SOLROUTES

Solidarities in Izmir
Imagined and in Practice

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Introduction

Our SOLROUTES Antennae's field research commences with an introductory part addressing solidarity with refugees[1] in Turkey.

This first node report follows the country report prepared for SOLROUTES' kick-off meeting in September 2023 (Körükmez and Ghaffari, 2023), which describes the legal architecture and processes of illegalization in the management of migration flows, placing Turkey at the node of flows from Middle Eastern and African countries towards the European Union. The country report discussed also civil society organizations and solidarity, with an emphasis on the political atmosphere in the country. Therefore, the initial phase of the fieldwork, which started in November 2023, was carried out within a conceptual framework that specifically refers to two key points:

- The presence of migratory fluxes and border control that is influenced by political decisions remains ever-changing and uncertain due to its susceptibility to internal and international politics (negotiations with the EU).

- The existence of solidarity practices with limits and potentials, understood as endeavors to debordering and re-bordering, intersect and reside along these routes.

In Turkey, the flourishing of civil society engaged in migration and refugee issues is rather recent. Although a small number of civil society organizations (CSOs) has been providing assistance to refugees since the late 1990s, the significant increase in their numbers came with the arrival of the displaced population during the Syrian crisis in 2011. Since then, a large number of CSOs, including loosely organized platforms and networks, have emerged, and many existing civil society organizations have broadened their endeavors to include refugees. It is important to understand how a segment of 'civil society' comprised of citizens supporting refugees emerged and how it was institutionalized as an actor supporting the reception of refugees (Fleischmann, 2019). Meanwhile, the government has developed multi-layered, permeable, and fluid responses to civil society and citizen engagement in supporting refugees, which include surveillance and intervention, selective inclusion, and strict exclusion.

Based on the research conducted as part of the SOLROUTES project, this study focuses on solidarity actors in Izmir, a metropole located at the Western border of Turkey. The paper is divided into three sections: the first part focuses on the overall migration situation in Turkey, with a specific emphasis on the city of Izmir. I selected Izmir because of its position both as a point of departure

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[1] Throughout this text, I use the term refugee as an umbrella term. Turkey does not recognize refugee status for people from outside Europe due to the geographical reservation in the 1951 Geneva Convention. Therefore, it is very difficult to define individuals or groups according to their legal status. It is also difficult to define them according to their entry or exit methods, as some of them may enter or exit the country through completely irregular means, while others may enter through regular means and then fall into irregular status. Furthermore, identifying individuals based on their final destination is challenging, as some may arrive in Turkey with the intention of continuing their journey, while others may choose to settle in the country permanently or eventually. Of course, this is not always the case. Conversely, Syrians under Temporary Protection, asylum seekers, and those with humanitarian residence permits are required to register and live in specific cities. They risk deportation if they travel, live, or work in cities other than their registered ones without authorization. Although Syrians are legally exempt from refoulement, CSOs and newspapers frequently report that various methods force Syrians to return to their country. For these reasons, it is difficult to use a single, overarching term. In the text, I only use the term People on the Move (PoM) to refer to people waiting to cross the border at short notice.

and as a point of settlement on the way to migration to Europe as well as for its significance in the present socio-political context and its extensive migration history. This section examines the Basmane neighborhood's role as a central migration hub.

The second part focuses on acts of solidarity towards refugees inside the urban area, where imaginations of solidarity and practices, potentials, and obstacles in the city are analyzed in depth based on the ethnographic research conducted between November 2023 and March 2024.

The third section introduces the Generative Narrative Workshop (GNW), which used an arts-based methodology to interpret the experiences of refugees, that I conducted as the outcome of the first node of research.

Finally, I provide data on the above mentioned actors and initiatives over the years and the current situation in order to illustrate how solidarities are imagined and enacted.

Methodology

This report presents the findings of four months of fieldwork conducted in Izmir between November 2023 and March 2024. This research was conducted through ethnographic observation and qualitative interviews. I conducted unstructured, in-depth interviews with five refugee supporters: a civil society worker, a volunteer refugee solidarity network member, a human rights defender and a lawyer specialized in asylum and migration, and a hotel manager. The interviews covered topics such as these actors' own biographies, how they relate to the fields of migration and asylum, and how they conceive and experience solidarity in their own lives. A life-story interview was also conducted with an activist who had moved from Syria to Turkey before the civil war.

I'm embedded in the 'field' since I have been part of refugee solidarity collectives, NGOs, and the academic scene working on migration. Thus, I was part of the refugee support scene and will continue to do so. There is no such thing for me to 'enter' or 'exit' the field in Izmir. I actively participated in the solidarity activities mentioned throughout the text, adopting a *de facto* militant ethnographic approach, understood as a politically engaged and collaborative form of participant observation carried out from within the grassroots movements (Juris 2007).

Although, at first glance, it seems to be the perfect environment for research, being an 'insider' was not without challenges. Being known as a researcher in the refugee solidarity scene in Izmir sometimes pushed other activists to embrace the 'politically correct' position during the interviews according to their own ideas of social desirability. Another difficulty arose from sharing a mutual academic interest with other researchers working in a similar field for a long time. Their assumption of shared academic interest and experience sometimes led such comments as 'no need to explain it to you; you already know'. To overcome these obstacles, I tried to explain why it was important for me to hear them fully express their experiences and opinions. Another challenge was that the field of refugee support in Izmir has been becoming institutionalized almost entirely through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In an environment dominated by NGOs, research is delimited by taking a volunteer position in these organizations where the researcher spends expanded time. I could not take such a position. Instead, I conducted my research by following a platform that is not an association but a collective of many NGOs and

independent activists. The difficulty here is that the platform operates through biweekly meetings of its constituents, which are attended by a small number of people. Additionally, a WhatsApp group that is not very busy is used to contact each other. Researching a low-interaction collective, as a result, required me to look for ways to interact with activists in different settings. Therefore, compensatory methods such as frequent visits to Basmane, visits to NGOs, and following the activities of the platform and other NGOs were used. Additionally, I conducted in-depth interviews with both platform members and non-members. The complete list of interviews may be seen in the appendices of this document.

Turkey, Izmir

Turkey has gradually become a land of diverse migratory movements since the 1980s as a node on the routes from the so-called global south to the global north. Due to the border fortification all over the world, refugees from various countries are arriving in Turkey with the intention of either temporarily or permanently settling in the country. The southern and eastern borders have traditionally been the entry points for refugees, but especially those from African countries can arrive directly in major cities such as Istanbul. The western coastline and the land border with Greece and Bulgaria are the departure points for those wishing to continue their journey towards Europe. Over the past thirty years, Turkey has aligned its migration management with the norms of the EU. Additionally, in the last decade, this process has been marked by uncertainty. The movement of people has thus been driven by growing criminalization and irregularization.

As of mid-2023, in addition to more than three million Syrians under Temporary Protection, there are hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran (MP, 2024). Nonetheless, as seen in the table below, the number of "irregularized migrants[2]" fluctuates sharply from year to year but remains persistently elevated.

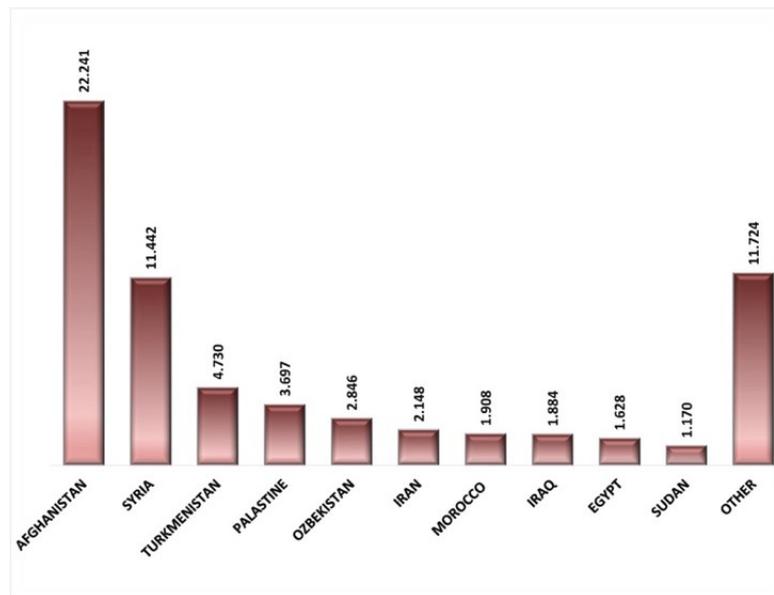Number of irregular migrants apprehended[3] by years.
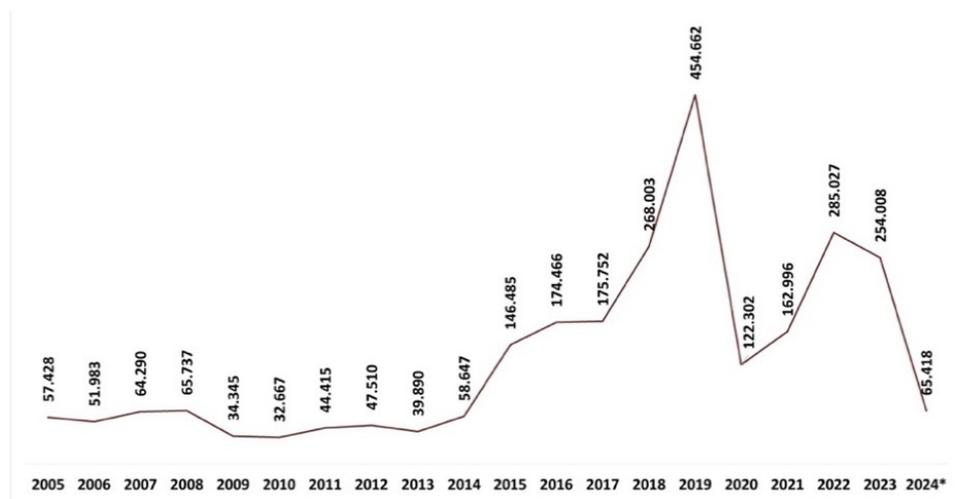
Source: Presidency of Migration Management, Online resource, last accessed in April 2024.

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[2] I use this term in reference to the nomenclature used in the statistics of the Directorate for Migration.
[3] The term used by the Directorate for Migration in its statistics.

As highlighted by the graph below, since 2017, Afghans have constituted the largest number of nationalities in official statistics.

Apprehended migrants[4] by citizenship in 2024.

22.241	11.442	4.730	3.697	2.846	2.148	1.908	1.884	1.628	1.170	11.724
AFGHANISTAN	SYRIA	TURKMENISTAN	PALASTINE	OZBEKISTAN	IRAN	MOROCCO	IRAQ	EGYPT	SUDAN	OTHER

Source: Presidency of Migration Management, Online resource, last accessed in April 2024.

Situated on the western coast of Turkey, Izmir is a strategic departure point for individuals journeying from the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia to Western Europe. It is close to the Greek islands of Lesbos and Chios, just a short distance away by sea. However, unfortunately, geographical proximity in nautical miles does not prevent deaths at sea. As a consequence of shipwrecks in the Aegean Sea since January 1, 2024, 27 refugee deaths have been recorded in Eastern Mediterranean waters, according to the IOM's Missing Migrants Project[5] (Infomigrants.net, 2014). Also, either for voluntary or compulsory reasons, Izmir is a destination for longer or shorter periods of settlement. That is why it can as well be considered a spatial and temporal limbo.

Historically, being a harbor city, Izmir has been an important stop on migration routes, and this human mobility has naturally affected the population of the city. Among others, Armenians, Greeks, and Jews from the Ottoman hinterland and Flemings, English, French, Venetians from Europe all came to Izmir in an attempt to gain a share from the wealth of the port city. With the granting of liberal economic autonomy, the city's population finally took on a cosmopolitan appearance. In short, by the 19th century, the city began to be known as *Gavur İzmir*[6] due to the diversity of non-Muslims in the city (Özet, 2022: 52). With the shrinking territory of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, it came to the forefront as one of the important centers hosting Muslim migrants who came to Anatolia with migratory waves. In the 20th century, an unprecedented population movement aimed at redefining national boundaries and ethnic

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[4] The term used by the Directorate for Migration in its statistics.

[5] For data covering a wider period of time, please see http://www.borderdeaths.org

[6] *Gavur* is the word used to refer to those outside of the Islamic faith. Today, the word is more often used as a form of exclusion and humiliation.

compositions emerged with the 1923 Turkish-Greek Population Exchange Agreement. This entailed the replacement of the city's large Greek population with ethnic Muslim Turks who had long lived in Greece and the Greek islands in a way that reinforced the emerging Turkish-Muslim character of the city.

Throughout the 20th century, the city was largely shaped by internal migration. Izmir, like other metropoles, received influxes of migrants because of the economic transformations in the country since 1950s. The 1990s witnessed the arrival of forcibly displaced Kurds. However, with the migration of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria, which started in 1989, Izmir became a focal point for the resettlement of Bulgarian Turks. While 20th-century migrations brought about spatial changes in the city, they also affected its socio-political structure.

Starting in the 1990s and accelerating in the 2000s, Izmir began to receive international migration. Since then, in line with the general characteristics of migration to Turkey, migration has continued uninterruptedly and increasingly. Although there are periodic differences, refugees from African countries and Syrians are currently the most visible groups.

The first place for refugees arriving in Izmir is the Basmane neighborhood. It is located at the foot of a hill, the upper part of which is known as Kadifekale. Until the first quarter of the 20th century, this neighborhood was one of the central settlements due to its proximity to the harbor and was the residential area for the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish populations. These groups were replaced by migrants who came here through internal migration, like Kurds who had been forcibly displaced and settled mostly in Kadifekale, but also in Basmane. Basmane became a locus for the ethnically and politically 'excluded', and the impoverished. Refugees aiming to reach Europe by crossing the Aegean Sea started to arrive in this neighborhood. Although Basmane is within walking distance of the city center, socio-spatial segregation is also visible.

A Hub of Migration Infrastructure: Basmane[7]

Xiang and Lindquist (2014) coined the term 'migration infrastructure' to refer to the interconnected technologies, institutions, and individuals that enable and shape mobility. This concept, derived from their field research in China and Indonesia, helps to analyze the mediation process involved in migration (2014:122). The authors classify migration infrastructure into five dimensions: the commercial (recruitment intermediaries), the regulatory (state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licensing, training, and other purposes), the technological communication and transport, the humanitarian (NGOs and international organizations), and the social (migrant networks) (2014:124). Referring to Xiang and Lindquist's original conceptualization, Düvell and Preiss (2022) underline the need to distinguish between migration networks and infrastructures, noting that migration infrastructures are a complex and ever-changing interplay of nature and technology, structure and agency, and knowledge, which are the five dimensions of the infrastructures. However, 'migrant infrastructure' refers to 'a partial promise to newcomers to establish a foothold in the city' (Hall et al.) and 'to a long-term process of "migrant sedimentation"'

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[7] Several neighborhoods, or *semt* in Turkish, make up Basmane. Translations of *semt* into English are "urban settlement area". *Semts* are not administrative divisions.

(Felder et al., 2020: 56). Basmane encompasses a rich historical, social, and economic context that may include two above-mentioned concepts. On one hand, it gives prospects for those who arrive temporarily and are waiting to cross the Aegean Sea. On the other hand, Basmane offers resources that may be used when the waiting period stretches to years or when individuals ultimately seek permanent residence in the city. Nevertheless, classifying someone as transitory or sedentary may be challenging, and it is more sensible to consider their current circumstances rather than definitively labeling them as one or the other. The reason for referring to the infrastructures in this study is not to analyze them as 'operational systems' *per se* (Lin et al., 2017:168), but rather to understand how they shape and give meaning to migrants' movements.

Basmane and its surrounding neighborhoods became a hub for refugees due to the availability of cheap accommodation, its central location in the city as well as the variety services that facilitate migration. One of the interviewees in our fieldwork shares the following narrative about Basmane:

> *Still, it wasn't so beautiful, Basmane... People were afraid to come in here... I think it is, in terms of criminality [now it's] better. Because it was worse when I first came here. I mean, we couldn't get into those back alleys. Of course, we were just going in. [In the past] As soon as s stranger comes in [an] extortion [incident happens]. Then this ecstasy consumption was very common or* roj[8], *etc... It was a nice place, but it was a place with a high crime rate.* [Ahmet, hotel owner][9]

Also, he tells how the inhabitants of the neighborhood and its surroundings have changed:

> *Also, the inhabitants of the neighborhood have changed. There were houses up there, and the municipality demolished them. More like... let's not use that now. I mean, that group left, and this group [refugees] came. There were families... their origin was the other side. Many of them have already been in prison, the people of this place.* [Ahmet, hotel owner]

The group he refers to with quite ambiguous words are Kurds that used to live in and allegedly associated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK, Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê). Although the ethnic composition of the inhabitants has changed over the years, two characteristics have remained almost unchanged. First, the area has remained a place of exclusion, and socio-spatial segregation persists; second, the physical appearance has largely remained the same.

> *The [physical] appearance of the neighborhood is the same now as it was 20 years ago*. [Ahmet, hotel owner]

A street of Basmane. Photo: Lülüfer Körükmez

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[8] A kind of narcotic.
[9] See the table in appendix for the list and details of interviews.

In addition to those who come to the neighborhood for permanent accommodation, there are also hotels, bachelor houses or houses for short-term rent to meet the accommodation needs of people on the move (PoM)[10]. A 'hotel district' of hotels that once served visitors to the nearby Izmir International Fair, marketers, and tourists travelling around the city now serves the PoM.

> *We had marketing clients. This started to diminish over time, and that's when this internet thing came out. Well, of course, over time, towards 2015, there are no customers left here. Everyone slowly withdrew. Syrians came, Syrians came. And in 2014, yes. We started to accept Syrians in the summer of 2014. And then here it becomes a place of migrants. Or others, or homeless', singles, people with no family. The hotels are cheap here. Over time, Basmane became a "place for migrants".* [Ahmet, hotel owner]

Although the locals gradually withdrew from the neighborhood, it continued to be a district where refugees and locals lived together. Increasingly, there were more and more laundromats, telephone shops, money-exchange shops, and shops selling life jackets and related equipment that are catered to refugees. As expected, it has also become a place where smugglers meet people who want to cross the border (Oner et al., 2021; Wissink, Düvell, and van Eerdewijk, 2013).

Refugee support organizations in the neighborhood

Unsurprisingly, non-governmental organizations that assist refugees have begun to establish themselves in the area. Long before the arrival of Syrians, Islamic humanitarian aid organizations had already been present in the neighborhood, giving out food for those in need. The Association for Solidarity with Refugees (Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği, Mülteci-Der) was one of the first associations established in 2008. Today, a large number of local and national associations and networks with diverse political backgrounds and activities are located in the neighborhood or nearby, and they are both physically accessible to refugees and in contact with each other.

CSOs supporting refugees in Turkey typically fall into two categories: humanitarian and rights-based. The humanitarian support includes financial and social assistance, education support, health support, in-kind and cash support, and counselling (Kalaycı, 2016). This is also true for NGOs in Izmir.

The government's containment policies, which include monitoring, selective repression and confiscation, and the policy of developing an alternative civil society (GAR, 2022; Yabanci, 2019), have resulted in the exclusion of numerous NGOs from public resources, leaving them reliant on international resources, particularly EU funds.

That said, donors' funding frameworks and the activities they support do not correspond to the needs of refugees and NGOs daily. Following the onset of migration from Syria, fundings were largely funneled to activities for Syrians under Temporary Protection, while civil society organizations were trying to support people coming from many different parts of the world. Another issue is that despite CSOs face a variety of needs, particularly in addressing employment and ensuring the protection of employee rights, the funding is usually not sufficient to meet these needs, which are crucial for the sustainability of CSOs. As will be discussed in detail below, one of the major problems is that funding support for the unauthorized is very, very limited. However, in

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[10] I only use the term People on the Move (PoM) to refer to people waiting to cross the border at a relatively shorter period.

cities such as Izmir, the number of PoMs can be quite high, and NGOs are inadequate to meet them. This inadequacy points out to another "bordering" by civil society, which is evident in Basmane as well.

In Izmir, as mentioned above self- and loosely organized solidarities, are absent. Most of the support comes from NGOs. According to Della Porta and Steinhilper (2022) NGOization in social movement groups occurs at three levels: first, there is a moderation of repertoires, when social movements recede from demonstration and instead focus on lobbying and shaping public opinion. Second, there was a progression towards the establishment of organizational structures, where social movement organizations were increasingly seen as institutionalized actors, possessing ample material resources and avenues to influence decision-makers. Thirdly, they focus their collective attention on specific concerns and adopt a pragmatic approach to align with public opinion to acquire further resources. (ibid, 12). That said, there are also organizations that have the legal status of associations but are not institutionalized in the way mentioned above. For example, the Peoples' Bridge Association in Izmir, founded as an association trying to bring together the people living in Turkey, started to work almost exclusively with refugees after the arrival of Syrians. Although they have the status of an association, they do not accept any funding other than donations.

Supporting refugees takes different forms, hence the outcomes and effects also differ. According to Fleischmann (2019), some groups focus on openly and vocally criticizing the migration administration and the actors involved, while other groups work more quietly on the field and without making direct demands on the state (p. 18). This applies to Izmir as well. Some individuals and groups collect money and in-kind support, try to find solutions to refugees' daily problems, try to find accommodation, while others make claims for equality, stopping deportation drive, open borders, or questioning removal centers. It's safe to argue that bigger ones, that is either international CSOs or those that are authorized by or affiliated to government, are mostly silent in public, even when major catastrophic events related to refugees occur. They are mostly identified as humanitarian NGOs, which means their focus is providing needs (GAR, 2022). Izmir-based Mülteci-Der provides legal assistance and defines itself as rights-based. Although Mülteci-Der is completely dependent on funding, it does not refrain from speaking out loud about Turkey's and the EU's migration management, legal regulations, etc.

The consequences and impacts of refugee support are another topic of debate. Organizations that provide direct in-kind or cash support certainly facilitate the provision of daily needs and livelihoods. However, the fact that most refugees reside in impoverished neighborhoods, and support designed as 'refugee-only' can potentially incite hostility among their -also impoverished-local neighbors. While legal assistance, especially in areas related to migration and asylum, is vital, the number of institutions providing such support is relatively small.

Advocacy, on the other hand, is a long-term effort with no direct impact. Most of the time, press releases, protests, and social media campaign are only available in Turkish, and even if they are translated, it's unclear to what extent these efforts reach refugee groups. Essentially, not refugees but local activists engage in advocacy, aiming to deliver their message to fellow citizens or institutions.

On the other hand, there are organizations that function like community centers. As in the *Yaşamak* Social Space and Solidarity Association or the *Kapılar* Initiative, which was closed years

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ago, there are social spaces where refugees can go just to dance, to play music, or to "watch the sky" at the beautiful garden of the association building. Their programs focus on what individuals with refugee status cannot normally access: It gives a sense of "normalcy".

> But when you are here, you are together, you are from another culture, how can we live together? This is the first one, this is one pillar. But the second pillar is that they also need hope, happiness, breathing. So, bread is definitely a very important problem. Shelter is a very, very big problem. But even if we are really without bread from time to time... ...when we come and dance there, when we hug and cry or laugh together... ... you realize that you are alive. When you eat bread, you don't understand that you are alive. But when you witness a theater activity, a painting activity... ...when you witness a discussion... ...yes, I'm passing, I'm being listened to here. There's a response here. My voice doesn't echo. It's here, it's heard and so on. [Dilek]

(Imagined) Solidarities

Rather than discussing solidarity with refugees in terms of a political-humanitarian dichotomy, this paper argues that any form of solidarity (or lack thereof) is essentially and inevitably political. Yet, solidarity is ultimately characterized by how each person or group defines their position, how they relate to others, and how they shape their acts. For this reason, the imaginings, self-definitions, and acts of solidarity of individuals and groups will be analyzed here.

Starting from the idea that practices and discourses of solidarity with refugees are always embedded in a wider social and political context, I argue that the national and local contexts are as decisive in the emergence and shaping of solidarity as the subjective positions of actors.

In Turkish, solidarity (*dayanışma*) is a cognate verb; it describes a reciprocal action; its literal meaning is "to lean mutually on each other". Forst (2024:41) argues that solidarity is in fact morally neutral because it is a virtue in the sense of overcoming narrow self-interest to advance a common cause, but it also pertains to the solidarity between the members of criminal organizations or nationalist groups. In the Turkish context, the word connotes left-wing politics and therefore is part of a political canon. Throughout the ethnographic fieldwork, I paid attention to how people defined solidarity and demarcated its boundaries. One activist interviewed referred to the phrase "Solidarity is the grace of the oppressed". The language used here subtly aims to distinguish between solidarity and help.[11] Although the political connotation of solidarity is in the minds of many, it should be noted that it is largely used as 'help' in daily use. The same interviewee continues as follows:

> There is a solidarity-based refugee approach that is more on the agenda in Izmir, locally. Is this necessary? It is necessary. Because there is a culture of solidarity in Turkey in urgent matters, especially in the case of earthquakes, floods, or anything else. [Ismet]

Here, solidarity is used to refer to 'aid' such as donating money, clothes, or food to people in need, so-called humanitarian reception. He further explained how they failed to transform those initial reactions into organized political demands:

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[11] There are two forms of the verb yardım etmek in Turkish: the first (yardım) is a unidirectional verb meaning to help someone; the second (yardımlaşma) is a cognate word meaning to help each other.

> ... [we] *demand the recognition of refugee legal status* [from Turkish state]. *Let's demand the removal of the geographical reservation in the 1960 Convention so that these people can defend their own labor or other rights as we do. This is, of course, a bit uncertain in the long term. The outcome is unpredictable. Therefore, it was not something that people were very inclined toward. Rather, solidarity movements developed.* [Ismet]

Similarly, Gül, who is a lawyer and has supported refugees as a member of an association for a long time, did not refer to following refugee cases and legal defense as solidarity.

For those solidarity actors, solidarity in the form of humanitarian help appears to be challenging. It's accepted that aid is crucial, especially in the face of urgent situations, such as the aftermath of an earthquake or when they meet casually with someone in need, but advocacy has a rather primary position in minds. Also, because needs and aid are an endless process and solidarists do not have monetary sources to address all needs continuously. During a breakfast with refugees, the translator was late to arrive. I asked one of the Turkish citizens politically active participant "How's it going?" He replied, "Well, we can't communicate". Then he smiled and continued, saying, "What would we say? If we ask them 'How are you?' they will tell us a lot of problems. We can't ignore the problems or find a solution. Maybe we shouldn't communicate".

Although the arrival of Syrians in Turkey dates back to long before 2015, that summer, hundreds of Syrian refugees overflowed beyond the Basmane neighborhood and found themselves on the streets and squares. The crowd that spilled out of the neighborhood became visible to ordinary citizens as well. Although some of the activists we spoke to during the fieldwork were already involved in humanitarian reception of refugees, the summer of 2015 marked a breaking point. Since then, the ongoing urgent needs of refugees on the one hand and criticisms of migration management practices on the other have kept activists constantly involved in the migration issue. For example, a woman who is a regular participant in a solidarity collective, Helin, while preparing for an event of the collective told that her first contact with refugees was when a group of Afghans arrived in Basmane, but that she became fully engaged after 2015. These insights illustrate how, since the summer of 2015, a self-organized group of citizens supporting refugees has emerged. However, this segment of civil society did not come into existence overnight. Rather, those who were active in other areas, either civil society or politics, carried their efforts further to refugee support. As many people noted during the fieldwork, Mülteci-Der had already had first-hand contact with the issue as it was the first NGO in Izmir to be active in this field. For example, one of the interviewees, a well-known solidarity actors and a worker in Basmane, has a long history of engagement in labor movements. Another was involved in left-wing party politics and was involved in the establishment of various platforms to combat racism, fascism, nationalism, etc. Another comes from an Islamic/religious background and is among religious human rights defenders. These examples can be multiplied, but the number of people who have not been active in any field before is almost negligible.

They also organize aid in emergencies, but their main objective is political advocacy. Some of them strive to advocate for human rights, while others use the language of labor struggle and 'oppressor/oppressed'. Since the metropolitan center of Izmir is relatively small, almost all activists working in the field of migration and asylum are in contact with each other. Not only do they maintain direct relationships, but they also regularly convene and engage in advocacy activities that extend beyond migration and asylum issues. For example, they often come across trade union action, commemorations of massacres in the country's political history, March 8, etc. The

necessity for the same people to be visible and collaborate in various settings stems from the country's shrinking civic space, a consequence of much-discussed authoritarianism in Turkey. Because of their political background, there is a distinction in their minds between humanitarian action and political action. Solidarity seems to encompass both on a rhetorical level, but in everyday language, it is used in the sense of humanitarian help. Except for the key person in Basmane, there is almost no one who is constantly involved in aid activities.

As Ismet explained, humanitarian help makes both sides happy, but it is an endless effort. What Ismet did not mention is that he doesn't take it as a political act. Although the boundaries between humanitarian help and political advocacy blur, he has an open demarcation and hierarchy in his mind. Thus, the imaginations of solidarities are attributed to the acts of creating an alternative society (Fleischmann, 2019) rather than solving the problems of today's migration context.

Alternative Visions of a Future Society

As Turkey has increasingly become a migration society, participants extended their political positions, which were already shaping their visions of the future and society, to the field of migration and asylum. Activists with a background in party politics or social movements frame their endeavors in terms of their visions of future societies that might naturally be expected.

The activists, either with a background in party politics or social movements, framed their endeavors within their vision for future societies, which might be expected to be natural. What is interesting and valuable here is that competing and contradictory political understandings can be put aside in the context of migration. This is not a kind of 'unlimited acceptance' but a coming together of actors—and their background politics—that have passed through a fine sieve. For example, the members of the collective that I was part of during the fieldwork included people from socialist politics, people of the Islamic faith, lawyers, human rights defenders, LGBTI+ groups, independent activists, and researchers who rarely attend meetings and events. Some of them were on the platform with institutional representation. However, it should be noted that these people with different engagements met on the grounds of "human rights" and "oppressed or exploited people".

In practice, the collective acted mostly to demand to stop discrimination and racism. I organized panel discussions, trainings on refugee rights given by lawyers, leaflet distribution on one of the main streets, and food delivery for free cooked by refugees to raise awareness.

In Izmir, the call for a life of coexistence and equality is frequently voiced by different groups, often referring to the law and ethics of '*hemşehrilik*'[12]. Beyond membership of the nation-state, people's political membership at the urban level has been widely discussed in the literature (Baubock, 2003; Baubock and Orgad, 2020). In the context of Izmir, *hemşehrilik* has been articulated in two separate but intertwined ways. The first is a strategy to persuade municipalities to support

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[12] The inhabitants or citizenry of a city, townspeople. The term denotes an individual who comes from the same city. In common parlance, refers to people from the same town or country. When used as an adjective, *hemşehrilik*, refers to a sense of informal connection and mutual help among fellow countrymen. Its primary purpose is to serve as a way of identification in daily interactions (Hersant and Toumarkine, 2005).

refugees out of their pockets by referring to Article 13 of Municipal Law No. 5393, the 'Townsmen's Law'. The law says:

> Everyone is a fellow citizen of the municipality in which he resides. Citizens have the right to participate in municipal decisions and services, to be informed about municipal activities and to benefit from the assistance of the municipal administration. The municipality shall carry out the necessary work for the development of social and cultural relations between fellow citizens and the protection of cultural values.

The second is to argue that municipalities, as people living in this city, have a moral and political obligation to support refugees and share resources with them. Despite their political intentions, this call remains mostly at the moral level because local governments do not enjoy independence from the central state in Turkey. Fleischmann (2019), in her research conducted in Germany during the 2015 summer on refugee support, describes the *politics of presence* as "political possibilities that unfold when alternative visions of society and belonging in migration societies are formulated and enacted" (2019: 125). The politics of presence is pretty much similar to *citizenship* (Vrasti and Dayal, 2016).

The city councils can play a strong role in supporting refugees and increasing their acceptance in the city. However, although they are supposed to function as independent organizations, the way they work is more dependent on the mayor. They are therefore timid and secretive in their support for refugees, just like the rest of Izmir's municipalities. Although Konak, one of Izmir's districts, has a refugee council under the city council, their work is the result of the individual efforts of the activists involved in the council. Ultimately, the limitations in the work of the city council led to the emergence of an association.

Calling for the implementation of the Townsmen's Law, making 'common public resources' available to all citizens may sound like a call for a radically egalitarian society, but it has not translated into a political demand beyond a call to provide the bare minimum for refugees.

Implementing Solidarity

Activists' insistent commitment to upholding and enhancing the political dimension of solidarity necessitates a further investigation. As previously stated, this fieldwork presents an adequate basis to support the claim that solidarity is realized in two dimensions: first, there are overtly public efforts to inform the public, such as news releases, flyer drops, seminars, trainings, etc. Social media postings might also be included in the first category. To get clarity on the gap between imagined and fulfilled solidarity, it is necessary to fully understand the circumstances in which these actions occur.

The absence of sources, both human and monetary, is one of the initial obstacles to bolstering solidarity, as clarified above. The second is the rise of xeno-racism (Fekete, 2001, 2018). Since 2011, anti-refugee sentiments have been on the rise; however, recently it has evolved into pogroms and collective attacks. We, as collective, had decided to organize a music and food festival in December 2023 to raise awareness and as an event that people could easily participate in. The festivity was planned to be organized with the support of various entities. The sound system and the stage

were to be provided by Izmir City Council[13]. The food was to be cooked in an Islamic faith-based soup kitchen by refugee women who were applicants of another association. The music was to be performed by the choir of an association working in the field of migration and asylum and the musicians of another music association working in this field. Soon after we shared the event announcement on social media, we received threatening comments, including one that shared images of bombs. At the same time, as we learned later, the municipality received frustrated calls asking for clarification. The City Council then promptly withdrew on the excuse that rain was expected on the day of the festival. Then the choir withdrew in protest of the council's decision. Given the circumstances, it was difficult to realize the festival as planned. Originally, the stands were to be manned by refugee women, who would cook and introduce the food they prepared. The festival was intended to create a kind of "moment of encountering". However, the risks of racist attacks and police detention of refugees became apparent. Ultimately, we held the festival without music and labelled the food on the stands with the country of origin and the name of the person who cooked it. Instead of a festival, it turned into a free food distribution lasting about 45 minutes. We decided to read aloud a previously prepared text during food distribution as a solution to the discomfort this situation caused.

Another activity involved the distribution of leaflets on one of Izmir's main streets. The brochure contained factual information about Syrians and corrected common misconceptions. About eight of us started to distribute the leaflets on Saturday afternoon, when the street, which is only open to pedestrians, was the busiest. As we expected, some people took the leaflet with curiosity and walked away, while others walked away with grumbling expressions of dissatisfaction. A considerable number of people, after seeing the content of the leaflet, made angry comments such as "Who is financing you?" "I don't want refugees in my country!" and "I don't care if this is false; I don't want Syrians!". Some were more aggressive than others; others were more open to discussion and listened to the explanations. After distributing leaflets for about an hour, we called the day off. Afterwards, the group all sat down for a cup of tea in a café and evaluated the day and jokingly said, "We did it without getting beaten up".

Supporters of refugees being called "naive leftism/human rights understanding" in its softest form is labeled as "spying" and "treason" in its hardest form. 2018 amendment criminalized activities such as renting houses to refugees, while other activities that may fall within the scope of solidarity are vaguely defined. Despite the lawyers we spoke to during the fieldwork asserting that no one has ever faced prosecution on solidarity charges, the law lacks a clear definition of "solidarity crime". The law recognizes smuggling as a crime, but it's impossible to determine if thousands of smuggling files contain any cases that classify solidarity as smuggling. However, we do know that there have been cases in Izmir in the last year where criminal investigations were opened against real estate agents who mediated in renting houses to refugees. A real estate agent in Basmane was being held under house arrest pending the final hearing date for renting houses to refugees.

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[13] Izmir City Council was established within the framework of the Municipality Law No. 5393, as a civil formation that brings together local governments, professional chambers, universities, trade unions, rights-based non-governmental organizations and socially responsible volunteers living in Izmir. City councils are civil organizations, although they receive their resources from municipalities. The members of the council are not elected.

The lack of human resources is one of the most frequently discussed issues both in collectives supporting refugees and in other social movements. The majority of the participants in almost every social movement are over 35 years old both women and men. As previously mentioned, the same individuals consistently contribute to different social movements. Particularly, we must explain the lack of youth participation. Nonetheless, what we know is that the authoritarian regime repels people taking part in social movements that's been discussed widely in literature (Yabanci, 2019; Bee, 2019; TİHV Akademi, 2021).

The fact that the same people are constantly running and making efforts for more than one issue, often for issues that cannot be resolved in the short term, leads to fatigue. In our interview with İsmet, he explained that working in the field of support for refugees is a very tiring issue and that people sometimes withdraw or leave the struggle altogether. When I asked him why he did not leave, he gave the following answer:

> *I am a member of a political party and I know this. When describing the issue of the party, there is a definition such as "the library of the working class". I am a bit close to this. We know this, that is, an idea that comes from there is this: These things will happen. Sometimes we will drag our feet, sometimes we will really fall apart, and sometimes we will really lose a lot. But somehow, we have to go on. On his deathbed, Marx - I forget the name of the journalist - asks. "You have done so much, if you describe this whole corpus with a concept, what would you describe it for?" "Struggle," Marx says. Therefore, as long as we struggle, as long as we exist, something exists. Is it at the desired level? Of course, sometimes it is demoralizing for us, it is inevitable. I mean, we make so much effort, what really happens? Sometimes you become a cult follower, a man like this. There is a state of total devotion, but actually, this is not such a situation. I mean, it's something related to a conscious political stance. That's it.* [Ismet]

The statement above can be read as a Marxist's standard line of struggle. However, given that the "politics of exhaustion" (Walender, 2020) is a technique used not only in the refugee field but in all civic spheres across the country, it reveals the amount of mental and emotional strength activists need to muster again and again daily.

Music that transcends the boundaries of time and space

Arts-based research methods combines creative work with research methods to understand lived experiences (Linette, 2019: 27). On the one hand, these methods facilitate people's participation in the research, and on the other hand, those methods, such as poetry, theatre, sculpting, or music, reveal research participants' experiences through narrative methods that are not necessarily in a question-answer dichotomy.

In this study, I used music to explore worlds outside of those offered by traditional research methods; aimed to connect the refugee experience in Izmir across time and space through Rebetiko music.

Rebetiko was born in Asia Minor among Greek-speaking communities and has evolved between the two sides of the Aegean, each time internalizing elements of the cultural geography of the new place. While the old Rebetiko was Izmir (Smyrnaean) style, the subsequent is Piraean style. Meanwhile, Reberiko has changed not only geography, rhythm, lyrics, and instruments, but also its audience (Koglin, 2008). While rebetiko was the music of Greek-speaking minorities in Izmir, it became the music of refugees in Greece, along with ethnic Greeks who were forcibly displaced.

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Subsequently, "the miserable shiftless member of the Lumpenproletariat of their early periods has been replaced (though never totally displaced) by the skilled worker, the more established member of a regular working class, say, a construction worker or a factory hand" (Fatouros, 1976: 19) It later became a controversial genre in Greece, rejected by some as "vulgar and un-Hellenic"; but was rediscovered in the 1970s as part of tourist promotion (ibid). Nowadays, Rebetiko has been rediscovered once again in both Greece and Turkey, as the music of the return-to-the-roots movements of these countries, once glorious and powerful civilisations, which have been overshadowed by Europe (Koglin, 2008). Therefore, Rebetiko has for centuries been an artistic expression of the joy, rebellion, pain, resilience, and solidarity of subaltern subjects within the violence and oppression of the nation-state and its policies of marginalization and exclusion. Moving from the idea that Rebetiko has been the music of outcasted, originally refugees', the GNW aimed to find the words of present-day refugee experience in Izmir.

Born and widespread among refugee communities on the Turkish-Greek border, The Rebetiko workshop was organised with the participation of four Somalis who regularly attend various art workshops at *Yaşamak* Social Space and Solidarity Association. They were in Turkey with a residence permit but were unauthorized in Izmir. The residence permit only allows them to live in certain cities and it is only possible to leave these cities with permission from the Security Directorate. This permission is only granted for "valid" reasons such as illness etc. These people sign a permit once a month by travelling to the city where they are registered. This can lead to their detention and eventual deportation. For this reason, travelling to Basmane to join GNW at a time when police checks were frequent meant taking a risk. Originally, I planned to conduct the GNW with eight participants from the two language groups. However, this situation only allowed for the participation of four people. Two musicians, who have been actively promoting and performing Rebetiko music in Izmir for years, ran the workshop. In the first workshop, two musicians, Murat and Serap, explained the history, lyrics and feeling of Rebetiko music and introduced Rebetiko musical instruments such as the bouzouki, the baglamas and the guitar. Afterwards, the participants listened to their favorite Somali music and talked about the meaning of the lyrics. The second workshop focused on studying the rhythms of Somalian and Rebetiko. It was discussed how to build unity between these two music.

Nesibe, one of the workshop participants, tries to play the bouzouki. Photo: Lülüfer Körükmez

Finally, the participants proposed writing Somali lyrics in a Rebetiko rhythm. Emin, a 29-year-old Somalian man who has been living in Izmir for two years with his wife and 1.5-year-old daughter, said that he wanted to write lyrics for this rhythm. The other participants agreed that he would write the lyrics, with the option to change them if desired. I refrained from putting any influence on Emin about content or theme of the lyrics. During our discussions on the themes of original Rebetiko songs, it was apparent that issues related to displacement were of least interest to them. They showed more interest in topics of love and relationships. Furthermore, while art-based approaches serve as a tool for "exploring other worlds," I did not want to impose certain ideas on the participants that were necessarily associated with refugeehood. Furthermore, as Dilek previously mentioned, the Yaşamak Association serves as a sanctuary, providing a respite from the daily struggles outside its doors.

In the third session, Emin came with the lyrics he had written. The lyrics were about the oppression and violence against women in Somalia.

Women whose beauty we take pride in!

We underestimated, didn't realize their value!

Mothers' honor has been destroyed

Women didn't receive respect…!

By those who bring oppression.

The ignorant crowd that drags us into this trouble.

They left no one untouched.

Even worse,

Disaster hasn't ended yet

They hold the handle of the knife in their hands.

They still seek evil.

Therefore, this is a warning

Before we become negligent…!

We've deviated from the right path

We've strayed from goodness

Our lips speak of things not in our minds.

In fact, we can finally realise that Emin's words are not far from the theme of refugeeism (being a refugee). He carries the oppression and violence in Somalia in his heart.

The first day the video clip was shot was March 8. On the same evening, hundreds of women participated in a night march on one of the main streets of Izmir, shouting that women will not leave each other alone, that the streets are for women's day and night, and celebrating women's liberation. The crowd chanted repeatedly the slogans "You will never walk alone" and "If you are afraid of the dark, we will set this city on fire". At the time, Nesibe and Halime and thousands of other refugee women were afraid to go out on the streets to do the simplest daily chores, let alone

participate in nighttime protests. Of course, the feminist movement is not to blame for this situation.

In the fourth gathering of the group, SolRoutes artists[14] joined as well. The first day, a video clip was filmed, and to be attached in the SolRoutes website relating to this node research On the second day, all the groups met in one of the female participants' homes in the upper part of Basmane neighborhood. They did not want their faces to be filmed as they still intend to continue their journey and legally, they should not be in Izmir.

Together with the SolRoutes artist team, I interviewed a PoM and the hotel owner in one of the hotels where PoMs stay in Basmane.

The experience with the camera was very different from the experience with the music. Before the SolRoutes artist team came to Izmir, we applied to the governorship for permission to shoot a documentary for academic purposes which is mandatory, and our request for permission was rejected because the "the subject [migration issue] is sensitive". This meant that we were banned from filming indoors and outdoors in Izmir province. This decision of the governorship shows the tense atmosphere in the city regarding refugees. Under these circumstances, I never expected that anyone, especially a hotel owner, would come in front of the camera and speak.

I brought cameras and sound equipment to this hotel, which I have previously visited multiple times. The hotel owner consented to filming, provided his face remained hidden. The camera had a somehow liberating effect, and he talked about things he had not talked about before or was afraid to talk about.

Accommodation is an important issue, and cheap hotels in Basmane are essential for PoMs as a part of their material migration infrastructure. Sometimes PoMs stay in a hotel for a few days, and sometimes, as with Sait's clients, for several years. As a result, hotels are where they can find hot water, cook, eat, and, most importantly, meet and exchange knowledge and experience with others who, like them, are also travelling to Europe. However, hotels are not safe places.

There have been frequent police raids on hotels in Izmir over the past year. According to hotel owners interviewed during the fieldwork, the police went upstairs, broke down doors, and detained PoMs in their rooms without a search warrant. In one case, I learned that the police threw gas bombs into the hotel. Although hotel owners offer accommodation options to PoMs, they stay away from preventive actions such as asking the police for a search warrant, etc. because they are regular shopkeepers in the neighborhood.

In any case, Hasan a young Eritrean-Saudi Arabian man seeking way to Chios, whom we interviewed, was detained by the police the next day along with another PoM. We presented the case to the Bar Association lawyers and assigned a lawyer to him. However, since I'm not a family member, I cannot get information about who the appointed lawyer is or Hasan's situation. The person taken into custody with Hasan was not found at the removal center, probably because the name she gave to the hotel was not the same as the one on her passport.

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[14] Director and editor Michele Cinque, Sound recording Giandomenico Petillo, Camera Massimo Cannarella and Michele Cinque, Production Coordinator Massimo Cannarella.

Using art-based methods opens up a space that traditional research techniques cannot provide, while also posing challenges. Certainly, not every research using such methodologies is required to provide an artistic outcome. These methods might motivate the prospective participants. I'm using the term empowerment quite loosely here. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the primary impact lies in the empowerment of the participants. It has the capacity to provide a possibility for participants to become the main characters in their own stories, apart from their refugee status, even if just for a day.

Conclusion

In this report, we attempted to understand the imaginations and implementations of solidarities by contextualizing a larger social and political context. Contextualizing solidarity by focusing on actors allows us to understand solidarity at the local level, while providing connections to the situation at the national level.

Basmane has turned into a hub with an expanded migration infrastructure as a result of the gathering of refugees from all over the world living here for long or short terms, activists, collectives, and NGOs supporting refugees in the neighborhood, as well as facilitators, smugglers, and shops selling equipment for sea crossing. However, there are support mechanisms for refugees, including NGOs, which mostly aim to provide refugees with some kind of paper. There are limited resources for support for the unauthorized or PoM. Solidarity actors state that PoM has already come with an organization, and that they are not in contact with the city, NGOs, or other solidarity actors unless they have an urgent need. For this segment of civil society, those who make economic gains from the process, such as hotels, are not solidarity actors. Moreover, they have a clear position that solidarity should have a political character, and they categorize in-kind, or cash donations made by themselves or others as humanitarian help.

Supporters with diverse political views and affiliations who possess different takes on the future and alternative society visions are expressing disagreement with both EU and national migration and asylum policies. These supporters advocate for human rights and/or equality, and they are expanding their demands to include refugees. The immediate political demand is to implement the *hemşehrilik* legislation at the municipal and national levels to remove the geographical restriction and provide refugee status to all individuals.

Furthermore, the GNW experience demonstrated the ability of arts-based research methodology to delve into a diverse array of aspects related to refugeehood and being enroute. The gender aspect of this research has found its place in the narrative.

However, despite framing practices like political advocacy, legal advocacy, and public awareness raising as acts of solidarity, the country's escalating xeno-racism and authoritarian regime confine such efforts to a narrow framework.

Interviews and GNW participants

Interview	Name	Gender	Age	Status	Nationality	Location	Notes
1	Ismet	M	50s	Activist	Turkish	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
2	Gül	F	34	Lawyer	Turkish	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
3	Ahmet	M	30s	Hotel Owner	Turkish	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
4	Bilgin	M	50s	Notary, lawyer	Turkish	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
5	Dilek	F	30s	Part time NGO worker	Turkish	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
6	Ayham	M	40s	Workshop owner	Turkish Citizen Syrian	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
7	Emin	M	25	Unemployed	Somalian	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
8	Nesibe	F	20s	Unemployed	Somalian	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
9	Halime	F	20s	Unemployed	Somalian	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
10	Kamil	M	20s	Translator	Somalian	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt
11	Hasan	M	20s	Unemployed	Eritrean-Saudi Arabian	Izmir	Consent to share the interview excerpt

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