

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW EXTRACT

[The in-depth oral history interview with the narrator was conducted on May 16, 2021 in Pristina. Due to the narrator's request for anonymity, we have concealed the identity.]

Narrator: That time when they left for Germany, that wave of asylum seekers, my husband and I left together. I also had my son who had turned two then. We left.

Interviewer: How did you leave?

Narrator: We left, first we got onto the bus here, we went to Serbia by bus, from Serbia, a family member found a person, they said, “He will take you and you will get on the bus in Novi Sad and they will take you to Austria, without any fuss.” We got into that car and they left us at the border of Serbia, the Serbia-Hungary border. He said, “Just cross this, get on the road,” he said, “I will get you on the other side.” We crossed the road, got to the other side, and crossed the border easily. We waited, he didn’t show up, the man disappeared (laughs), we had to walk, I don’t know for how long, we got there at 11 a.m. until 5 p.m.

We just walked down the road, we walked, walked, my son was very little, one and a half years old, so he turned two there. And he’d cry all the time, he’d say “I want to go back home.” He knew, we walked ahead that way, he’d turn back, “No,” he’d say, “I want to go back home, home.” I was with my husband, my brother-in-law, and two friends of my husband. They helped me a lot, they carried him, they tried to distract him. I was breastfeeding him at the time and, when he’d ask to be breastfed, I had to carry him *hopa* {onomatopoeic} and breastfeed him while walking (laughs). Sometimes we’d sit, rest, but we mostly walked until the Hungarian border police arrested us and imprisoned us all.

Then they took only those of us who had children, we got into a, they got us into a prisoners' van and they took us to a garage. My brother-in-law and my husband's friends were left there because they [the Hungarian border police] said, "We will take you later." They took us to a garage, it was all filled with water, they put us there. Until they took some personal data from us, I didn't know what they were doing. They brought two buses, then with those buses they took us to a prison, I don't know the name of that place, it was like a prison. When we went in there, I was so tired, so exhausted. The moment I went in, I slept and I didn't hear anything until the policeman came in the morning and knocked on our door.

They didn't keep us for long, they gave us food and water and everything, you know, we weren't maltreated or anything. And so we took those, they came and called us and took all of our personal data, our fingerprints and stuff like that and they let us go. But we wanted to get together with my brother-in-law and with those friends. We slept in a hotel for a night, it was something like a motel. And we stayed there for a night until we got together with them. When we got together, the person who was supposed to pick us up, he just lied to us, he didn't come to pick us up at all.

We took a taxi, actually one of the taxi drivers who took us was a policeman, but the price was convenient to him, because in the Balkans, in general corruption (laughs) is number one. He took us to Budapest. In Budapest we stayed in a hotel, there came... my husband's friend found an acquaintance, he came and took us to Austria by car. He took me and my child, and that man. Because the aunt of that man sent him to pick us up and they took us to Austria, in the train station, he took me and my husband out, he said, "Come with me," he said, "I'll get your ticket so they don't notice you." It was snowing a lot that day, it was [snowing] too much.

So, we had to leave for Germany at noon, we didn't leave until 2 a.m., we stayed in the station because the roads were blocked. We got on the train at 2 a.m. and got to Germany at around 5 or 6 a.m. When we went there, we didn't know what to do, we didn't know the language, the place, nothing. And we were stuck there, so we went to a coffee shop. I told my husband, "Let's go inside just so we can get warm, or do something" because it was very cold. And we went in there, we stayed for about an hour. We met an Albanian family who were refugees like us. There was the husband, the wife, and they had four children.

That man was told, "You can come, and when you get to Germany, tell me where you are and I will come get you." He had left hoping that his brother would pick him up, in fact he would call him on the phone but he wouldn't answer, he would only text him, "Go there" you know, with names. But he didn't know how, neither the man nor the woman, nor his children, they were very little, they knew neither English nor German, no languages at all. Where would he go, he didn't even know where to get tickets, or what was happening, he was left on the streets. And we told him... because we could speak a little English and my husband told him, "Come with me." Then we met an Albanian who was a

resident there, he bought us some tickets and said, "Go to Stuttgart." We were in Munich there I think. And he bought us the tickets.

Then we very often had to change trains. My husband understood stuff more or less. And we went there, we left them there, we applied for asylum at the police, I don't know what he did, where he went, he himself didn't know, well his brother had lied to him. We didn't stay there for long, around four months in Germany. We stayed, for a month we stayed at the camp, for three other months they moved us into an apartment, so we lived in an apartment with my husband and son only. A bedroom, a living room, a kitchen, it was good, we didn't lack anything, they took great care of us.

The place where we were was Osna... Osnabruck, no, another one, what was the name, I forget (laughs) its name. They said... there were some elderly women there, they said, "Even during the war in Kosovo," they said, "There were no Albanian refugees here. So you are the first who were brought here." It was just us and a man and a woman, they were a couple. So they took really good care of us, because they had never had refugees there. And then we got it [the invitation], we went to the interview, but then we got a negative response and we signed it immediately, and we came back. Because they'd say, "They're taking them home by force." My husband said, "Since I have my son and you are here too, I don't want to flee or anything" we got it [a negative response] and we came back.