

ACCESS TO HOUSING

Transgender women have faced a long history of attempts by the authorities to force them out of their houses. Transgender women consistently told Amnesty International that police would harass them if they lived in upmarket areas of the city deemed by the police to be unsuitable for “undesirable people” such as themselves to live in. In other instances, in neighbourhoods where transgender women have come together seeking the greater security, solidarity and support transgender women can provide each other, police have specifically targeted such communities. In Istanbul for example, the city with the largest population of transgender women in Turkey, successive operations by the authorities to “clean up” neighbourhoods resulted in transgender women being forced out of particular areas. In many cases those forced from their houses had previously migrated to Istanbul due to the transphobia in their home towns and cities across Turkey which made it impossible for them to live there. The most notorious event, ahead of the UN Habitat II conference in Istanbul in 1996, saw transgender women being beaten in their homes and arrested in the process of forcing the women out of Ülker Sokak in Cihangir where many transgender women lived.¹

Transgender women consistently described to Amnesty International how they were being forced to live in one area of a city and that living in other areas resulted in constant police raids making it impossible to live (see for example p.16, Elçin and Ebru from Istanbul). In Istanbul transgender women told Amnesty International that they could only live comfortably in the central district of Tarlabaşı while in Izmir a small area of Alsancak and the Halil Rôfat Pa!a neighbourhood were reported to be the only areas where transgender women could live without their houses being constantly raided by police. All of the transgender women to whom Amnesty International spoke reported that a non-transgender person was required to sign the rental agreement as in the vast majority of cases landlords refused to deal directly with transgender individuals.

Even in these areas transgender women reported that they risked their houses being raided by police on the grounds that they were being used for prostitution. Transgender women reported to Amnesty International that because police view all transgender women as sex workers, transgender women not engaged in sex work or transgender women engaged in sex work but not at their home address are also at risk of their homes being raided by police. Transgender women also reported that police fabricated evidence showing that the houses were being used as a brothel. In addition they also widely reported that following the police raids an order was issued forbidding entry to the house for periods of three or in exceptional cases six months. Activists in Izmir reported that police raided the houses of prominent transgender activists and told them “if you carry on like this, we wont let you live here” (see p.26, section on threats to the freedom of association).

¹ Ba!aran, Y (1996), Ülker Sokak Sakinleri ve Travestiler, Kaos GL Journal, 27. Available at www.kaosgl.com/resim/Dergi/PDF/KaosGLD27.pdf

TARLABASI URBAN REGENERATION PROJECT

In the Istanbul district of Tarlabaşı a new threat faces the transgender women living in the area. In this district, said to be the only one in the city where transgender women can live relatively comfortably, they, along with other residents, face eviction due to the area being redeveloped. Under the state sponsored scheme, the area's many historical buildings are to be refurbished and the others demolished to make way for high value housing.² As a result of the project, people who currently live in the district face eviction – including among others, transgender women who have lived in the area for many years, and other vulnerable populations such as Roma groups and Kurdish people who settled in the district after being displaced from their villages in the south-east of Turkey during the 1990s. Amnesty International was told that more than 100 transgender women currently live in the project area and face eviction. Among them are home owners who have to an extent been consulted and offered compensation for the loss of their property.³ However, the vast majority of transgender women, as with other groups that live in the area, rent their homes and depend on the area's cheap rent and close proximity to Beyoğlu for their livelihoods. They told Amnesty International that, due to the fact that they do not own their homes, they were not offered alternatives to eviction from their houses, that they were not consulted on the process and that they were not given information on alternative housing or offered any form of compensation.

One of those facing eviction, Özge, a transgender woman who has been living in Tarlabaşı for 10 years, told Amnesty International that despite the fact that she faces eviction, she has had no contact with the local authorities or the private company that has the tender to carry out the project. In common with other tenants who spoke to Amnesty International, Özge said that the authorities only provide information to the buildings' owners and that the tenants' only official correspondence from the authorities was when the property had been sold and they were issued with an eviction order and had to leave within 15 days. She told Amnesty International that no compensation was being paid to the tenants and that no appropriate housing was being offered to them.⁴ Although they had not been approached by the authorities, Özge said that alternative housing potentially offered by the Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ) in Kayabaşı was completely impractical for the transgender women of Tarlabaşı: it was too expensive, and more than three hours by public transport from Tarlabaşı where they work. Like other tenants in Tarlabaşı, Özge said that the cost of public transport would make it impossible for them to continue working as previously. Amnesty International is concerned that transgender women, like other tenants within the Tarlabaşı Regeneration Project Area, have not been adequately consulted and that they have not been provided with compensation or alternative adequate housing.

Report: http://queeramnesty.ch/docs/eur440012011en_TurkeyReport_B.pdf

² According to a Cabinet decision (no. 2006/10172, published in the Official Gazette 28 March 2006), Tarlabaşı, along with several other areas within the Beyoğlu district was declared by the state a "regeneration area" giving the local authorities special powers to gain possession of the buildings.

³ Home owners within the project area also told Amnesty International that they were not consulted properly regarding the possession of their homes, that they were subjected to coercion in order that they vacate their homes and that the level of compensation and or alternative housing offered to them was unfair.

⁴ Amnesty International sought a meeting with the Beyoğlu district authorities however they told Amnesty International that they were not available during the period.