

**Interview Series: “Global Deportation and Detention Regimes”**

**Organized by Cemile Gizem Dinçer and Eda Sevinin**

**Interview with Hayriye Kara and Mehtap Erdem**

In this interview, we talked with Hayriye and Mehtap, activists and lawyers who have long-term experience in the field of refugee and migrant solidarity in Turkey. The interview starts with a broader framework of how the detention and deportation regime in Turkey has been instituted and evolved in the last two decades. It continues with contemporary anti-gender politics and their impacts on LGBTI+ refugees. We ended the conversation by discussing the possibilities of self-organization, refugee solidarity, and the obstacles to opening a political space for a more solidaristic engagement on the ground.

After completing her LL.B. and LL.M. in the Netherlands, Mehtap Erdem moved to Türkiye, where she obtained the equivalent of her law degree at Ankara University’s Faculty of Law and completed her legal traineeship in Ankara. Since 2019, she has been working as a lawyer at the [Association for Solidarity with Refugees](#), where she currently also serves as a project coordinator. In addition to her work in the field of refugee rights, she is one of the founding members of the 20 November Association for Combating Hate Crimes, established in 2024, and currently serves as its Vice President.

Hayriye Kara graduated from the Faculty of Law at Ankara University in 2008. After completing her legal internship in 2010, she joined [Kaos GL](#)—Turkey’s first and leading LGBTI+ organization—where she has worked on refugee rights and provided legal support to LGBTI+ people. Since 2017, she has been Kaos GL’s Refugee Rights Program Coordinator.

**Cemile Gizem Dinçer and Eda Sevinin:** Thank you, Mehtap and Hayriye, for being with us today. Let’s start with a broader question, how do you view the current state of border governance in Turkey? What significant changes or shifts have you observed in recent years?

**Mehtap Erdem:** Where to begin answering this question? Perhaps it would make sense to start from the war in Syria, and from refugees who arrived in Turkey after the war broke out, and of course the policies developed by the European Union and the rest of the world. Taking

this as a starting point doesn't mean that there were no refugees in Turkey before or that refugees weren't using Turkey as a transit country. But I think it was an important period in terms of developing a migration policy. Because, after that, we started to see changes in Turkey. Previously, the foreigners' police were the point of contact, and there was no civilian migration administration, nor was there a specific law on foreigners and international protection.

After this war, in 2013-2014, we started to see institutionalization, migration management, removal centers, and a number of legislative developments. Looking at Turkey now, we need to consider political and diplomatic balances between the EU and Turkey. Because, there are also developments in Europe. They want to keep the refugee population low. Operations like Frontex are intensifying with practices like pushbacks.

If we fast forward a little, what do we see when we look back to a few years ago? People from Syria have been here for a little over ten years, Afghans are the second largest group in Turkey. The migration flow continues. This is actually in line with the global trends. But then a few years ago, we saw it being used as a propaganda tool in both local and national elections: "We will send refugees back" or "We have sent this X number back". What do we see today? There are (1) removal centers; (2) after being implemented in a few pilot regions, there are now mobile migration point vehicles in all provinces. They are mobile checkpoint vehicles or mobile stations. They can stop the people, conduct identity checks to see if they are registered or unregistered or they have legal residency. This is an active identification. After identification, they run some procedures and, if necessary, this can lead to deportation.

Then, (3) there are temporary accommodation centers. Initially, some Syrians lived in temporary accommodation centers for quite some time. What happened now? This coincides with the February 6<sup>th</sup> Turkey–Syria earthquakes in 2023, after the earthquake, they began to be used for different purposes. Migrants and refugees who are undocumented or whose residence had been revoked were held there. In addition, more recently the centers called (4) GÖKSEM (Irregular Migrant Pre-Acceptance and Referral Centers) came into operation. So, when you look at all of this from the past to the present, what is the policy? Identify those who are undocumented or deportable. And the number of instruments like GÖKSEM, mobile migration points, have increased, and the migration management apparatus has developed.

**Hayriye Kara:** Thank you very much Mehtap for this summary of Turkey's migration policy. It might be also important to mention that this policy was one of Turkey's commitments during the EU harmonization process, even before the Syrian civil war. Turkey had begun drafting migration legislation and civilianizing this area within the EU harmonization framework. In fact, to a certain extent, the preparation of this law was open to communication with academics, albeit relatively few in number, as well as civil society. They examined the laws in Europe and what is needed in Turkey. The participatory character of the drafting of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection was rarely seen in Turkey.

However, after the law was enacted, it turned out that there was something that the government could not foresee. No one could foresee the uprisings in Syria. No one in Turkey could have predicted the large group of refugees coming in. But even if it had been predicted, no work was done on this in Turkey, no policy was developed on this.

The civilianization of migration management meant, for example, that foreigners were transferred from the police branch to an immigration office, a civilian public institution. This move was not made particularly from a security perspective but rather from a rights perspective, that is, it was based on the idea that access to asylum is a right. But then civilian officials started acting more like law enforcement. The migration administration was established in 2013. Despite so much time, refugees still call the migration administration "the police". I think this tells us a lot.

And there are still very serious problems with access to justice in Turkey's border policies, detention conditions and deportation regime. Originally the law had allowed for 15 days of appeal to deportation decision. In 2019, they reduced this period to seven days. And the decision ruled by the court of first instance is the final decision. There is nothing you can do to appeal the ruling. The only legal avenue is the Constitutional Court. Beyond that, access to lawyers is virtually impossible. This is mostly handled through civil society, and the law provides no judicial steps for this. Although the law refers to it, the Turkish Bar Association does not provide legal aid unless there is an ongoing project. Besides, when we consider the removal centers, access itself is very difficult. Even if access is granted, obtaining information is problematic, even for a lawyer. People can be moved from place to place arbitrarily, without any justification. They can be sent to places far from where their lawyer is located. Even if a lawyer manages to access them and meet with them, there is no meeting room for

the lawyer. Privacy cannot be ensured, and time is very limited. This regime is being reinforced, and even more problematic thing is that the implementation is not consistent. I personally think that this inconsistency is the policy itself. It leaves things vague and allows for a room for maneuver.

**Cemile Gizem Dinçer and Eda Sevinin:** You've summarized such a complicated system in such a short time, thanks a lot. Alongside this uncertainty and ambiguity, we are also witnessing the rise of state led anti-gender policies. As you know, 2025 was declared the "Year of Family" in Turkey, and the next ten years will be the "Decade of Family". Among them, we see it not only in family-oriented policies but also in anti-gender politics. So, in such an environment, what would you like to say about the conditions and experiences of LGBTI+ refugees, of course, thinking through the lens of detention and deportation?

**Hayriye Kara:** In this system of Turkey, decisions don't have to be based on law or court rulings, there is no need for it to be on paper, any implementation now operates based on instructions. And it is not difficult to predict that these anti-LGBTI+ or anti-gender policies will immediately turn into implementation by the discretion of the personnel in migration bureaucracy. Any statement made, anything said, could become another violation of law or another discriminatory discourse against LGBTI+ refugees who have to go to the migration office, and it does...

At this point, there are many things that are confusing: what will happen if these identities are criminalized? Because, to be frank, under the current system, Turkey recognizes sexual orientation as a ground for persecution and grants LGBTI+s conditional refugee status as LGBTI+ individuals. Now, if LGBTI+ identity is criminalized, what will happen to LGBTI+ refugees? It's legally very confusing. Putting all this possibility aside, we already encounter discriminatory practices in the field, namely, insults, humiliation, discrimination, and stigmatization. And there is no effective mechanism in place to respond to. So, how will these policies reflect on implementations? Will there be any instructions regarding implementation change? Even if there are, we do not know anything about them. Because in Turkey, there seems to be no area left where the law is applied, especially in terms of fundamental rights. And when it comes to refugee rights, currently international or rather

institutional pressure is lacking, it's almost zero. And when this is reduced to the private sphere, when a politics of hostility, othering, and stigmatization is pursued specifically towards certain groups, it quickly translates into very serious rights violations and very serious oppression on the ground.

At the same time, LGBTI+ refugees, like all refugees, are even more vulnerable. What is going to happen to their access to justice, support and solidarity? Or what kind of pressure will be placed on their solidarity networks? This means serious difficulties. But now, when we come to the specifics of the deportation regime, will these policies make the deportation decisions easier? Because, deportation decisions are made very easily in Turkey. For instance, a trans person who has been subjected to violence cannot file a complaint, because the perpetrator is a citizen. So, it's not that they can't file a complaint not only because of discrimination, but also because of the fear of deportation. We see that the probability of being taken into a removal center, of being placed under administrative detention is not low at all. So, it's not an ungrounded fear. That's why they can't go and file a complaint; they can't actually seek justice. Also, this is not only about being subjected to violence, even when refugees make a claim about their own rights, they might face the threat of deportation.

If we move on to the implementation... The administrative detention or deportation order means that you deprive a civilian of their freedom. There is no penal basis to this; this is not a sanction. Deprivation of liberty must be the last resort as it is a very serious measure. First of all, alternatives to administrative detention must be evaluated, only if the conditions for these alternatives do not exist, the administrative detention should apply. However, in Turkey, administrative detention is used as a sanction, as a punitive method. For instance, people are detained for a few months and then released. And this is entirely at the discretion of the administration. Of course, the administrative law imposes certain limitations on how this discretionary power should be exercised. However, there is no written policy on how immigration administration should regulate its practices. These should be open to the public. The real danger here is that the number of deportees is being presented as a success story by the state. This tells a lot.

**Mehtap Erdem:** I'd like to add a thing or two. It might be good to consider this question from the perspective of LGBTI+ refugees. Simply being a refugee in Turkey presents

structural difficulties in accessing rights and services, such as access to asylum, which is fundamental. When you are an LGBTI+ refugee, this difficulty becomes even more layered due to intersectionality. It would be easier to understand if I gave specific examples. But I think the fundamental concept we need to keep in mind is *non-refoulement*, or the prohibition of return, along with the right to life, intersectionality and criminalization. Even before the declaration of the Year of the Family, LGBTI+ refugees were already facing multilayered problems. If people under international protection or temporary protection participate in any rally—enjoyment of their constitutional right—and are detained, they are taken to a removal center. If we think that this person is also a LGBTI+, and if we add this to being a refugee who had to leave their country due to their gender identity or sexual orientation, it means this person will face deportation back to a country where they have suffered or could suffer persecution, where their life is at risk. So, they face something that has many layers and directly related to their lives. When the LGBTI+ identity is criminalized, the society, a citizen, a civil servant, or a healthcare worker can assume discriminatory attitude. When the LGBTI+ person is also a refugee, they are sent to a removal center. From that center, they face the risk of deportation to a country where their life is under serious threat, or even worse, where they will be killed. So, this is very very dangerous. And unfortunately, we have seen such cases.

In addition, there are taboos and lack of knowledge on the subject. LGBTI+s are isolated because the administration, the institution, the removal center doesn't know what to do. Should we put them in this cell or that cell? Should we isolate the person? Or if they require a specific medication or treatment, these are automatically withheld. But as we said, removal centers have existed since 2013-2014. So, this practice has been going on for a good ten years, even more. The fact that these institutional gaps have not been filled yet tells us a lot. To summarize, we need to monitor what the effects of the Year of the Family will be, but even before it was declared, people were already facing a layered risk due to this intersection of being refugee and LGBTI+. Unfortunately, we see that some cases or some people, some events, can even lead to fatal outcomes.

**Cemile Gizem Dinçer and Eda Sevinin:** You mentioned some of the conditions, but actually, every day—less so now, but we used to hear a lot about it back then—there were refugees committing suicides, or uprising in various ways in detention centers. I remember,

maybe around 2013, when conducting research at the Kumkapı Removal Center, refugees had clogged the toilets. Apparently, it was a resistance strategy. By clogging the toilet drains or through acts such as suicide, they were in fact protesting the conditions and making their voices heard. But of course, we only hear about these things to a very limited extent. You probably see other things because you work directly with detainees and can enter these centers. How do people in detention respond to all these violations?

**Mehtap Erdem:** There is a fundamental issue here, this is where the whole issue begins. In the vast majority of interviews I had with detainees in the removal centers, they ask “why am I here?”. What does this show us? They are trying to understand why they were taken under detention, how long it will last. Are they not informed? We need to ask ourselves these questions. If someone is to be taken under detention, there needs to be some kind of predictability, right? Will it last forever? Is there a time limit? Or, could it change if I fulfill certain conditions? Or, if I do this, if I cooperate will the situation be different? Because that’s one of the grounds for administrative detention under the law: if a person’s nationality, name cannot be determined, administrative detention can be extended to complete these processes. So, there needs to be predictability, transparency. When this is not the case and you keep people inside for a long time—without adequate ventilation, social and cultural activities, playgrounds for children, places of worship, access to books and other things such as sufficient water, food, and hygiene—it negatively impacts people’s psychology. On top of that, when someone has health problems and can’t access medication, their physical condition deteriorates. Let’s think about ourselves during the pandemic for instance. Many people suffered, right? This is not even comparable to the pandemic. There is also the risk of being sent back to a country where you might face danger, be killed or persecuted. You cannot convince them, nor can you have the chance to explain yourself. All these have of course very adverse effects on people.

On the other hand, there is an issue in Turkey: as the number of refugees increased, many “professionals” (be it lawyers, NGO employees, etc.) turned to this field. Projects commenced, funds were allocated, etc. But this shows also that the entire field has become a sector. Now, not every person working in this field has a rights-based approach. As human rights lawyers, you cannot simply go to the removal center, learn the number of the

deportation order, present your objections to the court and move on with your life. You have to observe when you are there, because it is a carceral space. You have to check if the detainee has access to all these basic needs I have mentioned above. You know, if there is incarceration, there must be CPT standards [European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment]. There are key conventions to which Turkey is a party. We need to monitor if Turkey complies with them.

In this context, I will also talk a little bit about legal aid in Turkey, that is, the appointment of a lawyer free of charge. Previously there was a lot of funding, projects, and various forms of support. UNHCR had a joint project with the Union of Turkish Bar Associations. Many lawyers were appointed to detainees in removal centers. They had access inside the detention area and were making certain things visible, giving the detainees a voice, or at least, giving them the feeling that they were being heard. Now the project has ceased, and unfortunately, many bar associations in Turkey, with the exception of a few, do not appoint lawyers to removal centers. Not everyone can access a private lawyer, not everyone has the economic means. Even when they do, they lack information. Because in removal centers, people do not have access to mobile phones. They can only use payphone, which requires a phone card. Again, some kind of financial expense is needed.

All of these combined (the conditions of removal centers, the human psychology, the uncertainty, the inability to come up with a solution), people start to think “if all these procedures are completed, I will be put on a plane and sent back to the country I fled”. Unfortunately, that happens. Whether we hear more or less about these conditions depends on the perspective of the human rights advocates who go there. Sectoralization is a contributing factor as well.

**Hayriye Kara:** I’ve had such an experience. In the Mahsa Amini protests, some people were arrested. Among them were four Iranians. Three of them had residence permits, one had international protection status. They also had received conditional refugee status. We went to the removal center from Ankara Bar Association’s Refugee Rights Center. Volunteer lawyers were conducting interviews. They could not trust us, they didn’t know us. We explained why we were there and that we were providing legal support. The three residence permit holders were told that they would be transferred to the migration office where they could receive

deportation orders or administrative detention orders. Their reaction was very strong; they asked “what does that mean?” But the one with the international protection status—this is truly tragic—knew exactly what was going to happen. Because this country is like an open prison in terms of international protection and temporary protection regimes. It gives us an idea about the deportation regime. I am saying this of course, in the context of international law, otherwise, we are all against borders: international law has its own provisions. Normally, states can select and control who enters their country. But in this case, it says “what is my international responsibility? I have to accept everyone who needs it”. Until security is ensured, refugees have to reside in a certain place for a certain period of time. There are certain obligations. But what does it mean for a person to be forced to live in one city for 15 years, for their city to be changed without any justification, for them to go sign-in regularly for judicial control. How could this be possible. It’s very serious; it’s not simply possible for a refugee to gradually gain access to certain rights in Turkey. But this has never been questioned, never been raised as an issue.

For example, they used to occasionally invite me to these social cohesion events—I’ve never liked the concept of “social cohesion”—the first thing I’d say was: “There’s no legal security, no status security, and no gradual access to rights. In cases where there’s not even the slightest predictability, what kind of cohesion are you talking about?” Everyone knows how harsh the detention conditions are. It’s not something that’s unknown. There are plenty of reports. There are reports on human rights violations, there is the Union of Turkish Bar Associations’ [report on the rights violations lawyers face](#). When you look at that, it’s only natural that people would rebel against such conditions.

But I think the real problem is not that the reaction of refugees is unknown. Even when everything is known, it doesn’t capture the attention of social movements in Turkey; it is not supported. This is part of our advocacy as well. If we speak of rights and struggle, then we too must stand shoulder to shoulder with refugees. I don’t see this in any movement, in any social movement. Only a certain group of people working on the ground and struggling alongside refugees—and there are very few of them.

How many social movements in Turkey have actually taken any action regarding the conditions of detention, besides issuing press statements? The bar associations do it, the İzmir Bar Association for instance goes and organizes a rally in front of the Harmandalı Removal

Center. This is also something we need to question. I've been part of the LGBTI+ movement for years, only recently have we actually started to stand with refugees, to bring these issues to the forefront in protests.

There was another case in Turkey, like the one Mehtap mentioned: a trans person was killed after being deported to Azerbaijan. These cases keep popping up, but when it comes to organizing, nothing is really being done. How many social movements say "let's talk about what we can do together"? Personally, I haven't seen any, I don't know if you have seen... And I really think that just as we talk about phobia when it comes to the LGBTI+ community, the fact that these are not spoken about is deeply connected to racism. Yes, there are uprisings. First, we don't hear about them. That's the problem. Second, even if we did hear about them, there's no support. That's why they're left to fend for themselves.

**Cemile Gizem Dinçer and Eda Sevinin:** You've already given us some context, Hayriye. Generally speaking, how social movements or democratic opposition should approach the issue of migration. You've talked about what's going on in Turkey, but if we were to ask how things should be within this broader picture?

**Hayriye Kara:** Honestly, I won't shy away from harshly criticizing the social movements in Turkey. First, if we're fighting this battle, the social movements in Turkey need to retreat from the spaces they've occupied. Second, they're closed off to communication. Third, I don't think they ever look at things from a rights-based perspective. This is a very serious problem. For example, even if they argue for "access to asylum is a right", they don't really back it up. Everyone should have access to basic rights. When we talk about human dignity, that should include everyone. But it seems to me that a citizen gets closer to the ideal of human dignity, for citizens are included in a broader framework of the ideal of human dignity. However, for refugees, human dignity is defined much narrower. The definition of human dignity has become more and more dependent on the person. We need to let go of this first.

If we are talking about issues like the women's movement, the feminist movement, the LGBTI+ movement, patriarchy, heterosexism, and cissexism and if we're saying that these actually become even more layered when they intersect with various forms of discrimination, then this should also be reflected in our discourse. For example, professional associations and

NGOs—and public institutions, of course—need to discuss these issues within their own frameworks. How many bar associations, for instance, have brought together lawyers and refugees to discuss what we can do about these rights violations? Or how many labor unions have met with refugee workers regarding refugee rights? Or how many civil society organizations have actually met with refugees and migrants who are working on the ground, struggling, and advocating for their rights to discuss what we can do together? This is simply a question posed by a few organizations that work specifically on rights-based issues and in the field of refugee rights: “What can we do together?”

**Mehtap Erdem:** Maybe I can pick up where Hayriye left off and say this: People, institutions, initiatives, associations, and professionals who claim to work in this field should ask themselves these questions, “When I am with or alongside refugees who are subjected to this, am I imposing a hierarchy over that person? Am I approaching the issue of rights as a favor? Are there certain, even implicit, forms of discrimination I’ve internalized?”

There is a specific problem in Turkey: when you’re part of the majority group, you don’t really see what the so-called “other” faces. This is what I’ve observed since I came to Turkey, as I didn’t grow up here: this society does not handle it very well. For instance, during the Gezi protests—I think it was around that time—there was an incident in a Kurdish region of Turkey where a child was run over by a water cannon. This story spread, and I heard people asking, “Are things like that really happening there?” I’m trying to bring it back to this point. This practice of living together needs to bring certain behaviors, approaches, shared experiences, and standing side by side. We all need to ask ourselves how much do we actually achieve it? Because you might also give yourself a different answer, you can say “I don’t see them as equal to myself. Because they’re refugees. How can they be equal? After all, they were forced to leave their country. They’re seeking asylum here”. I think it comes down to internalizing equality in our collective memory—the idea of living together, seeing the other as an equal, seeing those who are different from us as equals. It’s about understanding that the rights you, as a human being, have are unconditional, but that they could also be someone else’s rights, and that they are.

**Hayriye Kara:** It's also important to call things by the name. You know, what happened in Kayseri<sup>1</sup> was a pogrom. It directly targeted refugees. I see these things that are named, defined, identified through struggle are not spoken of when it comes to refugees. If it's racism, we have to call it racism. If it means xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, or the demonization of refugees, we need to state this clearly and unequivocally. Otherwise, we risk downplaying what actually happened, shifting the focus to something else, and failing to keep the issue at the center when we come together to act.

**Mehtap Erdem:** Can I add one more thing? I think it's an important one. Empathy is a very important factor here. I am the child of a migrant family. We went to Europe to work. I mean, there was no war here in this country, right? People weren't being killed. But they [migrants from Turkey] went there to work and were able to come back here. Now, when people who have faced something all the more horrific came to Turkey, they are being asked "why did you come, why aren't you leaving?". This attitude stems from the lack of empathy and from dehumanization, that is, failing to see that person as a human. For example, what comes to mind when we say "refugee"? Do we think of a group? A number? Or perhaps people flooding the border? Or they [the press] claim that only men are crossing the Iran–Turkey border, there are no women among them, etc. But every single person in those images has a story, reasons, a past, a family, and doesn't have any other choice.

Or, for example, we hear people saying "I'm a doctor in Turkey. I can't practice my profession at the level I want. I'll go to a European country", how can they at the same time raise an eyebrow to someone who comes here? Or, for example, when the minimum wage is announced, I get angry. Why can't I see someone who's forced to work much longer hours, without registration or security, for less than the minimum wage? These are very problematic, very sad things. As human beings, is this what we want? Is this who we are?

**Cemile Gizem Dinçer and Eda Sevinin:** What we have been discussing so far actually calls for establishing a different kind of relationship with migrants in Turkey. How is it possible—or is it even possible—to support and carry out grassroots movements without establishing a relationship of the 'savior' and the 'saved'? Could this be by creating space for self-organization or for solidarity movements?

**Hayriye Kara:** All four of us here have been in this field for a very long time. And Mehtap mentioned something very important: the field has become a sector. Before that the relations established by the civil society or civil initiatives were not based on a dynamic of “savior and the saved”. It was more about struggling together, listening to one another, and supporting one another, although only a very small segment was actively involved. But there was a sense of progress through collective struggle. When did that change? It happened when civil society organizations started receiving funding and became highly institutionalized. Even though we had received funding, it wasn’t as institutionalized. The way those funds were to be used and the nature of the support was so strictly defined, and this brought about red tape. It turned into a process driven by clear definitions, paperwork, and the clear delineation of the relationships established. We adapted to responding pressures and problems accordingly, then the funds were suddenly cut off and the capacity of those working in the field to maneuver and respond to such issues was effectively taken away from them. But I still believe that Turkey retains this memory. I think we need to return to this field and this memory.

**Mehtap Erdem:** Yes, “solidarity” is the key word, just as Hayriye said. We actually see something very interesting here. People who are working in this field are not the subjects. None of us are the subjects here; there are very few subjects. We are in a privileged position; we have resources at our disposal. I don’t know how to put it, but there is a tendency for people to want to create the space and be at the forefront of it. Instead, we should create that space using the resources and privileges we have, perhaps after ensuring safety. This can only be achieved by putting in the effort here. As we have discussed earlier, for instance, a refugee is not only a refugee but is a student, a worker, an employee, and so on. For them to find a space there, to find safety, to have their voice heard, to be included, we need to build solidarity by establishing equal relations.

I’d also like to add that, I get in touch with refugees and migrants every day, and I observe that there is a huge fear in people. Fear of what? We talked about this earlier, there is a certain policy in place –policy to identify, process and send back or detect, check, and revoke the status. Of course, refugees and migrants see it. That’s why, even appearing in public can be a risk. There are situations where people have to weigh whether they should

even go to the grocery store. Now, when fear is so widespread, the idea of getting involved or showing solidarity isn't such a straightforward or simple matter. Unfortunately, this is a very legitimate concern. Just today I talked to someone. They have a request for international protection (application for asylum), they were going to submit it. They went to the Migration Directorate, but officials there said "We do not accept applications right now". They insisted saying they had the petition, but the response was "If you insist, I'll send you to a camp" to cut the conversation short. You know, the right to submit a petition is protected under the constitution. Given such things happen, we need to read the context very carefully. I will tie back to where I started: I think the most important thing we need to do from our privileged position is to open up that safe space for refugees and migrants. We need to want to open it.

**Hayriye Kara:** I don't agree with you on certain points, Mehtap. Because I believe that, as citizens we need to withdraw from the space we occupied, because citizenship is the most protective shield you have in the country you reside. I think we need to beware of this privilege when it comes to the things we demand from people who don't have that shield.

But solidarity, in my view, is something different. I mean, we're talking about refugees here—people who have survived conditions we can't even imagine in Turkey. If a person is aware of the risks, aware of what might happen, and still wants to be a part of it, then the very act of intervening into it feels condescending to me. Right now, all women's organizations—I'm not just talking about feminist ones—are aware of this. They're aware of how easily refugee and migrant women, and LGBTI+ refugees, become targets and how easily they're killed in Turkey. And cases are being followed. I mean, there are cases that lawyers—feminist lawyers—are following. Going to those cases in large numbers to exert social pressure is, in my view, an act of solidarity. There are very serious violations on the ground. We need to consider this—I definitely agree with that.

Undocumentedness, housing problems, lack of access to basic needs, legal insecurity... We need to put these issues before us, and think how we can use our own privileges at this point. We have our own history. I mean, how did we provide legal support back when the bar associations had no connection to it and didn't even know what it was? Of course, the numbers are very high right now. It's a field under immense pressure. We need to outline what we can do to build solidarity. For instance, how can we, lawyers, put pressure on

the bar associations? How can we pressurize the Union of Turkish Bar Associations? How can we remind them of their responsibilities as a professional organization in this field? We need to think about all these. I think we need to start from a place where we practically discuss what we can do and build the narrative from there.

### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> In June 2024, a group of local people started an almost-organized violent campaign in Kayseri, a central Anatolian city, against Syrians. For more details, see <https://bianet.org/haber/violent-protests-target-refugee-community-in-turkeys-kayseri-after-alleged-sexual-assault-on-minor-297002>.