

# Fatos - Irregular Refugee in Sweden

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*Nils Hammarén*

Fatos is 22 years old, born in Macedonia and raised in Kosovo. For the last couple of months, he has lived as a refugee, in hiding, in Sweden. I met him at a health centre run by an independent network in Gothenburg, which provides medical assistance for refugees in hiding. He says:

*'Until I was five I had a good life, with Mom and Dad. Then dad became completely destroyed and started with drugs and alcohol. He hit me and mom and things like that and threw us out on the balcony in the winter. He has abused me since I was five years and he broke many times my leg or arm. Every time he entered my room, I had to crawl under the bed in the morning so that he would not find me in bed, otherwise he struck me when I slept and kicked me for no reason. Then I got this kind of trauma. I get scared if somebody just touches me for fun. Today I'm not feeling so well because of all that has happened to me.'*

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The picture illustrates the suburb where the health centre is located. Fatos and his mother live in Gothenburg in an apartment that is rented for them by an organization for irregular refugees. They are very poor. Fatos' mom is on sick leave and can barely walk because of the domestic violence she has been subjected to. She requires a lot of medicine. Fatos has difficulties finding a job since he is an irregular refugee, living in hiding. Sometimes he distributes out flyers and

earns a small amount of money and other times he searches for bottles and cans. His girlfriend has given him clothes.

Fatos was born as a female but today lives as a male. He regularly meets a psychologist and plans to do a sex reassignment surgery in the future. As he told, he was repeatedly brutally beaten by his father during his childhood, and now refers to him as the 'psychopath' instead of using the term dad or father. He thinks the violence was partly because of drugs. The father has no education, moreover, has never attended school, can barely write his own name and now lives as a criminal in Kosovo. Fatos believes that his father escaped prison by bribing the police. Fatos' Uncle also raped him several times. When he told his father to seek help, the beatings intensified. Fatos says he has had to undergo several operations because of all the injuries. Today Fatos' father knows about his transsexuality and has on several occasions threatened to kill him. He has called him from Kosovo and menaced him. Fatos has also received anonymous threats by phone and people have harassed him at night.

*'I know he'd kill me if he gets hold of me. Even if someone in my dad's family found me they would chop my head off. He has said: I'll kill you myself with my own hands. I will bury you. When I have killed you, I will cut you into pieces and hide you so that no one can find you.'*

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When Fatos was 16 year's old, the situation was critical. He and his mother were forced to flee from Kosovo. A local priest helped them organize the exodus. They planned the escape for a long time. It cost them 7800 Euros to run away. At four o'clock in the morning they got up. The father slept in the basement. They sneaked out through a window and there stood a car to pick them up and drive them through Europe. Fatos does not know how they got out of Kosovo, but just remembers that they were told by the drivers when they could eat, take breaks, etc. He also remembers that there were seven people in the car. He and his mom were scared, but the drivers were nice and tried to make it comfortable for them. They also said that Fatos and his mother would feel at home. Fatos does not really know how they crossed the borders. Perhaps the drivers knew people at the border crossings, he says.

However, they received no residence permit upon arriving in Sweden. Instead they traveled to the Netherlands and later returned to Sweden. After three years they were sent back to Kosovo. They dared not return to their old hometown because of the father, but lived on the streets and several other locations for nine months. Then they fled to Sweden again, were rejected after two years and are now forced to live in hiding. Fatos says that the Swedish Immigration authorities do not consider their story to be severe enough. However, a police officer believed in their story and advised them to hide.

Fatos has a girlfriend that he loves and is engaged to. He thinks it is good to be in Sweden, and dreams of obtaining a residence permit and not least a regular job so that he can support himself and his mother, and have something to do during the day. He says that he can work with anything. Now he and his mother have hardly any money for food and must rely on friends who sometimes give them some money. Fatos is ashamed of having to be dependent upon friends in such a way, and describes the situation of being a refugee in hiding as extremely stressful.

Because of his background he has only attended school for four years; from the age of seven to eleven. In school some children would beat him because he wore a Christian cross. Fatos dreams of writing a book in which he can tell his story to help other young people who have been in similar situations of assaults, rapes and being forced to flee. He would also like to write for young people who feel good and to make them realize that they should be thankful for what they have. He is trying to locate a ghost writer who can reproduce his story. Fatos and his mother are now working on an appeal. They regularly meet a lawyer who follows their case and tries to help them. Fatos' big dream is to acquire permanent residence, a job, to live with his girlfriend and to finish his book. He dreams of working with people who suffer and who have been through similar experiences as him. However, right now he bears the imprint of hopelessness.

*'You become mentally ill. It does not feel like a life. I have suicidal thoughts.'*

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