



## THE MIGRATORY REALITIES IN GREECE

### AT FIRST HAND AND FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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# **PRESENTATION**

This publication is born from the need to make visible the Greek migratory reality, at first hand and from a gender perspective, through the voices of the people that are in migratory processes in Greece.

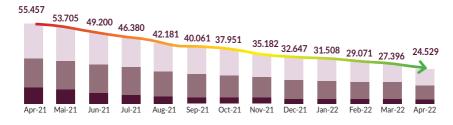
This publication is the result of a research process carried out by **EREI Elkartasu-nerako Elkartea** in three Greek locations: Lesvos island, Athens and Ioannina. The methodology consisted in personal interviews made with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants during February and March of 2022, with the support of organizations that work in the field, which provided the contacts of some of the interviewed people: **Yoga and Sports with Refugees** and **One Happy Family**.



The research has focused on three points:

## SITUATION IN GREECE

Beyond numbers, this research work seeks to get to know the situation of those who are trapped in their migration processes in Greece, through their personal experiences. However, in order to provide a broader picture, it is important to mention that the number of asylum seekers has decreased considerably in the last months, a fact that has shaped the Greek migration context.



<sup>\*</sup> Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration & Asylum. Report A, April 2022: Reception, Identification and Asylum procedures. https://migration.gov.gr/en/statistika/

The island of **Lesvos** is 10 km away from Turkey and is one of the entrances to Europe for those who are seeking international protection. In the last years, Lesvos has been one of the most important migratory hotspot in Europe, being Moria camp the biggest European refugee camp, which hosted more than 20.000 people in the beginning of 2020. Moria was burned in September 2020 and since then, the majority of asylum seekers live in the Mavrovouni camp, also known as Moria 2.0. In April 2022, around 1.000 residents live in the camp\*. One of the most important features of the migratory reality in Lesvos and other Aegean islands are the pushbacks, illegal practices that violate human rights.

Athens and Attica region host more than 10.100 asylum seekers, according to the data published in April 2022\*. The main refugee camp in Athens is Eleonas camp, which is 15 minutes away from the city centre. Nevertheless, and even if there is not official data, many refugees and migrants are homeless in Athens.

**loannina** is a city located in the northwest of Greece, in Epirus region, 60 km away from the border of Albania. According to data published in April 2022\*, around 1.400 asylum seekers live in the region of Epirus and according to local sources, 400 of them are residents in Katsikas refugee camp, 8 km away from loannina.

### REASONS BEHIND MIGRATORY FLUXES

Capitalism and colonialism have contributed to the increase of inequalities in a global level, to the removal of territories and resources and to the acceleration of the climate change, facts that influence inevitably the migratory fluxes. Although climate change is a global phenomenon, its consequences are unequally distributed and have a bigger impact in the Global South or in impoverished countries, which explains many of the internal and international displacements. Besides, the patriarchy shapes the migratory fluxes, since gender inequalities and the specific violations of women and LGTBIQ+ rights are behind many of the migrations.

## INITIATIVES CREATED IN MIGRATORY CONTEXTS

There are many initiatives that are created by those who are in their migratory processes, which seek to create community, share knowledge and skills, and spread migratory realities. The main focus is on non capitalistic initiatives, whose aim is not an economic profit, but want to be resistance and learning tools in the migratory contexts. Especial attention goes to initiatives created by women, which fight to defend women rights and provide safe spaces in a patriarchal society.

The information of the following pages is the result of the interviews conducted in Lesvos, Athens and Ioannina, and gather the testimonies of those who are in their migratory processes in Greece. Due to the difficulties and fears existing in the migratory contexts, many of the interviewed people did not want to share their real names, as well as their photos. These decisions reflect the instability, uncertainty and fear existing in the migratory realities, which affect the physical and mental health of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

# **PARTICIPANTS**



11

I think if every European tries to fight for refugees one time, maybe it could be helpful for us, to safe us from this situation. To have a normal life, like other people, like normal people. Not to have the feeling of being a refugee."

## **FERESHTE**

Woman, 18 years old, Afghanistan. Born in Iran. 2 years and a half in Greece. *Ioannina, Katsikas camp.* 

# **JEMHORIK**

Man, 22 years old, Syrian Kurdistan. 2 years and a half in Greece. *loannina, Katsikas camp.* 



I want European citizens to know about the bad situation of the refugees in Greece. I want them to know about what is going on in Greece. People could help us at least giving us a warm and safe place."

## **DESIRE**

Woman, 38 years old, southern Africa. 4 years in Greece. Lesvos.



Turkey and Europe should stop playing with the lives of the people. And people should not just take for granted everything that they hear from the media, that the situation is much better. That's not true. Europe must act, they shouldn't leave Greece alone."



# **PAYMAN**

Man, 22 years old, Iraqi Kurdistan. 4 years in Greece.



Why should I stay here? Without work, without school. Greece is like this: always wait, wait, wait... I don't think here is Europe. Greece is not Europe. For me it's not Europe."

# **YUSUF**

Man, 24 years old, Somalia 9 months in Greece. *Lesvos. Moria 2.0 camp.* 



Europe has a power to change the situation. They have a power to build a safe place. They have a power to do everything. Even they have a power to change the food, because we can not eat the food inside the camp. They can do everything."

# **JALAL**

Man, 34 years old, Balochistan. 7 years in Greece. At*hens*.

The Baloch Mothers are hopelessly asking for justice and safe release of their loved ones. On the other hand, Human Rights and other international organizations are silent and just trying to ignore the situation in Balochistan. Just remember being silent makes you equal in this injustice."

## **NILOFAR**

Woman, 34 years old, Afghanistan. Born in Iran. 2 years and a half in Greece. Athens.



We are human. Please, don't ignore us! Please, listen to us! I just want that people listen to us. Just see us. We are human. We are like you. We have dreams. Just if you want to see us, if you want to understand us, maybe you can help us."



## **FATEMEH**

Woman, 26 years old, Afghanistan. Born in Iran. 2 years and 9 months in Greece. Athens.

Just look at the situation. If everyone is going to other countries, it's because we don't see that we are doing something here, in Greece. We are waisting our time and our life, just waiting for this progress and we don't know what is going to happen. And it is very tiring and exhausting not to know what will happen."

# **VICTOR DIDIER**

Man, 29 years old, Cameroon. 3 years in Greece. Athens. Eleonas camp.



I want people to know what happens with refugees in Greece, to be aware and to realize that it is a really difficult situation. Because the thing is that it takes so long here. The problem is that we stay so long. Waiting so long is a big problem. The only way to help refugees is to help them to leave Greece. Because there is not job, nothing."

# **TOORYALAY**

Man, 28 years old, Afghanistan. 2 years and a half in Greece. Lesvos.



I think that the European people don't know about the situation of refugees in the camp, but the government knows it. All governments know how the situation is and they don't allow people to go inside the camp. Because they know that if journalists or photographers go to the camp, they can take some videos from the bad situation that doesn't want to be shown."



NAZANIN
Woman,
28 years old,
Afghanistan.
Lived in Iran the
past 6 years.
2 years and a
half in Greece.
Lesvos.



The thing that sometimes is annoying me is that we are seen just as refugees. At some point, because of some situations, our live might be harder, but it doesn't mean that we are that vulnerable. It is this label that I'm very worried about, that is representing me all the time in the first step. It is representing me as a refugee and not as a human. So, I just want people to see us like themselves, there is no any other difference. And to stand by us."



MASUME
Woman, 27 years old, Afghanistan
Born in Iran.
2 years and a half in Greece.
Lesvos.



If there is someone by your side who doesn't have enough information or who judges people by their nationality, tell them that everybody is equal. Just this borders, this geographical place doesn't make any difference, it really doesn't."



EBI
Man, 28 years old, Iran.
5 years in Greece.
Joannina.



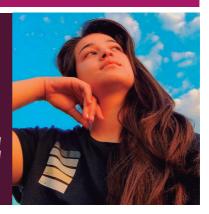
Every human deserves to live well. Simple things like home, food, shower, water... this is the basic for me. When they speak about humanity and they don't give the people this opportunity, this means they just speak and they didn't act. (...) Don't make a business with humanity."

## **ZAINAB**

Woman, 22 years old, Afghanistan. Born in Iran. 3 years in Greece. *loannina*, *Katsikas camp*.



We left our war torn country and try to build a good life for ourselves and our children in the future and here we are. So, we need the support of the people."



# SITUATION IN GREECE

If there is one word that describes the situation that asylum seekers, refugees and migrants face in Greece, this word is: difficult. The asylum procedure is slow, "we should wait a long time so that the government decides for us", says Zainab. In this challenging time, the access to education and jobs is almost nonexistent. The financial problems are also a highlight in the migratory procedures, which are even tougher once the refugee condition is granted. As Masume pointed out:

"After getting asylum, the money from the Government stops. So, refugees suffer because of lack of money. They should leave the camp if they are living in the camp, they should leave the house that has been provided by the Government or any organization. On the other side, they must wait for the ID or Passport, so it means that they cannot leave Greece, even if they don't have anything to live from here."

However, many asylum seekers do not obtain international protection or refugee condition, since their asylum application is rejected. As Yusuf said: "they consider Turkey to be a safe place for us, for Somalian citizens and they asked why we came to Greece". Asylum seekers must prove their reasons to seek for international protection in Europe, so that their refugee condition is granted.

Besides, inclusion in Greek society is also challenging. "Greece is not very good with integration system, they are not helping people to integrate to the system", said Nilofar. In addition, Victor Didier noted:

"One of the worst things in Greece is the way they treat refugees. I would like to be treated as human and that they understand that we are all human."

## **LESVOS**

The conditions in Moria 2.0 camp are difficult. The basic needs are not appropriately fulfilled: "there are poor sanitation conditions, poor living conditions, which result in many fights amongst nationalities", said <a href="Desire">Desire</a>. Besides, there is not freedom of movement.

"The camp is closed and when you want to go outside, you have to show your police number paper. If your number is not in the schedule, you can not go outside. There is no freedom." Tooryalay

"Many NGOs are leaving the island, because the refugees can not leave the camp and the NGOs can not help that much. Besides, being trapped inside the camp can create psychological problems." Desire

In addition, the security is not guarantied inside the camp. As Yusuf pointed out: "for me, the camp is not a safe place. Two months ago we had fire, two times, even in my tent."

A reality to underline in Lesvos are the pushbacks. The arrivals in the island are few, compared to the previous years and one of the reasons behind that are the pushbacks, which are totally illegal and violate human rights:

"It sounds like now there is not much people coming, because they tightened the borders or something like that. But that's not the truth, because we hear that some people came here and then they were pushed back." Desire

"People are pushed back in a very inhumane way. Literally, they are putting peoples life in danger, many people have lost their life because of this." Nazanin



Old Moria camp, Lesvos, 2021. Photo: Daniel John.

# **ATHENS**

One of the realities of Athens is the reality of asylum seekers, whose asylum has been rejected in the Aegean islands and who are in an irregular situation. However, the situation is tough for every asylum seeker, refugee and migrant:

"It's really hard to live in Athens, without money, and there is no support from the Government, or something. I see a lot of people that they are really dying. They don't

have place, they don't have food... nothing. You can see a lot of people that are sleeping in the street. They don't have a place." Jalal

"As you know, this country is not rich, it's poor. Like my country. And they can not support all of the refugees. There is no any opportunity here, there is no any facility. And you can not study here, you can not find a good job here." Nilofar

"If you are a boy and minor they will use you as a drug seller. It is much easier to tell minors. They use the minors to sell drugs and they pay them very little. In Athens it happens a lot." Fatemeh

The main refugee camp in Athens is Eleonas camp, which is located 15 minutes away of the city center.

"In Eleonas camp it's getting better for the last few months. They are building more stuff. Because before people were building their own tent and everything, and there were lots of fires and a lot of people died. And since then, they did something about that. But still it's not enough." Victor Didier

It is not clear if the camp will keep opened. Victor Didier said that "recently the authority of the camp came to us, saying that the camp is going to be closed, completely closed, no more refugees. And they don't give more information."

### IOANNINA

"The situation is very difficult. Especially now, they want to build a wall around the camp and we face a lot of limitations with no facilities or supports." Fereshte

The wall has been already constructed and it brought restrictions, visitors can not enter the camp. Inside the camp, residents live in containers. Payman noted that "living in this camp is difficult. Inside the containers, everything is white. You go outside and you see all the containers, all white. It makes people get crazy." Besides, if the asylum seekers are not with their families, but alone, they need to share the container and rooms with other people, which makes the reality even more complicated. As Jemhorik said:

"We were 6 people living in one container. It had 3 rooms, so in each room we were 2 people. So the situation is very bad to handle with each other in the container, for cooking, for everything."

The lack of routine and activities inside the camp, as well as the long waiting for the decision of the asylum procedures causes a tiresome atmosphere.

"In the morning everyone is sleeping. At night everyone sleeps at 3:00 or 4:00, because people have nothing to do." Payman

# FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

In the context of a patriarchal society, the situation of women is specially difficult in migratory processes. Gender-based violence is a reality to underline and women have to overcome difficulties, which men do not have to face.

"Specially single women and single mothers have more difficult conditions, in terms of security in the camps, as well as being a single guardian." Zainab

"Something that I have always seen in my whole life is violence against women, which nobody can ignore it, all around the world and specially in the migratory processes. Sexual harassment, which happened in the camp a lot." Masume

"There are rapes, specially on the way (migratory way). And then, when you are in the asylum procedure, instead of being an interview, it becomes like an interrogation process, which is very sad." Desire

"The situation of women in Athens is specially difficult (...). Maybe some women can not find any place to stay and they have to sleep in the streets, and they are raped." Nilofar

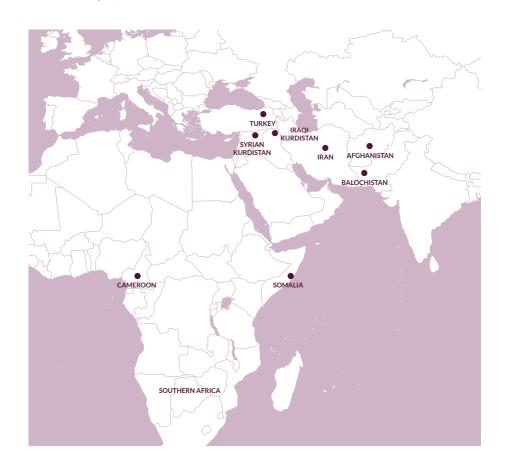
# REASONS BEHIND MIGRATORY FLUXES

The reasons why people leave their home country and seek asylum in another country can vary from person to person. The lack of safety, freedom and human rights, and specifically women rights, are some common factors that lead people to migrate. In addition, as Masume says:

"Economic problems, which nobody cares about, are also a reason to leave. And people believe that they are not a reason for leaving."

The inequalities existing in a global level, which are closely related to colonialism and capitalism, are also behind the migratory fluxes. As Jalal says, "it is all about resources". Ebi also points out that:

"The reason of people leaving their countries and being migrants is related to capitalism and geopolitics, at least in Middle East."



### **AFGHANISTAN**

"The main reason for people leaving Afghanistan is that there is fight, war (...) With the Talibans, Afghanistan is a jail for the women, also for the men." Tooryalay

"Afghanistan is not a place for living, when there is all this war, when there is always lack of safety and non of education, especially for women." Masume

"In Afghanistan, as you know, there is war, there is not safety, for women there is also sexual harassment, there is not right, nothing. No freedom." Nilofar

"The main reason to leave is the lack of safety. We had to flee from Afghanistan, first to Iran. In Iran we were facing lots of discriminations for being Afghan. Literally, we were not human there." Nazanin

## **SYRIAN KURDISTAN**

"In my country right now there is no work and there is no safety. The situation is very bad. You don't know where the rocks and the fire come from. You don't know where the sounds of the bombs are coming from. There is war everywhere and it's still continuing. Before we had normal life. I was going to school, we had everything, everything was alright. I was studying until seven degrees. But once that the war started, I left my school, I left my home, I left my mum and I came to Turkey just for work."

"When the war started most of the men left Syria to come to Turkey to work and to help their families because there was not work, there was nothing to do, to send money and feed their family and kids." Jemhorik

## **IRAQI KURDISTAN**

"In Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish citizens are killed, and for some people, this is normal. Life of a Kurdish is not the same as life of an Iraqi. This is a big problem because it is not recognized. People don't know what is happening inside Kurdistan." Payman

"People leave Iraqi Kurdistan to work and send money to their families, because of unpaid salaries and big corruption. The Iraqi government steals our money. And as an Iraqi Kurd, even in Europe, we are not free, we have the risk to be deported." Payman

## **IRAN**

"About Iran, as Afghan, we had a lot of problems. We were just surrounded by limitations about having a job, about going to any kind of lessons that we wanted, even for school. Most of Afghans cannot go to school. And about the job, most of the time they cannot." Masume

"Why I came from Iran? Because really I don't have any identity there. The Iranian government didn't care about me, didn't give any opportunity to me." Nilofar

### **TURKEY**

"The situation in Turkey is also difficult if you don't work. You have to work all the time. I worked as a tailor since I arrived in Turkey, so I worked there like 2-3 years, but they were not giving me the full salary. Not just to me, to everyone, they started to become racist with refugees."

### **SOMALIA**

"Right now, in Somalia there is a civil war. If my country was a peaceful country, I would not come here. Never. I would stay in my country. My country has Al Qaeda, because they were killing my father, my mother... All these reasons made me come here, but here I don't get anything." Yusuf

### BALOCHISTAN

"The Pakistani military attacked and they occupied Balochistan. It's like in Kurdistan. You can not guess how many people are missing from my country. Nobody knows where they are. Like women, girls, children, men, young people... Pakistan already controls all Balochistan. It's all about resources, because Balochistan has a lot of resources. Now we don't have schools, we don't have roads, we don't have hospitals... Nothing. You can take all of our resources, but just give us one good hospital, or schools, education for our new generation. Education is necessary."

"Balochi people prepare to die in our land, but not to move from our country. Because they know that nobody can help us for our fight. This is our fight. We need to fight for it. Some of us don't like to fight, so we moved."

### **CAMEROON**

"No human rights. There are lots of problems with human rights. And also economical reasons that make people seek asylum in other countries. The main problem for me now in Cameroon is the government. If the government would change, I would consider going back to my country. But the problem is that there is so much corruption." Victor Didier

# **SOUTHERN AFRICA**

"First of all, in my country in southern Africa, it's kind of like a tabu to be homosexual. To be a lesbian or to be a gay. Secondly, economic reasons. And, as soon as the people go to the streets, on a strike or a protest, they are bullied by the government, the army, the police... So there is no democracy in our country. So these things, actually lead to assassination. If you're identified as part of that group which actually went for demonstration, your life becomes in danger." Desire

## FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Lack of freedom and safety are some of the specific realities that women and LGT-BIQ+ people face in many countries, becoming important reasons to flee from their countries of origin.

"Insecurity and unequal rights between men and women can be the reasons for women to leave Iran. Some women can not travel alone, they are not allowed to work, they can not enter politics like men, women in Iran do not have the right to divorce themselves." Zainab

"For me, personally, it was that as a woman I didn't have the freedom to live in Afghanistan, to have my own choices for my life, to decide. (...) I was in restriction, I was limited. So I don't like this. I have lots of ambitions, I would like to be active, I would like to follow my dreams." Nazanin

"Some girls want to be free, but in Iran or Afghanistan all the girls and women cannot, because there is pressure on them. They cannot do anything that they want. They have pressure from society, religion, all the things together. They don't have right of education, they don't have right to be a part of society and there's no future for them there." Fereshte

"Women have different reasons to leave: they don't have any rights in Iran, and also there are many sexual harassments there. For example some men rape women and you can not say it. Just be silent. Also your family tells you: "be silent, don't say anything." Nilofar

"Lots of families are just leaving because of their daughters, because of this force marriages that are happening in Afghanistan." Nazanin

"The main reasons for women to leave Cameroon are that there are still a lot of forced marriages with old people." Victor Didier

"Women have specific reasons to leave my country in southern Africa: they get raped by the people in power: CEOs, the soldiers, police..." Desire

"And the LGTBIQ+ people are getting harmed by people, specially psychologically. And it is very difficult for them, specially in our countries: Iran and Afghanistan. They have more difficulties. And most of them are already betrayed by their own families."

Masume

# INITIATIVES CREATED IN MIGRATORY CONTEXTS

There are many initiatives and projects created and run by asylum seekers, refugees and migrants while in their migratory processes. Since there is lack of education in the camps, many start teaching English and sharing their knowledge and their skills within the community.

"When I arrived to Greece, after two or three months, I started to be more active. Because first of all I had depression, but after that I decided to work on myself, to be more powerful and helpful for myself and for people who were like me. So, that is why I started to teach English for women." Fereshte

"Refugees have so many skills. They cook, they teach many people computer lessons, they are translators, they do handcraft, they sew. There are so many sewing projects which are led by refugees." Desire

Besides, there are also initiatives that seek to offer food in the camps. The food distributed in the camps by the authorities is not enough and its quality is often not acceptable. Therefore, some residents of the camp build their own shops in order to sell food and get an economical income.

"People had lots of shops in the old Moria, also my friend had a shop in Moria. He used to sell burgers. He used to make potatoes with cucumber, tomato... and he used to cook for people." Tooryalay

### ART

Some initiatives "go one level more than food and basic things", as **Ebi** says. He remembers some project "about making movies in Athens". And he continues: "I like it. I support this project. I love this one. It's about the art. I prefer much more things like this than just giving food or clothes or shoes. Less capitalism."

Theatre provides the opportunity to share the migratory reality, as well as perceptions, reflections, fears and dreams. It is a tool to fight for human rights and to raise awareness about the reality that asylum seekers, refugees and migrants face in Greece and in their migratory processes. It also offers the chance to create a community, bringing people together:

"I can name the group theatre that is happening here. I had this opportunity to be in both of the groups, *The Boat Theatre* and the *Tamsilgaran*. These are two groups that I know, which are initiatives that are created by refugees and that are run by refugees." Nazanin

"I have participated in a theatre group named *The Boat Theatre* and we had a performance here in Lesvos on August 2020. I hope we have again in the future, somewhere in Greece or out of Greece, anywhere." Masume



"The Boat" performance. Photo: Amirali.

## **EMPOWERMENT TOOLS**

The projects are transformation and empowerment tools. They are initiatives that help to continue forward and give meaning to the waiting time that those who are in their asylum processes have to go through.

"Being involved in projects helps you to go further, to keep going and not stop. Also to keep hope." Victor Didier

"I think that this initiatives help people. At first point it's making them to feel that they are doing something, to feel positive about what they are doing, to feel benefited. Because in that situation many people have nothing to do, but when they are doing this, when they are starting this, so somehow it's good for both, for their mental health and for their self-confidence (...) And one of the reasons that maybe, I myself was involving myself in every activities or things, was that I didn't want just to wait, I just wanted to use my time, and it was really helpful." Nazanin

"I was in the camp and I was always thinking about my documents. This made me tired, and I heart some people speaking about exercising, boxing. I went there and I saw the boxing teacher training to the students, then I joined them. When I joined the class, I forgot some problems about my family, about my documents. It was very helpful for me." Tooryalay

"I wanted to have my progress, I try every way to have progress and make empowerment for others and encourage each other. (...) For my future, to improve myself for another society." Fereshte

## FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

There are many initiatives that are created by women, which fight for women rights, create a safe space for women and give opportunities to women in the context of patriarchy and gender inequality:

"I teach yoga online to women in Afghanistan and Iran. I run it all by myself. For women now in Afghanistan is so much harder, but I'm really trying to get them involved, because I know that it's a really difficult situation there now." Fatemeh

"Together with some Iranian women, Afghan women, a Syrian woman and a Greek woman, we had two week training about how to work with the camera. Then, we made a short video about a Syrian woman and it just went to a festival." Fatemeh

"When the Taliban's took over of Afghanistan, we made some videos for Afghan women. We were just some women and recorded us saying something to them: "We are here, we support you, don't give up." And the Greek government showed it in the TV." Nilofar

"We also had a project with UNESCO about how we could point the locations which are safer for women in the city. (...) We did all by ourselves." Fatemen

Besides, some women that are in their migratory processes get also involved in projects which seek to create a safe space for women, giving the opportunity to learn languages, practice yoga, fitness, dance or any sports.

"I am teaching English for adult women in the camp, for ASB organization as a volunteer for almost one year." Fereshte

"I'm also teaching yoga in another organization which is called Melissa. It's for the women who came from Afghanistan to Greece, because of the Taliban. Only for women." Fatemeh

"I'm a Zumba teacher for women in YSR Athens. When I saw is quarantine and we can not do anything, I just called all my students and said: if you want, I can do a class for you in the park. Also I saw many refugees made classes in the park during the quarantine." Nilofar

Regarding LGTBIQ+ rights and with the objective to make visible the inequalities that also exist in the context of migration, the work of *The Boat Theatre* group also shows the reality of LGTBIQ+ people:

"The show has four parts and one of them is about LGTBIQ+ reality (...) Unfortunately, LGTBIQ+ people have again more difficulties anywhere in the world. Because people have little information." Masume

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



**EREI Elkartasunerako Elkartea**