, I can’t find my way and this is very bad for refugees”. (Man, 28)

Challenges and difficulties for exiled people in France

One of the biggest challenges faced by asylum seekers, refugees and migrants is access to housing.

“Accommodation is the biggest challenge”.
(Man, 25)

Lack of housing inevitably affects health, which is negatively affected for people who have to live on the streets or in very bad situations. In addition, the lack of housing also affects the possibility of finding a job, as it creates great instability.

“My little sister has been very sick. She was in hospital for 11 days. They came to the doctor several times, but they didn’t pay attention. We were asking for the doctor to help. But they couldn’t help. We went to the hospital several times, because she was too bad. They say that the only thing she needs is: fresh food, rest, good sleep. But in our condition, this was not possible [living on the streets for 6 months]”. (Woman, 16)

“I know that if I want to, I can do many things, but the main challenge is to find a job and try to get some help. Where we stay is a big house, but it belongs to some people from some other African country. When they go to work, we can sleep there. But if they don’t go, we have to stay outside. It’s a bit difficult”. (Man, 24)

In addition to the difficulties to access accommodation, there are also obstacles related to the asylum process and the time it takes to obtain a response. Uncertainty makes it difficult to make future projections.

“It is very difficult not having a house and having to live in my friend’s house. And I am always thinking about my asylum process, not knowing where I will be or what will happen to me afterwards [...] First I need to be accepted and then I can find a job and make my life”. (Man, 28)

Racism is also an inherent problem in society, which further complicates coexistence in France.

“In Paris there is racism. But unfortunately, outside Paris, in other regions, there is more racism. Because people are in front of the TV, and the only thing they listen to is the government media, which is against migration. They listen to them and they believe them. And they become against migrants”. (Man, 25)

Messages

“It may be difficult for you to see so many people in your country. But nobody is so stupid to run away from their family, to flee their home, to escape from their life and come here and disturb somebody. We are forced to flee, because they want to kill us, there was no other possibility to live. And we are here to learn. We came with our hearts open, to learn from you, so that we can be friends, so that we can live. If you can’t help someone, at least don’t create more suffering for them. If you cannot understand the suffering of a refugee, at least don’t add to it. If you see them, think about what they have been through. How many years of suffering”. (Man, 25)

“Try to know what people are going through, what their difficulties are. You can find good and bad people everywhere. So, try to get to know the people first”. (Man, 24)

Challenges for women and LGBTQ+ people in exile

Patriarchal society perpetrates violence against women and LGBTQ+ people, also in migration contexts. One of the biggest challenges, housing, also affects women, who may find themselves living alone on the street, even with their children.

“I am a woman who arrived alone with her daughter in France and I had to wait two months until they found accommodation for me. During this time I stayed with my brother, but if they weren’t here, I would have had to sleep in the street or in a tent in the park. And it doesn’t matter if you are a woman”. (Woman, 24)

Being a woman and a migrant means that in addition to racism, the gender must also be taken into account, creating a larger system of oppression. Gender is always conditioned by coloniality and the racial structuring of the world [Pikara Magazine, 2020] and it is therefore important to understand migration contexts from an intersectional perspective.

“Refugees are in the middle of intersectionality. Because you don’t need to be black to be part of the intersectionality question. Afghan people and Afghan women are in the middle of intersectionality, because they come from Middle East. This is a problem. They don’t have financial resources and they suffer from a lot of stigmatization. And in my experience, many Afghan women don’t have the confidence and they are scared, and they cannot find that inner confidence to go on and make their dreams come true. I think they are so dependent on their man. Without a man, Afghan women are nothing. It’s a big problem because our feminist movement cannot go forward”. (Woman, 38)

Furthermore, in addition to racial discrimination, it is also important to take into account oppression based on gender orientation and/or gender identity within the intersectional perspective.

“I think in France the queer community is really closed, with a lot of stereotypes and lot of inferiority complex. I think the community is not very welcoming in Paris or in France. I met an Afghan gay guy who was sent to a very right-side village here in France, where there was not a big refugee community. He was isolated, alone. But if he had come to Paris, it would have been difficult too. In France the gay community is very rich. Because homosexuality is connected to capitalism in France. A person coming from Afghanistan has a lot of traumas, is not educated enough and does not have enough economic resources to be part of this community. And the discrimination and isolation are very big. He is scared of two things: of Afghan heterosexuals, because they can be very violent with him and are dangerous for the Afghan gays, and of French people, because of the discrimination”. (Woman, 38)

Within the gender and intersectional perspective, gender roles also play an important role. Traditional gender roles are very strong for some of the Afghan women in exile, and this makes the inclusion in French society difficult for them.

“Today we have two generations of women. One generation, the woman in the family with the children, and the other generation, the young woman who is really courageous. And that woman, that young generation, I’m really proud of. These women have crossed the line here. They are educated and they can progress. In parallel to this generation we have the generation of women who are married,

Exile

they have babies and they don't want to work. They prefer to stay at home to be with their babies and do not want to learn the language. In France or in Western countries, if you don't have any activity in society, you can be a ghost, you are isolated and people don't care about you. Having children is not an excuse not to work and not to participate in society. I have met Afghan women who arrived at the same time as me in France [14 years ago] and they still can't speak French [...] They are traditional women, who act in their traditional roles and don't want to work. They think that working is a man's role". (Woman, 38)



"French women accept Afghan men. But French men do not accept refugee women. Because a male refugee or a man in exile is generally motivated and goes to places like Les Amarres [a community space that welcomes vulnerable people in Paris]. But an Afghan woman does not go there, because according to their stereotypes, she cannot be close to a man, because it can be dangerous, because of the violence, because of the harassment". (Woman, 38)

"We are here. We are in a neutral zone. We are in a zone of freedom. I should have the time to find myself. I am not in Afghanistan, I am in France, I am in Europe. Every European country has its own culture and we have to learn it. Traveling is enriching and exile is an occasion for learning, for metamorphosis. I chose the word metamorphosis, because for me it was a metamorphosis. Today I am a hybrid woman, because I was born in Iran and I knew its culture, but my origin was Afghanistan and I went there to discover it. It was dark, but also magnificent". (Woman, 38)

"I think that exile is an occasion for transformation, for metamorphosis and for learning that each country has its own culture. We must learn it, but we are also free to build something personal, our personal idea". (Woman, 38)

04

**RESPONSES TO THE
CHALLENGES: ACTIVISMS
AND EMANCIPATORY
PROJECTS**

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In migratory contexts and in response to the challenges existing in the host countries, many activisms and projects are created by asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The following summarizes the personal projects and activisms initiated by the people interviewed in France and Germany. First of all, we will present those projects and activisms carried out by women with the aim of fighting for women's rights, especially in their countries of origin. Then, we share activisms and projects created by both men and women, focusing on various subjects: borders, climate change, living together, etc.

Afgactivistcollective: activism for women's rights in Afghanistan

Atifa and Zahra are Afghans and currently live in Berlin. Since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan, they have participated in several meetings with other women, with the aim of organizing actions in defense of women in Afghanistan.

“Since 15 August 2021, after the fall of Afghanistan, we started to meet with some women to talk about this context of Afghanistan. We made some bags and sell them, and with the money we support some underground schools for women in Afghanistan. Now we start to be a collective: [@afgactivistcollective](#)”. (Atifa, Zahra)

“Yesterday we organized a demonstration. It was really nice, specially considering what is happening to women in Afghanistan. I don't know if you heart about the 'survival syndrome'. As a survivor, you feel guilty for the situation that other women are going through. And being part of the collective helps us, because we feel we are doing something about it. It is really hard, but also in a way a relief”. (Atifa, Zahra)

Wings of Hope: animation in memory of Dashte Barche victims

“I made the animation *Wings of Hope* when I was in Greece with the help of many friends.

At that time, I made it in memory of the martyrs of Dashte Barche, who will never be forgotten. But I want to share it again because the situation of all the girls and women of my land is very similar. All their hopes, wishes and efforts are killed and they are shot. I hope that by sharing this animation, I can make their voices heard by more people”. (Tahere)

Tahere is a young Afghan girl living in Germany and with the animation “Wings of Hope” she wanted to remember the massacre that took place in the Dashte Barche neighborhood, a refuge for the Hazara minority and the Shiite community in Kabul. On 8 May 2021, a bomb killed more than 85 people and injured 147 others. The attack took place in front of the Samed Al-Shuhada school and most of the victims were 13-18 year old girls on their way to school.

Activism in Germany: Being the voice for women and girls in Afghanistan

Tahere fights for the rights of girls and women in Afghanistan by participating in demonstrations, performances, theaters and by publishing texts on the subject. Her activism also focuses on education.

“I really try to be the voice of women from Afghanistan. This is my fight”. (Tahere)

“Education is very important. I am a young Hazara girl and if I were in Afghanistan I would not be able to study, I would not be able to do anything. And this makes me stronger to fight for education”. (Tahere)

“I have participated in some presentations, in Hamburg, in Düsseldorf, in Dortmund... And I spoke about the girls killed in Afghanistan. They were fighting for their rights and they are still fighting for their rights, they are very brave. But the world is silent. This makes me angry and also sad. I also write texts on the subject [...] I write in Persian and English. And I also try to write in German, because in Germany you have to speak German if you want people to understand you”. (Tahere)

“I wrote the text *Self-made laws*, also in German. And next week I will take part in a theatre performance in Münster and read the text in German”. (Tahere)

“I started writing a book about one girl in Afghanistan who struggles to overcome many challenges. She is very brave”. (Tahere)

The 34 Afghan Windows: music to give voice to the women in Afghanistan

The aim of the project 34 Afghan Windows is to fight discrimination and promote social inclusion and a real awakening process. The project aims to raise the voices of the voiceless through art. “The 34 Afghan Windows” refers to the 34 provinces of Afghanistan and through music and art shares the specific realities of Afghanistan, especially after the Taliban returned to power and destroyed the rights of millions of people, especially women.

Whirling is the second song on this track and talks about women’s rights in Afghanistan. Afghan women didn’t have a voice for many years and with this song and project they want to give a voice to all those women who don’t have a voice.

Neda is from Afghanistan, comes from Iran and lives in Germany. She has collaborated in the project *Whirling*, together with other Afghan women.

“Elena is the singer and she asked me if I could participate in this song together with other women. The song is about Afghanistan and I feel I can do something for Afghanistan. We will perform the song through our bodies. And for me, the body is the most important thing in theatre”. (Neda)

Art and painting to denounce the absence of women's rights in Afghanistan

Roya did not go to school as a child, instead, she spent her time drawing with a pencil at home. Roya is an Afghan woman and an asylum seeker in France. Before arriving in France, she spent some time in Greece and on the Greek island of Samos, her gateway to Europe. In Samos, she got to know an art space.

“I went there and first looked at what other people were doing. When I started drawing, a French woman told me that she really believed in me, that I had a lot of talent and that I had a future. After my first painting, an African man also told me that I was very talented”. (Roya)

For Roya, art is a way to escape the difficulties she faces as an Afghan woman in exile.

“When I paint, I forget about my problems. I travel to another place and I can forget about my worries for some moments. I can travel to a special world where I am happy and at peace. It is hard for me to speak and I use my art to speak and to express myself”. (Roya)

In addition, Roya uses her art and painting to give Afghan women a voice and to raise awareness of women's rights violations in Afghanistan.

“Through my art I can speak from the voice of women in Afghanistan. That's why I paint women, especially Afghan women. They are in a very bad situation and because I am an Afghan woman, I can feel them. They don't have the right to speak and my biggest dream is to help them. Through my art I can speak for them”. (Roya)

Roya shares her art through [social media](#) and exhibitions.

Afghan and feminist events in Paris

Shakiba comes from Afghanistan and has been living in France for 14 years. Her activism is feminist, LGBTQ+ and in defense of human rights. Among other things, she organizes feminist events in Paris and tries to bring Iranian, Afghan and French societies closer together.

“My activism is feminist and LGBTQ+. They have the same enemies: patriarchy and religion”. (Shakiba)

“I try to bring Iranian society, Afghan society and French society together. For example, I organized an event for the solstice and a lot of Iranian, Afghan and French people came. Even the French TV and press came and made this [video](#). It's a reportage in French”. (Shakiba)

“This event was the occasion to present feminist and LGBTQ+ activists from Afghanistan, and to talk about this community. It is a community that exists, different from the heterosexual community, but it has the right to live. I have a lot of hope for some of the activists, because their work is very important. Our history does not have a lot of activism on this subject. In Afghanistan we have the idea that women are only made for men. And everything else, homosexuality or transsexuality, is forbidden”. (Shakiba)

Most of the people who participate in the events organized by Shakiba are Afghan and Iranian women, as well as many Afghan men and French adults, especially women.

“I want to organize a feminist Afghan ceremony, because in Afghanistan we, women, have a tradition of coming together before the new year and cooking a soy sauce recipe. It's a pagan festival, it's not religious. I like this feminist festival because it is the women who started this ceremony. We cook the soy sauce until the morning and then we share

it with the people. We dance around the fire, play music... I think it's beautiful. I have talked to feminist and LGBTQ+ activists and asked them to do a two-hour round table in the evening, to talk openly with people. People can ask questions and participate in the conversation and I think it's a good moment to bring a lot of people together and discuss feminism, queer. It will be open to everyone. There will be a lot of Afghan women and also Afghan men. Maybe also French women. It will be a good occasion to talk about issues that are normal in Europe, but not in Afghanistan". (Shakiba)

The Persian Circle: an association that aims to promote exchanges between Persian and French cultures

Shakiba is also one of the founders of the association "The Persian Circle" or Le Cercle Persan. It is an association that tries to co-create a common cultural heritage, based on the exchange between Persian and French speakers. It is an initiative that wants to promote intercultural coexistence between Persian and French people. The association can be contacted through [social media](#) and its website is under construction.

"I chose this name because I was born in Persia, in Iran, but my origins are Afghan. And Afghan people are also Persian. But in Iran there is a lot of racism and they want all Persian culture to be associated with Iran. And I think today is the day to give this identity back to all the people who share this culture". (Shakiba)

?WHY|BORDERS: questioning border policies

?WHY|BORDERS is an action that questions the consequences of Europe's border policies. Its position is clear: borders destroy lives, borders kill and borders divide. ?WHY|BORDERS is created by refugees and migrants who live mainly in Germany and who through their actions expose what is happening at Europe's borders and what we can do to improve the situation. They call on Europeans to unite and to take responsibility for the situation at Europe's borders.

The initiative organizes exhibitions that show the artistic works of people who, fleeing war and persecution, have landed at Europe's external borders. With the exhibitions, they want to give their voices a space to present their own view of European border policy and to draw attention to their situation.

Neda lives in Germany and has participated in the initiative ?WHY|BORDERS. Her photos are part of some of the exhibitions held by the collective.

"When I want to do something I always think if what I want to do is right or wrong for a woman. I want to fight for women's rights. And theatre helps me, it helps me to show my feelings through my body [...] I took the colors and painted my body. When I paint my body in those areas where I feel bad, I can show my feelings. Then I took the camera and I started to move the way I wanted to move, the way my body wanted to move. And I took pictures. After that, I felt better [...] And I thought that maybe it can help someone else too. Maybe if another woman or another person sees my pictures, they can still feel the dance inside their body". (Neda)

Refugees For Future: migration and climate change

Refugees for Future is an initiative created by refugees in Germany, which fights climate change and aims to raise critical awareness of the impact of climate change on migration flows.

“Refugees for Future fights climate change and also addresses the topic of migration. Because climate change makes people have to migrate. And we also deal with the colonialism of Western European countries. We fight against it”. (Mohsen)

“It is an initiative created by refugees. But we are open to everyone, including Germans. We activated Refugees for Future in Ghana, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Afghanistan... in many different countries”. (Mohsen)

Refugees for Future also aims to communicate and socialize about climate change to those who have not had access to the subject.

“In Germany there are millions of articles in German on climate change, but nothing in Persian, Turkish or other languages. We have no resources about it. And if we do, they are too little. I didn't know about climate change until 2 years ago. Imagine what it's like for the uneducated part of society. We have no idea about it. And this is what we do in Refugees for Future: we educate our people. It is the first step. We are finding articles, translating them into 8 different languages and sharing them through *social media*. And we also hold workshops, online workshops. We are looking for activists, politicians... who care about this issue in different countries and in the workshops we talk about this”. (Mohsen)

Yadu-Yoga: yoga as a bridge of connection

Yadu-Yoga is an initiative created by Yadullah, an Afghan man who is a refugee in Paris. Through Yadu-Yoga, Yadullah offers yoga classes to all those who are interested, with the aim of bringing Parisian citizenship closer to the realities of migration and creating community.

“I created a project called Yadu-Yoga, because I am a yoga teacher. It is a project making bridges between refugees and local people, through Yoga”. (Yadullah)

“For me it is important to find a safe space, where it doesn't matter who you are. This is one of the philosophies of yoga, not to worry about the physical part, and go inside, find yourself, know yourself and try to connect with the outside, with nature, with people, no matter who they are [...] No matter who you are, but I want to create the possibility for us to sit together, in a safe place, to share the love, the energy, the sport, the smiles. This is the beautiful connection through Yadu-Yoga. I am trying to work on it, in different places”. (Yadullah)

Yadu-Yoga also seeks to fight racism and to show that all people are equal, regardless of the borders that separate us.

“I try to show that I am the same as you. It is very simple. We are all the same. These borders are not necessary, it's all in our mind. I would like to connect people, through different ways to say: Why can't we hug each other? Why think badly of each other?” (Yadullah)

“I would like to say that I am an athlete, that I am a teacher, like you, that I am an artist, that I am a painter, that I am a runner. And that I am also a refugee. They think you come here to steal, but no! I will tell them that I come here to bring us together”. (Yadullah)

Yoga as a tool for mental health care

Sultan comes from Afghanistan and yoga and meditation have helped him overcome his panic attacks, both in Greece, his country of entry to Europe, and in Bosnia, where he travelled through on his way to France.

“I started a YouTube channel to show people how I overcame my panic attacks when I was in Greece and Bosnia”. (Sultan)

“In Greece I had access to a doctor for my panic attacks, but he couldn’t help me. And when I discovered yoga and when I learned yoga, I found my way”. (Sultan)

In Greece he had the opportunity to participate in a yoga teacher training and through the tools he learnt and his personal experience, he shares yoga classes in Farsi (Persian) on his [YouTube](#) channel.

Sharing migratory experiences through a book

“I want to share my story in my language, in Farsi. There are many people who travel and are still willing to travel, with a very very bad situation and they have not very good feeling. Through this book, I can show to people that speak my language how they can overcome their bad situation. How they can be good in their mind, and active”. (Sultan)

Sultan is writing a book about his experiences on the journey from Afghanistan to France, passing through countries such as Greece and Bosnia. During the migration process there are many difficulties that have to be faced and this can affect people’s mental health. Sultan wants to share tools so that migrants who are going through what he went through can be emotionally well.

In addition, his book can also help European citizens to understand refugees.

“And I also want to translate the book into other languages, so that more people could read it and could understand refugees. And they could believe refugees, trust them and help them, and treat them as human beings. All people who migrate are not bad people. Most of them have problems and want to have a better life. They want to be active and they want to do something for people”. (Sultan)

“When I talk at my boxing-club about my journey from Greece to France, and say that I came here on foot, people don’t believe it. They think that I came here with a passport [...] If I could share my book with those people who want to read it, they would understand better the people who come from other countries”. (Sultan)

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EREI Elkartasunerako Elkartea is an initiative born in Oñati (Basque Country, Spain), with the objective of making visible the migratory realities.

With the collaboration and direct participation of people who are in migratory processes, and with the aim of promoting human rights and making visible the inequalities that exist worldwide and their consequences, the association **EREI** carries out education for social transformation activities.

EREI commits to works from a feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist point of view, towards a cohesive society that seeks social justice at a global level.

