



# HARDSHIP, HOPE AND RESETTLEMENT

REFUGEES FROM SYRIA  
TELL THEIR STORIES

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



## Amnesty International met with refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. They spoke of loss, uncertainty, hardships, hopes and dreams. These are their stories.

Nadia, like many of the refugees from Syria that Amnesty International has interviewed, dreams of a better future for herself and especially for her teenage son. She is one of 4 million refugees<sup>2</sup> who have fled Syria as a result of the ongoing brutal conflict, which has claimed the lives of over 190,000 people<sup>3</sup> and broken apart homes, families, livelihoods and any sense of a normal life. Her son is now one of the 1.7 million refugee children<sup>4</sup> from Syria at risk of becoming a 'lost generation.'<sup>5</sup> He, like many other young refugees, struggles to attend school and lives in difficult conditions. "School is very far. My son goes by bus. Sometimes I don't even have the money for him to take a bus so he stays at home. We are very poor. Sometimes we don't have anything to eat," Nadia told Amnesty International.

While the sheer number of those displaced by the four-year crisis is astounding, it doesn't reflect the full impact the conflict is having on the people affected by it. Behind every number is a face, a name, a person who has experienced deep loss and who hopes for a better future.

This briefing highlights the stories of eight families and individuals from Syria who have escaped the conflict. They are based on interviews carried out by Amnesty

International in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq<sup>6</sup> from October to December 2014. While the stories have been shortened to make them more accessible to the reader, the events recounted and statements made are all told in their own words. Due to their extreme vulnerability and the harsh living conditions they face, the refugees interviewed here need to be resettled to another safe country outside of the immediate region.<sup>7</sup>

Yara, a Syrian woman with four children who sought safety in Lebanon, told Amnesty International, "My son's health situation is deteriorating and I would really like to treat him. The UN has put me forward for resettlement but I don't know if I am going to be resettled."

The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR estimates that 378,684 refugees from Syria who are in the five main host countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt) need resettlement due to specific vulnerabilities such as serious medical needs, sexuality, gender and disability.<sup>8</sup> That is why Amnesty International is calling for a global resettlement surge to relocate 380,000 Syrian refugees from the five main host countries by the end of 2016. This would amount to around 10% of the current combined Syrian refugee population



in these countries being resettled to countries outside the region.

For some of these refugees, their vulnerability and need for resettlement stems from a serious medical condition or disability that cannot be treated where they are. Others face harassment, sometimes as a result of their sexuality or for being a woman without a husband. Some have experienced extreme violence, arrest, imprisonment and torture in Syria and are unable to access the care that they need.

For vulnerable refugees, being able to start their lives again in another country can have a momentous impact, giving them a lifeline and the chance of a peaceful future. However, this opportunity is dependent on wealthier countries



stepping forward to open their doors and welcome Syria's refugees. This can be done via resettlement schemes, as well as by providing other forms of admission, including humanitarian admission places, family reunification, sponsorship opportunities and visas (for simplicity, these will be collectively referred to as 'resettlement').

In their own words, the refugees here describe their experiences of pre-conflict Syria, the outbreak of the crisis, their journey to neighbouring countries and their struggles as refugees. Many speak of their hopes and dreams for a safer future.

For those interviewed, a primary motivation for escape from Syria was the fear that they or their families would be harmed or killed. They witnessed random

bombings, home raids, homes destroyed and people injured or killed. Beyond fearing for their own safety, parents describe wanting to protect their children from the violence and being driven by the desire to ensure their children have a good future away from the conflict.

Nadia, who has a 14-year-old son told Amnesty International, "I heard that they kidnap children and rape women. I was very afraid. The sound of bombs made my son very afraid... I was afraid for my son so I took him and came to Jordan."

Having made it out of Syria, refugees describe their lives in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, including the extreme hardships and daily struggles faced. For refugees like Qasim, his medical needs and the needs of his family have been the

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**Above:** There are no formal camps for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Freij informal tented settlement in Bekaa Valley is one of more than 1,400 informal settlements in the country.

**Cover:** People carry their belongings in a refugee camp after crossing from Syria into Turkey, September 2014.

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primary concerns. Both he and his daughter have a medical condition called elephantiasis, a disease with “stigmatizing and disabling clinical manifestations”.<sup>9</sup> “My daughter, who is 14 years old now, has the same problem. During the last Ramadan my daughter was taken by a local NGO to a doctor and we found out she has elephantiasis. We can’t afford the treatment and it is not provided in this region.” Qasim is one of over 53,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria in Lebanon<sup>10</sup> who have fled Syria.

Mariam, who has three children and fled to Jordan told Amnesty International, “In Syria you are afraid of being raped, of being arrested, of being killed and here I am afraid for my daughters. If you get sick or fall, no one is here to help you. I am struggling to buy things for my daughters.” For single parents, Yara, Nadia and Mariam, providing for their families is a continual struggle.

Women that Amnesty International spoke to face street harassment, like Yara, who describes her experiences in Lebanon:

“I wanted to register my son (aged seven) in the school. He was nagging me to be registered. While I was walking to [the place to register my son for school], some men, some with weapons surrounded and harassed me and I felt very frightened.” Other refugees, such as Hamood, have faced street harassment and abuse as a result of being gay: “We get threats in the street every day. Sometimes we wait until it gets dark [to go out]. We are addicted to rain because the streets are empty.”

Some of the families and individuals also talk about the grinding poverty, the lack of work and the uncertainty of life as a refugee. All have hopes and dreams for the future.

However, without a significant increase in the number of resettlement places available to refugees, many vulnerable refugees will continue to face hardship. To date, the international community has done very little. In total, only 79,180 resettlement places have been offered globally by wealthier countries,<sup>11</sup> a fifth of what’s needed. These would only

help 2.1% of the 3.8 million refugees from Syria living in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Excluding Germany, the remaining 27 European Union countries have only offered 9,114 places, which amounts to just 0.24% of Syrian refugees in the main host countries. The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have offered none.<sup>12</sup>

As the conflict rages on, the situation for refugees continues to deteriorate. Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt are between them hosting 95% of the total refugee population from Syria.<sup>13</sup> To varying degrees, this has had a significant economic impact on these countries and has overstretched their infrastructure.<sup>14</sup> All five of these countries have imposed restrictions on the entry of people fleeing the conflict in Syria, leaving tens of thousands, if not more, trapped in the conflict.<sup>15</sup> In addition, a shortage of humanitarian funding to the region in 2014 left many refugees struggling to survive as financial aid and assistance were reduced.<sup>16</sup> In December 2014, the UN launched an appeal for



US\$5.5 billion that will be needed in 2015 to deliver humanitarian assistance to refugees and vulnerable host communities in the region.<sup>17</sup>

In this context, it is essential that the international community makes every effort to resettle far larger numbers of refugees out of the region surrounding Syria.

Never has it been more pressing to call on the leaders of wealthier countries around the world to open their hearts and arms to Syria's most vulnerable refugees and provide them with a peaceful and safe future.

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**From left to right: Zaatari refugee camp, North Eastern Jordan, which is home to over 80,000 refugees from Syria, November 2014; Darashakran camp, one of eight refugee camps for refugees from Syria in Iraq's Kurdistan Region, December 2013; Inside a tent in Darashakran refugee camp, December 2013.**

## WHAT IS RESETTLEMENT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Resettlement<sup>18</sup> is the relocation of vulnerable refugees from countries where they have initially fled to safe third countries where they can restart their lives in dignity. Resettlement benefits refugees who are facing particular hardships or vulnerabilities. Resettlement also relieves some of the pressure on countries hosting large numbers of refugees.

Following World War II, it was anticipated that in times of mass population movements, international cooperation would be crucial. Thus the concept of international burden and responsibility sharing was clearly set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention.<sup>19</sup>

UNHCR initially identifies vulnerable refugees for resettlement according to set criteria. Those with serious medical needs or disabilities, security risks, survivors of torture/violence, women

and girls at risk, children and adolescents at risk and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people are among those prioritized for resettlement. Once refugees have been identified by the UN, their cases are put forward to resettlement countries who will then decide whether to accept them for resettlement. If accepted, these governments actively facilitate the safe transport of refugees to their country and help them to integrate into their new countries.

In addition to UNHCR-coordinated resettlement, Amnesty International encourages other means of relocating refugees safely including through other admission programmes such as humanitarian admission programmes, family reunification, and sponsorships so long as they guarantee the rights of refugees.

*“I found out my husband was killed.  
No one told me – I found out from  
YouTube...”*

**YARA (23) WITH FOUR CHILDREN,  
MAHDI (7), MARIAM (6),  
MOHAMED (3), MUTANAMA (2).**

*Yara comes from Dayr al-Zor in eastern Syria and she lives alone with four young children. She told Amnesty International that her husband died in prison, which she discovered from a video on YouTube. Her two year old son, Mutanama, has an opening in his spine which leaks fluid into his brain. Since they moved to Lebanon in October 2012 his health has deteriorated. When she tried to register another of her children at school she was surrounded by men who harassed her. Yara and her children have moved around a lot due to unaffordable rents and the constant harassment and abuse she has faced from her family for refusing to remarry.*

**Yara:** My husband was arrested by Syrian authorities at the [Lebanon/ Syria] border. I didn't have anyone to turn to and people were being killed by bombings and massacres so we [her family] fled.

I found out my husband was killed. No one told me – I found out from YouTube that my husband was detained in a [Syrian] prison. He was killed in the prison and then they threw his body outside and the rebels showed the video on YouTube. I saw the video showing his photo after he was killed. One of the sheikhs [religious leaders] told me that my husband was killed and showed me a copy of his ID card. Afterwards, the people who buried his body contacted us and told me, “your husband is killed and come and receive his body”, but we couldn't reach the place where he was. So, these same people buried him.

I have moved around a lot in Lebanon. I can't afford to pay rent. I can't live with my parents because they have a very small house and three families already live [there]... [My family] believe that I must get married because a woman should not stay single... they follow me to the mosque and hit me and say it's not appropriate for a woman to live all by herself... [But] my son is very sick and I [often] have to take him to hospital. The doctor [said] he mustn't be living in a crowded house or he will have diseases transferred to him.

Mutanama [two-year-old son] has [had] an opening in his spine since [birth] and he has a device in his head. When they did the operation on his back he was only three days old. They put a device in his head because with the opening he has water [which] would go to his brain, and the device drains the water. He has a weak immune system.

Everything is full of difficulties as a refugee; especially living here in Lebanon is very difficult. A lot of people say bad stuff about me and harass me. I used to work at a sheikh's library. I went in a taxi and told the driver I want to go to the Airport Road. He took me to Khaldi Road. He started to harass me and offered me his money and asked if I would stay with him and be his companion. I wanted to throw myself out of the car [when] we reached a checkpoint.

I wanted to register my son [aged seven] in the school. He was nagging me to be

registered. While I was walking to [the place to register her son for school], some men, some with weapons, surrounded and harassed me and I felt very frightened.

My son's health situation is deteriorating and I would really like to treat him. The UN has put me forward for resettlement but I don't know if I am going to be resettled. I don't have anyone to help me with the children, I have no-one to support me with the rent. It's a difficult life, I can hardly manage.

[Yara's children are asked, “What do you like to do?”]

**Mariam:** I like to play around with friends.

**Mahdi:** I like to go to the sea. I just don't want to go back to Syria, there's no sea [where I live] in Syria.

**Yara:** They just saw the sea for the first time here. They hardly go out so they feel locked up like in prison so when they came here and saw the sea, they wanted to spend the day there.







***“I just want my children to be educated and I want Elias to be cured.”***

**MAHER (35), HOUDA (30),  
ELIAS (12), IBRAHIM (9),  
YUSRA (3).**

*Maher, Houda and their family left Syria and have been living in Qushtapa refugee camp in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq since August 2013. Their 12-year-old son Elias was diagnosed with cancer in 2012 and they have struggled to find treatment for him amid the conflict. The hospital was shelled while Houda was inside with Elias. When Elias's hair fell out because of the cancer treatment, Maher shaved his own head too so Elias "wouldn't know it was from the medication". They want to be resettled so their son has access to treatment and their children can go to school.*

**Maher:** We all came to Qushtapa refugee camp together. It has been a year and four months. I left because of the war and because of the lack of livelihood options. My son has cancer. He was getting treatment in Damascus. It was really hard to get the treatment because the hospital where my son was receiving treatment was in another neighborhood. It was a troubled area so every time I used to take my son to receive treatment there were snipers and gunfire. It was very dangerous but we had to go for my son. Elias has pancreatic cancer and every three weeks we had to take him to get treatment.

**Maher:** When he had his treatment, his hair fell out and I shaved my head as well so he wouldn't know it was from the medication. When we were coming back to Qamishly from Damascus, Jabhat al-Nusra [an armed group] stopped the bus and wanted to punish me because I had shaved my head and I had to explain.

**Houda:** Every time I took Elias to the hospital for his treatment I saw a lot of fighting. There was an intense firefight with bullets hitting the hospital. I called my husband and said, "Listen, I am really afraid". He was outside the hospital and the doctor came and said, "All you ladies get out of the rooms and stay in the corridors because the rooms have windows". We started shouting and crying and we got hit by two shells. The second floor ceiling fell to the ground. All the glass broke.

**Maher:** ...When I heard the shelling I ran upstairs to try to get her. One of the ceilings was open with a big hole. I did not take my son out, I did not leave. I stayed there so he could get the treatment because the doctors stayed as well. When the doctors stayed, we all stayed. It's still going on now, the bombing.

We really hated our lives. Once we left the hospital and got the medicines [for Elias] we left. Life is very difficult here because we need doctors and medication for Elias. We have really suffered to get treatment for him. Before we left Syria he had the bone marrow test every three months and then every six months. He has been here for one year and four months and hasn't done the test. They said they weren't going to take any more x-rays and we should take him to a private hospital... For my child there is no help, no aid.

I feel really happy we are going to be resettled to Europe because the treatment over there is much better. It [is] enough to feel like a human over there.

**Houda:** I just want my children to be educated and I want Elias to be cured.

## JAMAL (27) AND SAID (21).

*Jamal and Said are a gay couple who are both journalists. They were arrested and detained in Syria because of political activities. They came to Lebanon in May 2014. Jamal has HIV. He struggles to afford his medication and tried to commit suicide when he discovered how much it would cost. He has a cat called Piqa whom he adores. They live in Beirut and earn just enough money to cover the cost of rent and food. Jamal and Said hope to be resettled so that they can both finish their university degrees and be more “productive members of society”.*

**Said:** We met in a bar and [discovered] we both work in media and have a common interest in working in politics, so we met several times and then we started going out. The relationship was not for the public – only really close friends. Our relationship is part of the reason we left Syria. We were threatened by more than one political party. We were in an opposition party and we had a campaign during the elections against the President being elected. Everyone knows we are members of this party and we work in the media office. I used to organize protests.

**Jamal:** I received threats on Facebook because I used to do a lot of cartoon drawings against the regime. I was arrested for two months and after I was released I found out that they had hacked my account on Facebook and tried to delete my drawings ... When I came to Lebanon the whole archive I had at my house was thrown away so I only have the electronic copies.

[Jamal’s cat jumps around in the room] I love cats; I adore them. I used to have one in Syria called Piqey and this one is called Piqa.

**Said:** We never talk about the time in detention [to each other]... They tied my



hands and hung me [from] the ceiling and tortured me with electrocution. There was a cell and you could see through the door of the cell to the other side where one of the prisoners was being tortured. [The other prisoners had] to keep watching how that person was being tortured. If they closed their eyes or looked away they would be hit. They would use knives to wound us [shows the scars on his shoulder].

***“I wish to continue my education, feel safe and feel stable in order to live my life. Jamal and I could never imagine ourselves sitting and doing nothing because we were very active, whether it was the work we used to do as journalists or in civil society.”***

**Jamal:** I am HIV positive and we were in a very small room, around 100 people detained all together. When a newcomer arrived he would stay standing for a long time [due to overcrowding] – when I first arrived I was standing for around 10 hours. You would see teenagers in the same room [as us] and some people had mental disorders, others were shot in their legs or their hands.

In prison my health situation deteriorated. In the corner there was a little toilet which

everyone would [use] and we also [had] showers there with cold water. I was sick and would faint sometimes. When I got really sick I told them I was HIV positive, thinking they would either bring a doctor, some medication or antibiotics, or that they [might] even release me. But they sent me to solitary confinement because they were afraid I would spread my disease [laughs at their reaction]. I was released after two months.

[After my release] a doctor saw [my health] was deteriorating and requested tests. He [said] I must begin treatment immediately. I was told that [the medications] cost around US\$600 monthly and I didn’t have enough money. I had a nervous breakdown and tried to commit suicide. The thing I fear most is that I won’t have a place to live in, in addition to affording the medications.

**Said:** We write some materials as freelance journalists about Syria. I wish to continue my education, feel safe and feel stable in order to live my life. Jamal and I could never imagine ourselves sitting and doing nothing because we were very active, whether it was the work we used to do as journalists or in civil society. That’s why when we first came to Lebanon we started searching for work so that we could be productive members of society.

## QASIM (34).

*Qasim is a Palestinian refugee from Dera'a camp in southern Syria. He arrived in Lebanon in December 2013 after his family home was destroyed by air raids. He has a daughter and son and his wife is pregnant. They live in a refugee camp. Hassan has a disease called elephantiasis and is unable to find proper treatment. He is concerned about his daughter who also has the disease. Before the crisis, he had an operation in Jordan but a mistake was made and now his legs are at risk of being amputated. Qasim was extremely upset when speaking to Amnesty International and broke down in tears several times due to his concern for his daughter.*

***“In every treatment I am waiting to die. I really don't care if I get treated but I want my daughter to get treated.”***

**Qasim:** I have one daughter and one son and my wife is pregnant. We live in Burj Barajneh camp [a camp in south Beirut set up in 1948 for Palestinian refugees] in a house. Before living in Burj Barajneh we spent one month in a warehouse in Burj Hammoud [a neighbourhood in Beirut] but there were lots of rats so we came to Burj Barajneh and found a house.

I have a disease called elephantiasis. It is when the lymph nodes are blocked. I have suffered from this disease for 17 years... I took medicines in Syria and had three operations.

Last summer the regime came and there were air raids in the area where I lived. When the bombing started it caused problems with my eardrum and I got



a fracture in my skull. My house was destroyed but my family and I managed to get out. That's why we came to Lebanon.

My leg will start getting bigger and if I don't get treatment [it will get worse]. My daughter, who is 14 years old now, has the same problem. During the last Ramadan my daughter was taken by a local NGO to a doctor and we found out she has elephantiasis. We can't afford the treatment and it is not provided in the region. I had an operation in Jordan and

they made a mistake and now my legs are at risk of being amputated.

The UN can't help me. In every treatment I am waiting to die. I really don't care if I get treated but I want my daughter to get treated.

Jarahieh, an informal settlement for refugees from Syria in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. Many refugees in Lebanon live in inadequate accommodation including unfinished housing, overcrowded apartments and informal settlements, September 2014





## **NADIA (47).**

*Nadia is a woman from the city of Homs who lives with her 14-year-old son. She left Syria because of the conflict and fears for her only child's future. Her husband died years ago and a brother who helped her also died. She came to Jordan in August 2011 but finds it very expensive. She told Amnesty International that they sometimes don't have anything to eat and can't afford electricity. She wants her son to be educated and encourages him to study. Nadia doesn't know how she will cope after May 2015 as she is worried about paying the rent. She wants to be resettled so her son can have a "good future" and "will go to any country that is open".*

**Nadia:** We left Homs because of the conflict. It is not safe there. I couldn't send my son to school. I heard that they kidnap children and rape women. I was very afraid. The sound of bombs made my son very afraid... I was afraid for my son so I took him and came to Jordan. I came alone [her husband died ten years ago], just me and my son. My brother was working in Jordan and helped me come [to Jordan] but he died of cancer.

Life in Syria was lovely. We had a beautiful house. Everything was luxury, unlike here. I took this carpet [covering her bedroom floor] from the mosque [in Jordan]. I rented this house furnished. If you told me to leave now I would only pack my clothes and my son's clothes and leave.

It is very expensive here, unlike Syria. I can't even afford to pay for electricity. It's a very poor living... School is very far. My son goes by bus. Sometimes I don't even have the money for him to take a bus so he stays at home. We are very poor. Sometimes we don't have anything to eat. Sometimes my neighbour asks me to cook for him and gives me money and sometimes my son goes to the mosque and they give him some money.

***"I want to go somewhere where I will not have to rely on handouts at all. I am crying for my old life where I had dignity. I have to beg all the time [breaks down in tears]. I want to leave for the future of my son."***

I wish to go to another country a lot because they will help me with my future and my son's future. I will go to any place. I want to go somewhere where I will not have to rely on handouts at all. I am crying for my old life where I had dignity. I have to beg all the time [breaks down in tears]. I want to leave for the future of my son. He has no friends and no life.

My house is all gone. All of Homs is gone. Here I don't cook ... You know kibbeh

[dish made with bourghul, onions and minced meat] and stuffed vine leaves? I used to cook it for teachers there. They used to come and give me money for the food.

Our bodies and minds are tired. My only hope is to leave with my child. I hope he will have a good future [Nadia starts crying]. I always tell him to study and learn English well because of his future. I am tired of thinking. I can't breathe sometimes when I think how to manage my life. I hope I will leave. Nobody knocks on my door, nobody asks for me. This is my last life. I am only thinking after May what will happen to me, where will I get money?

I beg them [the international community], I will kiss your hands if you help me get out. My son needs boots for winter but I need the money for gas. I keep telling him to be patient and maybe one day he will get what he wants. He likes to help me, but he is still young. I didn't buy any clothes for him at Eid [Islamic holiday] and he didn't ask. He knows we don't have money.

I will go to any country that accepts me.





*“We are living a desperate life and know we can’t go back to Syria. Here we are dying and there [in Syria] we were dying in different ways. We don’t want to suffer anymore.”*



## MARIAM (48).

*Mariam is from a suburb in Damascus, Syria's capital city. She has three children including two teenage twins (a boy and a girl). She came to Jordan with her daughters in September 2012. She lives with a family who took her and her two daughters in after they were unable to afford the rent. They all sleep in the living room. Mariam had to leave her son to live on the streets because she wasn't allowed to bring him to the house. Since that separation, her twins have both tried to commit suicide. Her and her daughters are very uncomfortable living in a house with an unrelated man (the husband of the host family) of the house and Mariam is struggling to cope. Mariam told Amnesty International that she wants to leave her "desperate life" and be resettled.*

**Mariam:** I have three children – twins who are 19 years old [a boy and a girl], and a girl aged seven.

I used to rent a house but the owner wanted it [back] because I was late in paying the rent. I was asking for a house and the woman here knew my situation and that I would have to leave my house. She said I could come and help in her house and live there for free [in return for looking after her disabled five-year-old daughter], but only with my daughters and not my son.

My daughters and I sleep in the living room. The family enter through one entrance and we come through another. At night we stay in the living room. We can't move freely because [the woman whose house we stay in has a] husband [who] is here. We don't feel we can use the bathroom. We can't even change our clothes alone in the room. We have to stay together because we are not free. Even the young daughter, if the man is here she will not play. We are not comfortable here.

In Syria you are afraid of being raped, of being arrested, of being killed and here I am afraid for my daughters. If you get sick or fall no one is here to help you. I am struggling to buy things for my daughters. I would not choose Jordan. It is known Jordan is the most expensive country in the region so it is very difficult to live here. A woman living with a man cannot cope. What about me? I am alone. I have no income.

I have had problems with my back [which have got worse from carrying the disabled child]. I borrowed money for the doctor from the woman I live with. The doctor said I need an operation but I can't afford it. I paid my debt back and now I have nothing. My passport was [held by] the woman until I paid.

My daughter tried to commit suicide. She couldn't study, had to borrow money, had to help me and was helping the woman of the house, so she tried to commit suicide. She cut her wrists with a pen. It was not

very sharp. It wasn't a very deep wound so I helped her. I told her to be patient.

My son came to Jordan later than me. He saw a lot of things, that's why he has become nervous. He hit his sisters. He tried to hit me sometimes but I stopped him. He also tried to commit suicide.

My main worry is my children. My son is very afraid. He is not allowed to work. If he works they [the Jordanian authorities] will take him.

I am registered with the UN and I hope my family and I get to leave the country. We are living a desperate life and know we can't go back to Syria. Here we are dying and there [in Syria] we were dying in different ways. We don't want to suffer anymore. You can't eat what you want, sleep when you want.

[Mariam poses for her picture gazing out on to the horizon. When Amnesty International comments on her pose and says she looks like a film star she replies: "I am looking for hope, even if it's far." Her children call out for her, "Mama ya mama" and she replies, "I am busy, I am a film star today".]

## HAMOOD (21).

*Hamood is a young gay man from Dera'a in Syria and is struggling to live in Jordan, where he arrived in March 2013. He left Syria because he feared the threat certain armed groups could pose to him because he is gay. He told Amnesty International that while in Jordan his brother tried to kill him and he was raped by six men. He feels discriminated against and is unable to work because of restrictions in Jordan. He has been interviewed for resettlement and hopes to be able to go to a new country, find a partner, and be himself in public.*

**Hamood:** The war in Syria made me come to Jordan. When Jabhat al-Nusra and other armed groups were present I had to leave the country. Nobody knows I am gay except my friends.

I live by myself here. After we [Hamood and his family] left Za'atari refugee camp (the largest refugee camp in Jordan) we got separated. I haven't seen them [since]. I have problems with my brother because he knows that I am gay, so I left. He threatened me and tried to kill me.

I wish I could go back to Syria because it's going to be easier and more merciful than Jordan. The government here is against being gay. It was much better in Syria being gay. I feel the pressure more here. I am behind on the rent. I am supposed to receive food vouchers from the UN but my family gets them, not me.

We are not allowed to work. I went to get some work a few days ago and they said "Syrians, no, no, no". I said "Why? Do you think I am going to poison the food?" Sometimes I exchange sex for money. I find people through an internet site. I go to them if they have a place. That's how I have to survive and I can hardly cover it. Frankly, all I have on my mind is to go back to Syria, but in Syria there's only death.

[I was taken] to a house [by a man] and six of the guy's friends all wanted to have sex with me and they forced me to. Of course I couldn't report it, I would be sent back to Syria. This happened about six or seven months ago. I haven't told anyone because I am still afraid. I don't know how I am saying it now.

I like to dress [up in women's clothing]. That's what I do in my spare time. I can't do that outside. I will show you a picture of a gay couple getting married. It was [here] in Jordan. We entered as men and then changed and did everything.

My friend works in a hairdressing salon. You should see when we walk on the street together. We get a lot of rude words [from passersby] and even the police don't have manners when they talk to us. They say, "If God gives us the power only", meaning if we had power over you we would execute you all. [Usually] I ignore this. We get threats on the street every day. Sometimes we wait until it gets dark [to go out]. We are addicted to rain because the streets are empty. During summer I will go out once or twice during the entire period. It is very difficult.

It is known in Arab countries they will not accept Syrian refugees. I did interviews [for resettlement] to go to a country in Europe. If I go I will be reborn. I will consider myself as having a life. Whatever I see on the internet, how I see the gay people living their life [is how I want to live]. The first important thing I want to do is work and if it's possible I will meet the right person and he will become my partner for life. To get dressed up, put make-up on and go outside without problems, that would be my dream. If I do it for one day and then I die I would be happy.





*“To get dressed up, put make-up on and go outside without problems, that would be my dream.”*



*“...we had a call from the mosque that the water was poisoned by the regime. That night the planes started bombing as well. I couldn’t stand it anymore. Not for me, but for the children.”*



**ALAA (33), DANA (25),  
HAMAD (7), RAMA (5).**

*Alaa and Dana live with their two children, Rama and Hamad, in a refugee camp in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Their house in Aleppo, the largest city in Syria, was destroyed. They decided to leave after bombings by planes and alleged water poisoning. They want their son Hamad, who has cerebral palsy, to get treatment. Alaa says the hospital in Erbil wouldn't help because he was Syrian.*

**Alaa:** We came to Erbil in January 2014 from the border to the camp. We are from Hasakah Governorate [in north-eastern Syria] but lived in Aleppo. We had a house there but unfortunately it got destroyed. I used to work in the private sector in a pharmaceutical company. At the beginning of the conflict, there was no electricity and no water. When sunset came we were not allowed to leave the house and I was not able to get [the children] milk or anything.

Things got worse. At the beginning the protests were peaceful but then we heard shelling and firing [of bullets]. The government sent police and the army. There were a lot of people killed and we saw a lot of destruction. The children were terrified. Rama was really scared and Hamad would wake up and not know [what was going on]. With every bombing the entire building was shaking and glass was broken... I have seen many wounded people. I saw many people with bullets in their chests.

My job was stopped. I no longer had a job or any money.

At the end of 2012 around Ramadan we had a call from the mosque that the water was poisoned by the regime. That night the planes started bombing as well. I couldn't stand it anymore. Not for me,

but for the children. We left the building and saw lots of other people leaving at the same time.

Because I was carrying Hamad and Dana was carrying Rama we didn't take anything with us except our documents. I thought it was better to leave. It's better to die outside than have a building fall on your head.

I rented a house for 20 days [in another part of Aleppo] but we had nothing. I had to knock on people's doors to ask for things. Those 20 days made me ten years older because I had to work really hard to get things for the children. We didn't have anything.

We went to Qamishly [a city in northeast Syria]. From Qamishly we went to Maliki [a city] near the border with Iraq but the price of medication [for Hamad's condition] was very high. The Syrian regime bombed Maliki. I didn't have a job or money and [there was] no school for the kids. That's why I came to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I came directly to Qushtapa [refugee] camp. We don't have our family. We feel like strangers.

The biggest problem here in Iraq is that there is no treatment for the child. I came to Kurdistan with one hope: to cure our child or at least to improve his health. We got a referral to a hospital in Erbil. When they knew I was Syrian they didn't help me. I don't have a job here and it's much more expensive than Syria.

I am really happy they [UNHCR] told me I was leaving [for resettlement]. The date is not specified. My first dream is for Hamad – I want him to improve. I know people are being treated like humans [in Europe].

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Resettlement offers refugees a chance to rebuild their lives. It is a concrete solution that can make a tremendous difference to the lives of the most vulnerable refugees of the Syrian conflict. Yet many countries that could help Syria's refugees are choosing to turn their backs.

Amnesty International is calling on wealthy countries to significantly step up efforts to take far greater numbers of refugees from Syria, both now and in the long term.

In particular, Amnesty International calls on the governments of high income countries in Europe (such as the UK, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark), the Americas (such as Canada, Chile, the United States of America and Uruguay), Gulf Cooperation

Countries (such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates), Asia-Pacific (such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea) as well as other countries which have the means and capacity to resettle refugees (such as Brazil) to:

- Collectively resettle 380,000 refugees from Syria out of the main host countries by the end of 2016;
- Give priority to the most vulnerable refugees such as unaccompanied children, women and girls at risk, torture survivors, LGBTI people, and those with serious medical needs. Palestinian refugees from Syria must also be given resettlement opportunities;
- Accelerate resettlement procedures so that refugees are quickly relocated.

## TAKE ACTION

You can help Syria's refugees by joining Amnesty International's campaign, #OpenToSyria. By opening our hearts, minds and communities to Syria's refugees and calling on our governments to resettle them, we can give some of the world's most vulnerable people the opportunity of a safe and peaceful life.

For more information and to join the campaign #OpenToSyria visit <https://storify.com/amnestyonline/open-to-syria>

## ENDNOTES

1. While full consent was sought to interview and take photographs of all the people featured in this report, some names have been changed in order to ensure that there are no repercussions for family and friends who are still in Syria.
2. The figure of 4 million refugees is based on a combination of figures from the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the Turkish government, among others. For more information please see Amnesty International, *Left out in the cold: Syrian refugees abandoned by the international community* (Index: MDE 24/047/2014), 5 December 2014, p.4, available at [www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/047/2014/en/f9a8340f-d247-4c84-b3b8-ce4e8cbebf0d/mde240472014en.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/047/2014/en/f9a8340f-d247-4c84-b3b8-ce4e8cbebf0d/mde240472014en.pdf) (accessed 8 January 2015).
3. UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-2016: In response to the Syria Crisis (3RP)*, 18 December 2014, available at [www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/](http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/) (accessed 9 January 2015).
4. UNICEF, *Press release: With 15 million children caught up in major conflicts, UNICEF declares 2014 a devastating year for children*, 8 December 2014, available at [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/media\\_78058.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/media_78058.html). Also see <http://childrenofsyria.info/> (both accessed 9 January 2015).
5. UNICEF, *Sustaining the commitment to preventing a lost generation of Syrian children*, 24 September 2014, available at [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/70207\\_76025.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/70207_76025.html). Also see <http://nolostgeneration.org/> (both accessed 12 January 2015).
6. In addition to Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, the other main host countries for refugees from Syria are Turkey and Egypt.
7. Since Amnesty International met with the refugees featured in this report, some have been resettled.

8. UNHCR, *Innovative Solutions Strategies in the Syria Situation, Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement*, Geneva, 25 June 2014.
9. World Health Organization (WHO), *Weekly epidemiological record: Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis: progress report on mass drug administration, 2010*, 26 August 2011, available at [www.who.int/wer/2011/wer8635.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/wer/2011/wer8635.pdf?ua=1) (accessed 16 January 2015).
10. UNRWA, available at [www.unrwa.org/prs-lebanon](http://www.unrwa.org/prs-lebanon) (accessed 12 January 2015).
11. UNHCR, *Resettlement and Other Forms of Admission for Syrian Refugees*, 9 January 2015, available at [www.unhcr.org/52b2febafc5.html](http://www.unhcr.org/52b2febafc5.html) (accessed 12 January 2015).
12. Amnesty International, *Left out in the cold: Syrian refugees abandoned by the international community* (Index: MDE 24/047/2014), 5 December 2014, available at [www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/047/2014/en/f9a8340f-d247-4c84-b3b8-ce4e8cbebf0d/mde240472014en.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/047/2014/en/f9a8340f-d247-4c84-b3b8-ce4e8cbebf0d/mde240472014en.pdf) (accessed 8 January 2015).
13. Amnesty International, *Left out in the cold: Syrian refugees abandoned by the international community* (Index: MDE 24/047/2014), 5 December 2014, available at [www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/047/2014/en/f9a8340f-d247-4c84-b3b8-ce4e8cbebf0d/mde240472014en.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/047/2014/en/f9a8340f-d247-4c84-b3b8-ce4e8cbebf0d/mde240472014en.pdf) (accessed 8 January 2015).
14. UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-2016: In response to the Syria Crisis (3RP)*, 18 December 2014, available at [www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/](http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/) (accessed 9 January 2015).
15. See for example, Amnesty International, Lebanon: New entry requirements for Syrians likely to block would-be refugees (Index: MDE 24/002/2015), 6 January 2015, available at [www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/002/2015/en/9b0ffff1-8ef1-4609-ab78-68c5931ddc83/mde240022015en.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/002/2015/en/9b0ffff1-8ef1-4609-ab78-68c5931ddc83/mde240022015en.pdf) (accessed 8 January 2015); Amnesty International, Jordan: Children among Syrian refugees denied entry, 19 August 2013, available at: [www.amnesty.org/en/news/jordan-children-among-syrian-refugees-denied-entry-2013-08-19](http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/jordan-children-among-syrian-refugees-denied-entry-2013-08-19) (accessed 8 January 2015); Amnesty International, Growing restrictions, tough conditions: The plight of those fleeing Syria to Jordan (Index: MDE 16/003/2013), 31 October 2013, available at: [www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE16/003/2013](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE16/003/2013) (accessed 8 January 2015); Amnesty International, Surviving to struggle: Refugees from Syria in Turkey (Index: EUR 44/017/2014), 20 November 2014, available at: [www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR44/017/2014/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR44/017/2014/en) (accessed 2 December 2014); Amnesty International, We cannot live here anymore: Refugees from Syria in Egypt (Index: MDE 12/060/2013), available at [www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE12/060/2013/en/a864e9fc-76c5-44ea-ab96-bd9e96843fc2/mde120602013en.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE12/060/2013/en/a864e9fc-76c5-44ea-ab96-bd9e96843fc2/mde120602013en.pdf) (accessed 12 January 2015); IRIN, <http://newirin.irinnews.org/syrian-refugees-restrictions-timeline/> (accessed 14 January 2015).
16. For example reproductive health clinics were closed in Jordan, source: Syrian Refugees: Inter-Agency Regional Update, 29 September 2014; funding limitations have led to restrictions on health services in Lebanon, see Amnesty International, *Agonizing choices: Syrian refugees in need of health care in Lebanon* (Index: MDE 18/001/2014), 21 May 2014, available at [www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE18/001/2014/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE18/001/2014/en) (accessed 8 January 2015).
17. UNHCR, UN and partners seek US\$8.4 billion for new Syria programme in 2015, 18 December 2014, available at [www.unhcr.org/5492a7bb6.html](http://www.unhcr.org/5492a7bb6.html) (accessed 9 January 2015).
18. UNHCR defines resettlement as: "Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them as refugees with permanent residence status. The status provided ensures protection against refoulement and provides a resettled refugee and his/her family or dependants with access to rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. Resettlement also carries with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalized citizen of the resettlement country." Source: UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, available at [www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf) (accessed 12 January 2015).
19. The preamble to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees states: "Considering that the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries, and that a satisfactory solution of a problem of which the United Nations has recognized the international scope and nature cannot therefore be achieved without international co-operation". The importance of resettlement, a key aspect of burden and responsibility sharing, has been repeatedly emphasized by the Executive Committee of High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom), the governing body of UNHCR; see UNHCR, A Thematic Compilation of Executive Committee Conclusions, pp 471-478, available at [www.unhcr.org/53b26db69.html](http://www.unhcr.org/53b26db69.html) (accessed 12 January 2015).
20. In 2015, high-income countries are those with a GNI per capita (using the World Bank Atlas method) of \$12,746 or more. The World Bank's list of high-income countries can be found at <http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups> (accessed 16 January 2015).



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