

#OUR STORIES

*“Sometimes
reality is too
complex.
Stories give it
form.”*

Jean Luc Godard, film director, screen writer, film critic

#EEA GRANTS

MY NAME IS..

Iman, Judy, Julie, Ramatulai ...

To preserve authenticity, the stories have been slightly edited.

To protect the privacy of certain individuals the names have been changed.

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Intro

Dedicated to women and girls who opened their heart and shared with us their story.

Human stories indeed hold immense power and significance in our lives. They have the capacity to break down barriers, bridge divides, and create connections that transcend cultural, social, and geographical boundaries.

When people open up and share their experiences, they allow others to step into their shoes, fostering understanding and empathy. These shared narratives can ignite conversations, raise awareness about important issues, and inspire collective action for positive change. It's through storytelling that we gain different perspectives, challenge our preconceptions, and build bridges of solidarity among individuals and communities.

In a world often filled with division and discord, the act of sharing stories serves as a reminder of our shared humanity and interconnectedness. It's a testament to the power of compassion and understanding.

The narratives which follow are the stories of young people turning 18, vulnerable women asylum seekers, single mothers, and victims of sexual or gender violence, who have benefited from the EEA Grants programmes.

We thank them for their trust and sharing.

My name is Iman



My name is Iman and I have seven children, five boys and two girls. I arrived in Greece on August 8, 2017, with my six children. I gave birth to my seventh child here, two years ago.

I got married when I was 17 years old. My life was very difficult.

*When I was in Iraq, I had a lot of problems with my husband. He beat me, I had no food, no clothes, no respect. Like I wasn't a human being. At home everyone was beating me, his mother, his brothers... my husband himself was beating my children and me. **Eleven days after I gave birth, he hit me so hard that he rent my hair.** Our life was very difficult. We were staying eight people in the same room. With all these problems **I decided to leave, I had no other choice.** I've been trying to get out of Iraq for two years. My mother-in-law kept my passport and didn't give it to me, didn't let me leave. Finally, I talked to my husband and he agreed to go. His mother and siblings disagreed. We left Iraq to go to another country, we didn't plan to stay in Greece. Somewhere my husband could work, he didn't know any work, he was a soldier.*

My husband and I broke up two years ago. I don't want to know where he is, what he's doing. In Greece his behaviour was worse than in Iraq. When we got here, he found freedom, he found everything. He gave no care to us, no food, no clothes, nothing. He started drinking, and continued to hit us and yell.. He was hitting me even when I dared to talk.

*When we arrived in Samos, from Iraq, one night in the tent, **he hit me so hard that he almost killed me. This was the first thing he did in Greece.***

An organization picked us up and took us to Ioannina city. That was the second time he hit me so hard. He treated the children very harshly. He made them stand for two hours with one foot against the wall, as punishment. He was breaking brooms on them, hitting them a lot.

Every week he was breaking three brooms on them. One day he hit my older son so hard that my little boy peed on him. **I was two months pregnant when he hit me for the last time.** We lived in Patision street then. He beat me a lot and tried to choke me. He wanted to kill me. I was very sick, I had no strength at all. I left the house as soon as he left and went to a friend of mine who lived nearby, I was bleeding from the mouth, without a scarf, my hair was untangled. My friend asked me why I shouldn't file a complaint, a lawsuit against him. And I answered that I don't know, I was afraid then, I didn't know what to do. I was also afraid of the police. I stayed at my friend's for about an hour, then I went home with my friend's daughter because I couldn't do it myself, and I lay down all night. I didn't have the strength to do anything. The next day, the children were left for school without food. He didn't do anything. I couldn't go out, I gave ten euros to my eldest son to get bread and cheese. In the morning I heard the husband telling his mother on the phone that he would take the children and come back. I didn't hear what his mother said, but I heard what he said.

He said he wants to kill me, take his children and leave. I knew that next time he would kill me. If he wouldn't kill me, he would kill my oldest child. He was hitting him harder than the others. My child had a problem, psychological, he spent a lot of time without eating. I tried to secretly give him something to eat when he went to the toilet. I decided that I should take my children and leave. (..)

We stayed at my friend's place for seven days. We didn't go out at all. In a small cold room, without blankets. But okay, we got through that too. Fortunately, the organization that had taken care of us found another home soon, in Acharnon street. After 14 days, we moved to Pangrati for 7 months.

I don't know how he found out where we were staying, he probably followed me from Omonia where I went one day. He reached the house and was knocking on the door to enter inside. I spoke to the lawyer and he told me to call the police. We were very scared. It was 6 in the morning. I called the police and luckily they chased him away. I told the organization that I can't stay in this house anymore after they found out where the house was. We were locked in the house for two days, I didn't even throw away any garbage. They finally came and took us from another organization and drove us to Kypseli. I gave birth there. Then they took us back to Zografou. Then again in Acharnon.

During that period, my children didn't go to school. We lived secretly. I was walking down the street and I was hiding. I was afraid that he would find us – that's why I didn't send the children to school: he might find them and go get them. I lived three or four months without going to the doctor, I was afraid. Then they brought us here, to the Doctors of the World shelter.

*Here, it is different. When I arrived here, I felt that I have strength, that I had people with me. I learned that I have to answer, not to be afraid. **Now I smile, I talk to people. I feel safe here. The kids go to school again.** And I'm also learning the Greek language. If I could leave a message, an advice to my daughters was this one: "Choose the right person. Have love, no fights and violence. Stay with your partner, not with his parents and siblings. Be strong, make your own decisions." And if they understand that this man isn't good, they should break up with him the first day. To not spend years with him, like me. **Every person must learn that when he falls down he must find the courage to stand up, to have strength.***

My name is Judy



My name is Judy. I am 17 years old, from Kinshasa, Congo. I gave birth 6 months ago. I arrived in Greece on foot, while I was pregnant. Someone raped me in Turkey. I traveled alone. As victim of gender-based violence, I ran away from home to escape a forced marriage to a man of my father's age.

*I left Congo because of my father, he was very mean to me, **he wanted to marry me with a man older than me. This man was as old as my father.** (My father) didn't want me at home anymore, he was beating me. **He beat me every day, he didn't let me go to school, sometimes he didn't let me even eat.** My mother told me that I must leave because if this situation continues like that it will hurt me. One day my father tried to set the house on fire... My mother told me that I should go to Turkey because it is cheaper there and she could pay for my ticket.*

*"I don't have enough money now to leave together, but **one day I will come to find you**" she promised. **I was waiting for her every day...** but I lost contact with her. I lost my phone, so to this day that I am here, I have had no contact with her. (..)*

*In Turkey I didn't know anyone, the people who came to pick me up from the airport took me to a house. There, **a man raped me.** After the rape, he disappeared. One day the owner of the house came and kicked us all out. When this happened, I started sleeping on the streets, I had nowhere to go, I was sleeping in the park. During the day, I was looking for food and at night I was sleeping in the park. One day, I met a woman from Cameroon who suggested me to work in the restaurant where she was also working. To do the wishes, to clean... and she also said that I would be able to sleep in the restaurant. So, I was working during the day and at night, I was sleeping in the restaurant. One day, this woman told me that she decided to leave Turkey and travel. I asked her "where are you going to travel?", she said "to Greece". I ask her "**What is Greece?**". "It's a country where we normally should cross the water to get there, but now, we don't have to do that, we'll go on foot". I told her that I have no money and she said that she will support me.*

She did it because I was completely alone. **We were traveling for a very long time, a month and a half, I didn't know I was pregnant, there were too many people,** Syrians, Congolese, Cameroonians, too many people.. **We were walking, being exposed to cold and wet weather.. we were sleeping in the forest.** One day we arrived "here". I don't even know where "here" is. The woman told me that she would continue the journey, but she couldn't take me with her, because she did not have enough money. But she told me that I could stay here and that it would be fine. She left me in a house where there were many people. One day, they started asking for money for accommodation and food. I told them I have nothing, and they kicked me out. I started sleeping outside again. I didn't know where the parks were exactly, but wherever I found a park, I stayed. There, I met another woman who helped me – she gave me a phone number to call a social service and ask for help.

First, they took me to another organization. I have been here since June 2022... since I was 5 months pregnant. From the first day I came here, they have helped me a lot, they took me to the hospital, they gave me clothes, they gave me food, I am fine here. I take care of the baby, we sleep, we play... I want to start school, but first I will start lessons in Greek language. I want to find a job, take care of my child. I would like to leave a message, some advice to the girls traveling alone... to travel in the most legal way, not the way I came, because they are in danger. I have suffered rape, if my child asks me about her father, what will I tell her? (..) **Women give life to the world. They bring life.** While men make them suffer. Like my father, who made my mother suffer...

My name is Julie



My name is Julie and I am 33 years old. I was born in a communist, socialist country, Cuba, and if you are a trans person, this is really bad.

People do not understand that you are different. They believe that if you want to change your gender, you should be crazy. **There is so much discrimination, bullying, police persecution and torture...** In Cuba, people who decide to change their gender have no possibilities to find a job and be good in society. For the society trans are rubbish. In Cuba you see NO trans people, either man or woman working. Never. **Gender-affirming surgery is banned.** So, you can do it only illegally, at home. You know, you pay for the doctor and all this... Many times there are complications and things are getting more difficult. Before the surgery I decided to take hormones for the breast. A friend of mine told me what to do. Without doctor prescription, nor advice.. it was a very traumatic experience. I was taking bigger doses of hormones and I was fainted in the streets, it was horrible. **But I had no other way.**

Trans and black: I'm the worst combination in the world.

I was born in a disrupted family: my father was alcoholic, slacked my mother every time when I was very young. **The brother of my father abused me** when I was 9 years old, fortunately he is in jail. My family didn't understand that my mind was not with my body. **My father** was behaving as an animal. He didn't accept me, **he was beating me. My mother, even though she didn't accept me, she was protecting me.** This is why she decided to take me and move to another city to look for better opportunities for me, because I had a lot of stress.. **The only thing she wished was me to study, to "become something".** She knew that for people like me, there were no future in Cuba. In this city I went high school and finished the extra year in which students, who have graduated with good grades, teach younger pupils. I liked, it was very interesting.

After that, the people who worked at school proposed me to continue to teach but I said no, I wanted to do other things. I wasn't open there, I was feeling different, I didn't want to shame. I was feeling necessary to transform me, to put my lashes, the nails, to be comfortable with myself.. Many times I was wondering what is the meaning of being a woman. **Woman for me is a symbol.** When I started this change of my life, I admired the beauty of the woman. I wasn't in love with women, but I admire the image of the woman, the hair, the nails, the body, the form of speech, the projection in the society. And slowly-slowly I understood that I was THAT woman and I would fight to gain the image I want.

In 2009, I went to Havana, the capital of Cuba, alone, to study the German language. First, I started to study computer sciences, but I had a lot of problems with my eye, so I decided to study languages because I'm very good to communication with people. The only way to "open my way to life" is to speak other languages and understand the culture of other people.. As I was one of the best students of my class, I received a visa to go to Germany to continue my studies. I had the opportunity to stay in Germany but I was very anxious about my mother. **My mother is everything for me.** She was alone, old and sick. So, I returned home to finish my studies. However, it was quite clear to me that I couldn't live in Cuba anymore, because I have been in Germany.. for me it was another world, free, totally different. When I graduated from the university, I worked as a tour guide in Varadero (everybody has to provide some years of social service in Cuba. For women are 3 years and or men 2 years, as they also have obligatory military service. For the trans it is a little bit problem, because as a trans person you cannot go to military).

*In 2019, I decided to go to Germany. The problem is that you cannot travel without visa directly to Germany. The only way was through Russia: from a communist country to another communist country. So, I went to Moscow and stayed there for about one year. I found job, but they fired me when they found out I was trans. But why? I was very good at my job.. Another day, **police caught me, told me bullshits, got me in the car, made sex and left me 20km out of Moscow, without clothes in the snow... It was terrible.** (..)*

*I needed to go to Germany, that was my plan. But the problem was always the passport. In Cuba, sex-change is banned, so you cannot change your name in official documents. So, in each airport I had the same problem.. from Russia airport they sent me to Turkey. From Turkey to Serbia and then to Macedonia. There, the police told me that I could travel to Germany only through Greece where I could reach on foot through Bulgaria. **So I walked.. Everyday I was promising to myself that I will not die, I will manage to arrive in Germany.** (..)*

When I came in Greece, I was sleeping on the streets, I had no house, no food, no job, I was returning to the ground, I was very bad. The police caught me, sent me to Petrou Ralli 24, for one month, I was alone in jail with men. Every time is the same. They didn't know what Trans is. Then, they wanted to send me to Amygdaleza and didn't know if I should go with the men or women. I started to have depression and anxiety. Fortunately, after my release, an organisation helped me. I started sessions with a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a social worker and a lawyer, they provided me a house and my situation started to improve. (...)

I have experienced a lot of discrimination. Not only in Cuba, but also here, in Greece. For example, the only job I find (and not always and not easy) is in cleaning companies. I want to find a job and ***people do not accept me because I'm trans and black.*** My mother tongue is Spanish. I speak German, English and I'm learning Greek. I applied for a job and passed in high scores in a Spanish language test in a well-known sales company. When they saw the male name in my documents, they didn't proceed with the placement. This is what always happens.

Although I have the skills and the legal document to work, they didn't accept me. The same thing is happening when I'm looking for a house. Although we have agreed on everything on the phone, when I give my papers, they change their mind.

I'm black and trans. It is terrible. But what I can do? I was born like this! People do not understand. You come to Europe for freedom, to be safe and people continue to discriminate against you. I want to work. To wake up at 8am to go to my work, to go back home in the afternoon, to be well. I promised to my mum to be well. ***If I don't work, how will I manage to live in dignity?***

People from NGOs have helped me a lot. They do not just do their job; they always go the extra mile. They are always there for me, anytime. I came to the SolidarityNow last year. Another organisation sent me here to see the lawyer for the asylum procedure. Then I started sessions with the social worker and the employability counselor. They have helped me a lot. We created a CV, we apply for jobs, they advise and coach me for the interviews, we check the documents etc. I also took my first certification in economics! My plan is to start the public evening school to learn the Greek language. ***Now I feel strong enough to start again my life, a new life in Greece.***

My name is Ramatulai



My name is Ramatulai and I am 17 years old from Siera Leone.

I arrived in Samos, Greece in September 2022. I stayed for two months in Samos camp and then they sent me here, in METAdrasi shelter. My life was good until a tragedy occurred and made me come here. I left my country with my aunt, but I finally arrived here alone. I am the only daughter of my mother and I didn't fortunate to meet my father.

The situation at the camp was bad, but normal. The food was not good, the place was cold.. But here, in the shelter, is better. The food and the water is good, we have better clothes to wear, better beds to lay down. And we go to school. When I was in Siera Leone I used to go to school. The school here is more difficult because of the language. When I came here and started to go to school all classes were in Greek, I didn't understand anything. So, I stepped back until I gained a level of knowledge of the language. The teacher of the shelter helps us a lot and now I understand the Greek language a bit.

My life here is good, we feel safe and protected. When we feel stressed, the people of the shelter speak to us, help us, they are good. Concerning stress, because of what happened to me, what I have experienced, ***I don't feel free, but I feel safe. I don't feel free because I cannot go back, I have lost everything, I don't have my mother, the only person I have had, I don't even know if she is alive or dead. So, this is still in me, the stress is still in my body. I feel safe here, but my heart isn't free.***

*I would like to become a doctor; I still have the hope and try to do my best. I don't know what life will bring to me. **When I turn 18, I must leave the shelter and I don't have anybody. It's only me. It's so difficult, so difficult.** Sometimes I think that everything has gone. Leaving without parents, at this age, in another country is very difficult and stressful. Nobody could do anything for me after I left the shelter.*

*I was thinking to move in a country where English is the formal language. All my life I was studying in English, the Greek language is very difficult and it needs much time. When I left home, I lost everything, even the school certificates, so I couldn't approve all these years of studying. I had to start again the school, to continue my studies. And I have to move on, I have nobody to support me, I have only myself, so I think that being in an English-speaking country would be more advantageous for me. The asylum procedure is still on going, so I am waiting. **Even if I don't have to live here, I will have the right to live here.** I cannot go back to Sierra Leone, it is not safe for me and I don't know what can happen to me.. I have nobody there, my grandparents chased me, I don't know where my mother is.. so, I don't know where I will manage to live. **The only thing I know is that I have to fight for myself and build a new life.***

The interviews were taken place during the implementation of the “Asylum and Migration” and “Local Development and Poverty Reduction” EEA Grants programmes.

The “Asylum and Migration” (Addressing urgent needs for the reception and screening of asylum seekers and for the accommodation of vulnerable groups) programme in Greece, financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, was awarded a total budget of 16,5 million euros as part of the EEA Grants 2014 – 2021. The program aspires to contribute to ensuring legal protection, support and care for the most vulnerable asylum seekers, with emphasis on unaccompanied children.

The “Local Development and Poverty Reduction” programme in Greece, financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, was awarded a total budget of 6,5 million euros as part of the EEA Grants 2014 – 2021. The program aspires to contribute to enhancement of social cohesion and reduction of economic and social disparities.

The Fund Operator for both programmes is SOL Consulting S.A in partnership with HumanRights360.



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