**Title: “You need to be in touch with the people that really can help you”**

*Transgender women seeking asylum in Greece need access to sexual and reproductive healthcare that responds to their needs without discrimination.*

Yuli\*, from Cuba, sought asylum in Greece after a torturous and dangerous journey that was all the more difficult as a black, transgender woman.

Tall, confident and exuding warmth, she shudders as she remembers the journey from Russia, one of the few countries where Cuban passports are accepted: the endless walking, the bus trips, the border guard refusals, the bullying and aggression, and the days and nights in a men’s jail, before she could reach safety.

**Seeking protection from persecution**

“Like all the trans women that are here in Greece, I decided to leave Cuba because of the system,” says Yuli. “In general, the family, society and the system in Cuba don’t understand trans people. You are *escoria* [scum] because you feel or you identify like a woman. They think that you are crazy. They don't give you opportunities like a job, like healthcare, like any help. The system is not interested in protecting LGBTIQ people.

“I made the *atravesia* [crossing] to find freedom. When you make this decision to leave your country it’s because you can no longer live there. For me it was better to die on the way than to live in Cuba.”

**Standing up for her community**

“I want to be the voice for the trans community from my country. It is very important that the people have the social and medical support, because most of the trans who came here do not have any medication. They experience sexually transmitted diseases—that is life. But it is very difficult to find the medical support.

“When you come in a country, that is not your culture, not your language, you need to show your body at the hospital but they don’t understand exactly, they don’t know anything about you. I know that the Greek medical system is very good. But the problem is the gender. We are trans, and mostly we are black.

“Recently, a friend—she has asylum-seeker status, she has the legal documents in Greece to receive assistance in hospital—she had psoriasis all over the body and the doctor came and started to make some inappropriate questions. I was with her to translate, to help. We don’t speak Greek perfectly but we understand with the body. It was a bad moment for us both, not only for her that was sick. We decided to go find another hospital with a more open mind about this ‘problem’ that is black and trans.”

**Accessing appropriate care**

“You need to be in touch with the people that really can help you. Like with MSF, where you can come for an examination. They look after you, the appointment to go to the doctor, to receive the condom, to take the PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV).

“For all the trans from my community in general, we are very, very happy [with MSF] because number one, they have translators in Spanish. These translators can explain and translate, of course, all that you need to know about disease. In MSF, you have access to a doctor that isn’t interested in if you are [legally] recognised, if you are an asylum-seeker, if you are from Cuba, if you are from Congo.

“They explain to you what you have, the process. They have a lot of patience. They find appointments in the different hospitals for specialists.

“And in MSF, I can access different things that you didn't know about. For example, most of the trans like me, we have started to have dizziness. You don't know what anxiety is, what depression is, what a panic crisis is. But when you come [to MSF] you can visit psychology, psychiatry, or receive therapy.”

**Drawing strength from people around her**

“Most trans people need to be strong in character, because when the society doesn’t understand you, when the family don't accept you, you need to be strong in life.

“But maybe because I am anxious and have depression, I need someone, maybe every day, that hugs me very strong, and tells me, ‘Don't worry, everything will be okay’. Everything is not OK, but I feel good when the social worker, everyone that knows me, hugs me strong, rubs my arm, and says, ‘Don’t worry’.

“It’s the best thing in life, because we need love. We need people that understand what happened in your mind, that understand what you need.”

**Planning the future**

“I, like a woman, have a lot of dreams, that I want to achieve one day.

“I think I’m more clear in my mind since the people around me helped me to understand about sexual problems and transsexual communities, and LGBTIQ. I feel more safe now. I feel that I belong to one community, for the first time in my life: one community of the same people, same sexuality.

“A lot of Cuban trans want to go to Spain for the language—our mother language is Spanish. But I decided to stay in Greece. I’ve found a lot of Greek people that were very nice with me. I feel safer in Greece than in Cuba.

“I have studied a lot in my life. I am a person that likes communication, societies, to make friends, to help people. I want to go out. I want to feel free. I want to have a boyfriend—Greek, of course!”

Ed: Yuli was interviewed in English and her words have been lightly edited for clarity.

\* Her chosen nickname

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Since 2016, MSF has operated a Day Care Centre in Athens which currently offers a comprehensive package of multidisciplinary services focusing on sexual and reproductive health (including care for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence), non-communicable diseases and mental health as well as health promotion and sociolegal support. All the activities are supported by a large team of cultural mediators facilitating referrals to the national health system where possible, and helping break down cultural and language barriers for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and, more broadly, marginalised groups of people in need of healthcare.