



## Blog Post 1: Unforgettable: I started from scratch

The COALESCE project aims to provide support to female migrant victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in Europe through gender-specific psycho-social, legal and economic support and assistance. Within the framework of the COALESCE project a series of blog posts are being published aimed at bringing forward the stories and perspectives of migrant women victims of trafficking in their integration journeys in Europe.

Blog 1 is titled: "Unforgettable: I started from scratch", written by a woman accompanied and supported by our partner SOLWODI (Germany).

Life, as they say, cannot be predicted. Wanting to live a normal life is asking too much but, what is the dream of every child that has been born into this world? Well, they can still dream. They are still babies, and their parents are responsible. A very important question is what happens to the child when parents or the family that is supposed to love and care for the child are the 'problem' - when they are the ones hurting the child. An innocent child, a sweet girl. I didn't ask to be born. It wasn't my fault that I was born into this world, and I didn't choose my parents or family. I did nothing wrong. I grew like every normal kid until life took a U-turn when my mother remarried. I never knew my father. Having a new daddy changed everything for me: I became the bad blood, the one who everybody blames for everything. I wasn't allowed to make mistakes, like every other child. When I did, they hit me at the slightest provocation. I never understood why everything changed, why they hated me. I mean, what does an 8-year-old child know?

The only time I felt loved was when I came back from hawking and sold all my goods. How I did it, they didn't care. I managed to sell the goods by allowing men to touch my breasts; because that's the only way I could do it. It became a normal thing for me. But what didn't feel normal was my stepfather wanting to bathe me when my mom was not around. He also wanted to touch my body. I didn't understand and told my mom and again they blamed me. My mom is always taking sides with her husband. They beat me, said I was lying and warned me not to tell anyone about it. It continued until I was 12, when my stepfather raped me and this time, I didn't tell anyone because no one would believe me and also because my stepfather started treating me like a human being. I started enjoying the relationship with my stepfather because I got things that a child should normally have. I got them by being a sex toy to my stepfather.

It continued for almost 3 years, then I became pregnant. I was scared to talk but my school teacher helped me; again they blamed me. This time it was the worst--it was me against the whole world. Everybody hated me. Parents told their children to stop being friends with me. I had no one, only my conscience. The way my mother looked at me, she had never looked at me that way.



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Not to mention the beating I received, the beating of my life. No one even blamed my stepfather. They all said I was spoiled and that I caused it. He didn't even have to explain, no one questioned him. They all blamed and cursed me. I told God he should have given us the choice to choose whether to be born or not. The only option for me was to kill myself, but my teacher was God sent: She was the only one that believed me and also took me to the police station to complain. Again, nobody cared. They said it was a family matter, that I should go home. Home they said, but if only I had a home. I cried that day. I hated myself. My classmates all started calling my name and laughed at me. I wanted it all to end. I overdosed on medicine. It didn't work. I imagined death would be so peaceful, I needed that peace.

To get rid of the "bad blood", my mom sent me to go live with my aunt in another city and didn't even care about the baby I was carrying. She didn't care what happened to me. All she cared for was to get rid of me. And she did. At my aunts, I got to experience what they mean by parental love and care. How she cared for her kids made me wonder again what I did to my parents. She helped me get an abortion. I was happy, because she didn't judge me. She was the only one that blamed my stepfather and I loved that she loved me the way my own mom never did. I wanted to repay her for her kindness and the only way for me to do that was to obey every command of hers. I also helped with her crippled daughter. She became my best friend. Her husband was so warm and kind; he was so accommodating and understanding. They took me in like I was theirs. I finally had the family I never had. The home I always wanted.

Life was perfect and peaceful. I was very happy. But, again, it happened. Even my perfect family wasn't perfect: they wanted me to trust them and feel comfortable and I did. That's how my aunt and her husband sent me to another city to live with a man and said that all I need to do for him is to help with the house store. I agreed. To get there, they said I needed a medical check to see if I have any disease. The doctor came and checked me. I was surprised when she said I should remove my clothes. But because I trusted my aunt I did it and they called two other women. At this point, I was scared, but my aunt assured me that everything would be fine. The women and my aunt held me while I experienced the worst pain of my life. That was how I was circumcised. I was in pain. I was very angry at God for letting me go through all this pain. I saw that my aunt didn't really care; so I asked her why she did that to me. She said that my husband wanted a circumcised bride. I was shocked, but she went on and said all the food and the life I have been living with them had been -funded by my soon-to-be husband. I didn't know what to say. I just looked at her with all the physical and emotional pain I felt. I asked her if she would do that to her daughter. She replied that I was already an abomination and that if she were my mother, she would have killed me. To think that I really thought she loved me. With all the disappointment and pain I was feeling, I already knew I was alone, that no one actually wanted me.



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Again, I asked what my crime was, what I did wrong to feel so betrayed by my own family. Her last words to me were: “Be a good girl. Respect your husband. Always obey him, because you know you don’t have any place to go. You’ve caused your mother too much pain. Don’t add to the money your husband paid, it is too big that even if we sell the whole family, it still won’t be enough to pay him back.” Apparently, my supposed husband had also funded her crippled daughter’s surgery. I said to myself I would rather die than marry a sixty-year-old.

I was determined to live in the house but didn’t have a clue how to go about it. The man (my husband) was kind enough to let me heal from the pain in my vagina before he would touch me. I was locked up in the house, wasn’t allowed to go out because they knew I would leave even though I didn’t have any money. I was supposed to be his fifth wife. His son, I think, the eldest, was the person in charge of my welfare. He brought food, clothes and everything that I asked for. I told him one day that I needed to call my mom. He said I wasn’t allowed to call anybody, but since it was my own mother he would get back to me. Two days later, he brought me a phone. I called my mom and told her I wanted to come back home, and pleaded for her to come and talk to me. She said I should stay in my husband’s house. I should be grateful that I was lucky enough to find someone to marry me after all the abomination I caused. That I should take it as paying her back for all the shame I brought to her, that I almost destroyed her marriage because I couldn’t close my legs. I pleaded for help, I would pay her back in another way, I didn’t want to marry an old man. She said I didn’t have a choice: either I accepted that this man would kill them because they had already spent his money, or get the money to pay him back. Still, I couldn’t go back home. After the phone call with my mom, I started to get comfortable with the son, so that I could find a way to leave the house even though I didn’t have anywhere to go. Eventually he became comfortable with me, he would tell me when his father was coming to my room, so that I could pretend that I was sick, and he wouldn’t come close to me. Sometimes he would let me out. I walked around and used the opportunity to look at the street to make it easy for me when the time would come for me to leave.

The day finally came...



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