



GUIDE FOR LGBTI+ REFUGEES ON EXPERIENCES WITH SAFE THIRD COUNTRY

PREPARED BY

Lawyer Yağmur Birdal - Zafer Rifat Irmak - Müzeyyen Araç



Tel: +90216 759 51 95

E-Mail: info@hevilgbti.org

www.hevilgbti.org

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HEINRICH
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ABBREVIATIONS

IOM: International Organization for Migration

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

USRAP: The United States Refugee Admissions Program

RRF: Refugee Resettlement Form

GIGM: Directorate General of Migration Management

ICMC: International Catholic Migration Commission

IRCC: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

IFHP: International Federation of Health Plans

GST: Good and Services Tax

MSP: Medical Services Plan

LINC: Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada

AIM

LGBTI+ refugees who are forced to migrate to Turkey due to the sense of insecurity are resettled in safer and more protected countries in terms of LGBTI+ rights within the scope of their international protection application in Turkey. Although this process is not definite for every LGBTI+ refugee, the country where more adequate protection is provided than the country of arrival is defined as “Safe Third Country”. This guide, created from the experiences of LGBTI+ refugees who stayed with conditional refugee status in Turkey for many years and then were resettled in a “Safe Third Country”, aims to draw a general picture with different country procedures.

SCOPE

This guide is prepared for LGBTI+ refugees who have applied for asylum in Turkey and have been resettled in another country that accepts their resettlement and/or are awaiting resettlement in another country.

This guide was prepared as the output of the panel on “Safe Third Country Experiences of LGBTI+ Refugees” organized by HEVI LGBTI+ Association.

CONCEPTS

Refugee

In international law, the concept of “refugee” refers to a person who is outside their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin because of “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion”. Turkey has imposed a geographical limitation to the universally accepted definition of refugee with reservations. Only those who come to Turkey from European countries and seek protection are considered as refugees.

International Protection

In general terms, international protection is the substitution of national protection by a foreign state on the basis of international law. Under international law, every state has the obligation to protect individuals who bear its citizenship. However, in cases where the state fails to fulfill this obligation, the bond of citizenship weakens, and the person becomes stateless. The right to seek asylum includes the right to leave one’s country in order to seek asylum and the right to apply for asylum in the country of arrival.

Resettlement

According to the definition by IOM Turkey: “Resettlement is a strategy for managing migration in emergency situations. It is about the organized relocation of refugees, displaced persons and those in need of international migration services, for whom arrangements can be made between relevant stakeholders and the countries concerned.”¹

Resettlement does not always mean resettlement to a third country.

1 <https://turkiye.iom.int/tr/yeniden-yerlestirme>

Third Country

Country other than a person's country of origin.²

RESETTLEMENT

In Turkey, the Directorate General of Migration Management (GIGM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) work together for resettlement to a third country. Resettlement is not application-based. Persons referred by GIGM are assessed by UNHCR to determine whether they meet the necessary criteria.³ Since resettlement is not considered a right, countries accept the most vulnerable refugees, with limited quotas. This is why UNHCR prioritizes emergencies. Refugees also cannot choose their country of resettlement.⁴

According to May-July 2022 update of UNHCR, 5,144 refugees, 79% Syrian and 8% Afghan, have departed for resettlement to 14 countries. UNHCR has not shared how many people have already completed the resettlement process.⁵

Third country resettlement process

For resettlement to a safe third country, after the file for resettlement at UNHCR has been generated, the staff member in charge of this area investigates and verifies the refugee status of the person. An appointment for an interview is then scheduled. The interview covers a wide range of topics and question areas, including counseling on the resettlement process, verification of family composition, review of the eligibility of refugee status and assessment of the need for resettlement. After the interview, the UNHCR officer prepares a detailed dossier and a Refugee Resettlement Form (RRF)

2 https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml31_turkish_2ndedition.pdf

3 <https://help.unhcr.org/turkiye/tr/resettlement/>

4 UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2011 Erişim Adresi: <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=4ecb973c2&skip=0&query=resettlement%20handbook>

5 UNHCR Türkiye Operational Update, May-July 2022

and submits it to the relevant unit.⁶

The process after acceptance of the resettlement dossier

Refugees whose resettlement process has begun have several procedures to take before leaving their country of origin. These are:

- resettlement interview
- medical screening and follow-up
- pre-departure counselling and cultural orientation
- exit visa and travel arrangements
- escort and transit arrangements (particularly for medical cases)⁷

These procedures may vary depending on the cooperating institution and the country of resettlement.

What to do in Turkey after resettlement to a third country

Once you have been notified of your resettlement by UNHCR, they will refer you to the relevant organization. In this context, you will be informed about the medical requirements of the country of resettlement, how and in what way it conducts cultural orientation and how to obtain your travel documents. Following the completion of these procedures, you should start preparations for your departure from Turkey.

You should wait for your travel details to be approved by IOM before selling your belongings, leaving your job or leaving your house.

You will then need to inform your landlord that you are terminating your rental agreement, if any, and collect your deposit. If your lease expires on a date that is far

6 UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2011 Erişim Adresi: <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=4ecb973c2&skip=0&query=resettlement%20handbook>

7 UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2011 Retrieved from: <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=4ecb973c2&skip=0&query=resettlement%20handbook>

from the date of your travel plans, your landlord may legally require you to pay the rent for a reasonable period of time during which the house will remain empty. However, this is not a common situation. In this case, you should seek legal advice.

Before you move from Turkey, you should sell or dispose of your household and some of your belongings. You should take note of the detailed information that IOM will provide you about the baggage allowances applicable to your trip. Please note that baggage allowances are very strict, and IOM cannot pay or otherwise take responsibility for excess baggage. If you have excess baggage, you may have to dispose of many personal items at the airport to meet your baggage allowance. In general, checked baggage is usually limited to two pieces of 23 kg or 50 lb. each per ticketed passenger.

If you have subscriptions such as electricity, water, natural gas, telephone, etc., the subscriptions must be canceled one by one. It is possible to cancel some of the subscriptions via e-government. In cases where the subscription cannot be canceled via e-government, you can apply to customer service centers, contact call centers or apply for subscription cancellation via the website of the company where the relevant subscription is provided.

Your bank accounts in Turkey must be emptied and, if possible, closed. For this purpose, you can withdraw the amount in your accounts in cash and close your accounts through the call centers of the banks or by going directly to the relevant branch.

If you owe any judicial, administrative fines, taxes, etc. to the Republic of Turkey, you must pay these fines before you leave.

Get a reference letter from your workplace. If there is an institution, organization, or workplace where you work in Turkey, get a reference letter to make your job applications easier in your destination country.

Get a criminal record. Obtain a criminal record certificate for the possibility that it may be necessary. .

What to do after arriving in the third country of resettlement

When you arrive in your resettlement country, you will be met by a person from the sponsoring organization or the organization with which the resettlement country cooperates, depending on the country. This person will help and guide you through the procedures at the immigration office. Your status upon arrival also varies from country to country.

You will be temporarily transferred to a hotel, motel, guesthouse, or other accommodation that is allocated to you, again depending on the country. The duration of your stay in these places will also vary from country to country. During this time, you will need to familiarize yourself with the social and other rights provided by your resettlement country and keep in touch with local civil society organizations.

As soon as you arrive in the third country, you must exchange your cash into the currency of that country at any exchange office.

You need to get a SIM card that will allow you to communicate in the country you arrive in. You can get this at the airport or any other place that sells mobile cards. They can also provide you with this service directly through institutions in your country of destination. You will be informed about this.

In the country you arrive in, they may give you a card for country and city travel/transportation and offer you a discount. Do not forget to ask if you have this right.

Depending on your status and the country's health system, you may have access to free health care in your country of destination and the scope of this health care may vary. Therefore, find detailed information about the right to health care and be sure to ask your contact organizations for details. Free health care may not include dental and eye care, HIV, or hormone therapy medication. Please find out more about these details.

You can enroll in language courses and some vocational courses in your destination country. This will make it easier for you to integrate into the country and increase your chances of finding a job. Language courses and some vocational courses are usually offered free of charge.

1. Canada Experience

Once your flight date for resettlement in the third country becomes certain, you will first need to inform your landlord of your departure date. I recommend selling your household goods as you will need money during this process.

You must close your electricity, water, and natural gas subscriptions before you leave. Among your existing subscriptions, you may transfer only your internet subscription to someone else. You must definitely close your other subscriptions.

If you have money in your bank account, do not forget to cash it out from your account. If you have debts to government agencies (such as court fees or medical examination fees paid at pharmacies), you must pay them before you leave. Once you make the necessary payments, you can start preparations for your trip.

When packing your luggage, do not forget to attach your name and contact number on it. In case of any loss, this information will make it easier for you to find your luggage.

If you have a chronic illness, it would be useful to get a medical report documented by a hospital.

If you are working somewhere, obtaining a reference letter written in English will make it easier to prove your work experience in the country you are going to. It is a useful idea to take a copy of your ID and passport with you.

You should have 6 recent photographs of yourself with you.

You can obtain your criminal record in English via e-government.

Finally, you need to make an appointment with the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management and get your exit documents. You should definitely get copies of these documents. After handing over the house to the landlord and receiving the deposit fee, you will come to Istanbul.

Process in Istanbul

Before you arrive in Istanbul, you will be informed by IOM about your accommodation and orientation. Here you will be informed about the medical screening and cultural orientation. Afterwards, your baggage will be weighed according to the travel allowances, and you will need to prepare for your departure. You will then be taken to the airport by IOM. At the airport you will sign an exit document and they will give you a copy of this document. This document, which is given to you by the immigration office at the airport, is a document that shows the date after which you will be able to reenter Turkey. No matter by which means you are going, either by UNHCR or by your own means, this document is given to you in both cases.

After handing over your luggage, you will receive your boarding pass and board the plane after passing through passport control. If you do not have a passport or if it has expired, they will stamp the back of the visa document and give it to you, you should keep this document.

Entry to Third Country

After your flight lands in Canada, you will be met at the airport by IOM or IRCC officials. You will need to go to the immigration offices at the airport and take care of your entry documents, fingerprinting, eye screening and temporary insurance (IFHP). If you go in winter, they may give you winter clothes at the airport. Afterwards, you will take your baggage with the IRCC officer and be settled in the hotel.

If you are traveling to Canada through a sponsor, the IRCC officer will take you to your sponsor after you collect your luggage. From there, your sponsor will take care of your further processing. If you have been resettled to a third country by UNHCR, you will be accompanied by a social worker.

What to do after entering a third country?

After entering the country, you will need to change your money into Canadian dollars to meet your first needs. Secondly, you will need a new phone number. To get a new phone number, you will need your entry documents, passport, and address information. You can go to the Canadian service office and get a Social Security (SIN Number) with your passport, address, and phone number information. Since you will be staying in a hotel for a limited time, you need to start looking for a house as soon as possible. For this, you can find housing ads on Facebook market and various websites. In terms of household items, you can find suitable items for every budget.

For health insurance (MSP or Health Card), you can make an appointment online and apply with the same documents you use for the other procedures.

For transportation in the city, you need to buy a transportation card and load money into it. There are various mobile apps that you can use to find your destination more easily.

You can use the IFHP website to make an appointment with a family doctor. Through this site, you will be directed to the nearest family doctor to your address. You can also make appointments for dental and eye examinations. In order to be examined, you will need the documents, address, and phone number you received from IFHP.

In order to open a bank account, you need to apply with the necessary documents. In Canada, banks work with an appointment system and you should make an appointment with the bank to carry out this process.

Under the scope of the project called LINC, the Canadian government provides free language course support. After the placement test for the language course, you will be sent to the nearest language school.

You need to be very careful about the Canadian tax system. There is a tax that must be paid in a small amount: GST. You pay this tax during the registration process after you enter the country.

You must pay this tax at the tax center after you register online.

The government and employment offices provide you with support in your job search.

2. Switzerland Experience

When I entered the third country, they first referred me to a hospital and covered the costs of all the procedures. This included eye health examinations. However, as a note, I was informed that I was entitled to one pair of glasses and that the insurance covered half, and I had to pay the other half. Afterwards, they put me in a suite room while some families were sent to the camps.

Switzerland covers real estate costs and rent.

Language courses are free. Before starting a language course, I took a placement test and was referred to a course according to my level.

If you want to continue or start a university program in Switzerland, they help you through institutions, but you still have to take a placement test. After the test, you can apply for the university education.

You need to learn French to work. They also put you through an exam in order for you to be able to do the profession you specified. For example, if you state that you are a

hairdresser, they make sure by conducting a professional exam on hairdressing. After this exam, they give you a work permit. I am a hairdresser and need to pass those exams and learn French. Apart from that, I have to pay only 285 francs to the state for one year.

3. The USA Experience

I have been living in the U.S. for eight months. In the process of moving to the U.S., you can specify a sponsor to UNHCR. If you have a sponsor, a key worker (caseworker) from the US contacts your sponsor. When you enter the US, the sponsor and the caseworker decide between themselves on who will meet you, and that person comes to meet you at the airport. After you land at the airport, if your sponsor has arranged a place for you, you can stay there. Then, the organizations will help you to find a house for the period after. However, if the sponsor does not provide accommodation, the key worker arranges a place for you. After I entered the country, the key worker welcomed me and gave information to me. He also gave me \$75 in cash and a check for \$416. Apart from these, I received \$400 to \$500 rent support for a year to rent a house. They helped with the deposit, as well. In Austin, Texas, where I was resettled, the organization told me that they could not cover the full rent because the house rents were expensive. So, I did research and found a more suitable house. After I rented a house, the key worker referred me to a church which helped me with household items. If you are unable to get all the necessary items from the organizations to which you are referred, the key worker comes to your place to detect and help you with the household items that you need.

They give you a bus pass for transportation.

Within a week or two, your insurance card will be delivered.

They refer you to a government agency, and you get a social security number from that agency. Only you should know your social security number, and you should share it only with government agencies.

English language courses are free. They contact you for English lessons, and according to your language level, they direct you to a language school nearby. If you have a good command of English, you will receive language training from a college or university to complete your language education.

In every city there is a medical clinic for refugees and newcomers. They will contact you to offer you this service. They first examine you and then vaccinate you. All these services are free of charge. However, health insurance does not cover dental and eye examinations.

Health insurance coverage may vary depending on your situation. For example, since I live alone, I received health insurance support for 8 months. For some families, support can be provided for a year or fourteen months.

Once you enter the country, you may be contacted by more than one key worker. One of the key workers helps you only with job situation. For this, that key worker called me and asked for information about my work experience and education. After this information, the key worker helped me to prepare a CV, and I started looking for a job. Then, I started working in a place that suited my experiences and education.

Those who come here should not be worried if they do not speak the English language. There are many newcomers who do not speak the language. The key worker helps you in your native language if you do not speak the language of the country where you are placed. If the key worker does not speak your language, you can go to job interviews with an interpreter.

If you are accepted at the interview, you will receive health insurance and other benefits on your first day of work. If you have gotten education in any country other than the US, your educational documents are not valid there. For example, if you are a hairdresser, you need to pass the exam in the U.S. You can start working after you get your certificate in the U.S. If you have completed university education in Iran, you need to bring your documents to the US. After completing the English course, you can go to the university or college and contact a supervisor there and apply for recognition/equivalency.

4. Spain Experience

Upon entering the third country, I was met by representatives of the Spanish Migration Authority and international organizations related to migration. They handed me some documents. Among them was a document permitting me to live anywhere in the country for one month. With this document, the authorities took me to the city where I was going to stay. At the airport, there are officials from associations operating in different cities of Spain. According to the lists they prepared beforehand, the officials take the arrivals to the cities where they will be placed. The team that came to meet me at the airport included psychologists, lawyers, social workers, labor, and health technicians.

After your resettlement in Spain, health insurance is covered by the state. You can receive services from health centers. However, dental treatment is not covered by this health insurance.

If your partner is in Turkey or lives in a country other than Spain, your partner reunification process can take up to 1-1.5 years through a lawyer.

The state provides accommodation support to refugees here for a year and a half. This support is provided in two different ways. First, accommodation support is provided for 6 months. In line with this support, you need to stay where the state or NGOs direct you. Within the scope of this accommodation support, those who settle in the third country are sometimes placed in apartments for 5-6 people and sometimes in centers for 40 people. After this six-month period, you can move to a new place or continue to stay there.

Secondly, for 1.5 years, you will receive €375 plus a rent subsidy per month as financial support.

As part of the resettlement, you are guided to a language course, and when your language proficiency reaches a certain level, to further courses.

After the language course, an employment specialist provide you support on how to find a job.

Learning English is of course important for communication, but since Spanish is the official language in Spain, you should definitely learn Spanish.

In Germany and the Netherlands, you will receive long-term support for accommodation and more financial support. However, in these countries, health insurance is not covered by the state. In Spain, they give you less subsidies, but you can benefit from more services. Countries like Germany and Italy offer more financial support, but you have to make additional payments to enjoy the social rights.

I would like to recommend to those who are waiting for a third country resettlement from Turkey and whose third country is appointed to them, to go to language courses in Turkey in advance in order to learn the language of the country they are going to. The earlier you start learning a language, the better. Learning the language before you go to Spain, Germany or any other country will make a very important contribution to you. After a year and a half of state support, you can get support from different institutions. But it may take time to reach these sources of support or institutions. I highly recommend you start your work life early rather than relying totally on supports.

For third-country settlers, you can access free psychological support in Spain. After arrival, my recommendation is to use this service.

5. Australia Experience

The flight to Australia was a connecting flight so I couldn't take any heavy luggage with me. When I arrived in Victoria, an AMES⁸ officer met me at the airport. In each city, you may be met by different officials from different organizations. I was directed to a temporary accommodation and did not pay any fee for it. I stayed here for about a month. The place where you will be placed is determined by the officers. It can be a room or an apartment. After my placement, I was given a phone line by the officers. The next day, the interpreter accompanied me to open a bank account, and I received a call from an organization called Centrelink⁹, which gave me information about how much time I have to find a job and when to apply for a job.

⁸ AMES Australia has a 60-year history of helping recently arrived migrants and refugees settle in Victoria. For more information: <https://www.ames.net.au>

⁹ Centrelink is a web-based service delivery system of Australian government. <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/centrelink?context=1>

You can get help from Centrelink twice a month. If you are single or living with a partner, you can receive financial support between 1200 and 1500 dollars a month.

They provide shopping support. For example, they gave me a voucher to buy groceries.

Centrelink helps you look for a job according to your skills and experience. This organization provides you with a code to access health services.

Renting a house in Australia can be difficult. Because there is a compulsory procedure, a loan for renting a house. However, another organization helped me to get a loan. They helped me to find houses that I could rent. It is important to be fast and download the necessary mobile apps to find a house. Because you need to go and see the houses in person, and it is difficult to find a place in general immediately after your arrival.

You can attend language courses, vocational courses, and hobby courses for free. You do not need to have any experience or diploma to be admitted to these courses.

After finding a house and making the contract, I had to go to an organization called AMES (see above). This organization helped me to complete the household furniture in two or three days. You don't have to pay VAT to the government if all your earnings in a year are less than 18,000 dollars. If you earn more than that, the people in charge said that they would help you pay the VAT.

To get a university education, you need to collect some points and if you have a diploma, the institutions help you for the equivalency of the diploma.

I was contacted by an organization to find a job which regularly followed up on my job status. If you want to work in a restaurant, be a waiter or a chef, you are welcomed very well.

All your rights and grievance mechanisms are explained in detail. The minimum wage in these sectors is 25 dollars per hour and working 8 hours a day can be enough to live in Australia.

People with vocational training can work in better conditions.

Note: This information applies in Victoria.



+90216 759 51 95

www.hevilgbiti.org

@Hevilgbit

@Hevilgbit

info@hevilgbiti.org

hevilgbit@gmail.com

HevilgbitDernegi

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