



Stories of Syrian refugees

Nada Al Musari – Baqaa governate, Jordan

Photos of Nada and her son Naser:

<http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15634&k=dfde5f7ff4>

Generic Photos: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15639&k=9a0f814f66>

Nada spends her days worrying about her two sons.

She is a 54-year-old mother and fled from Syria a year and a half ago and now lives in Jordan with her boys and husband, Abu Naser.

A strong, independent woman, she is working hard to hold her family together in the toughest of circumstances.

Nada's eldest son, Naser, aged 25, is disabled and also psychologically traumatised by what he witnessed in Syria. He struggles to walk and uses crutches after suffering nerve damage in his back which he sustained when he was shot by a sniper. The family are uncertain whether he will ever be able to walk without crutches again. Naser used to make a living playing in a traditional Syrian band back home and loves to make music.

Nada remembers her journey out of Syria was difficult and dangerous, taking several weeks. Her memory of the moment she decided 'enough was enough' and that she was going to leave the country is as clear as a bell.

Many of her friends and family had been killed in Syria after there was a mortar bomb near to her home – her son Somar was the only survivor. She talks in a matter-of-fact fashion as she speaks of that devastating moment.

"When this [explosion] happened I just didn't know what to do. I thought my son had died. I went to check and my friends and a cousin were dead but my son was alive – he was the only one that survived," she says.

"I felt Jordan was the safest place for us, the safest place in the Middle East and also the medical side in Jordan is very good which is important for my disabled son."

At one stage during the journey she was separated from her husband, Abu Naser, and their son Somar, 21. She continued with the journey and then, once she had settled Naser in safety in Ramtha, Jordan with her husband, she returned to Syria to

OXFAM ITALIA
VIA C. CONCINI, 19
52100 AREZZO - ITALIA

T + 39 0575 182481 – F + 39 0575 1824872

www.oxfamitalia.org

look after her son Somar who was injured by a car explosion and to help him flee once he was well enough so the family could be reunited.

Initially they lived in a tent in Zaatari for 20 days but now they live in a flat in Zarqaa, a large, bustling city in the North of Jordan. Almost half a million refugees live outside formal refugee camps, in Jordan.

All Nada wants to do is provide for her family but she also finds time to help other Syrian refugees.

She volunteers as a community facilitator with Oxfam and now helps at cash, water filter and hygiene voucher distributions in Zarqaa. But her main concern is her family – and for people who have been injured during the crisis.

She says: “My main challenge is to be able to take care of my family. I hope to go back to Syria and I hope my son will work again. I wish the international community would support the injured people because there are now huge numbers of them and not enough support for them.”

It’s a daily struggle to survive. Medical care for Naser is expensive and Nada is unable to pay for his treatment. Without treatment his condition will only deteriorate and the likelihood of him ever fully recovering is significantly reduced.

Nada’s family received emergency cash assistance from Oxfam that has helped to pay for some treatment – including an operation on Naser’s back.

She says: “The help that Oxfam has provided us has improved our security. Without this help we would be in the street.”

Abu Naser suffers from post-traumatic stress after seeing scenes of violence in Syria. Abu Naser is undergoing psychological support with Oxfam partner Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD). This is helping but there is still a long way to go on the road to recovery.

Ammar – Baqaa governorate, Jordan

Photos of Ammar: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15636&k=a22c047823>

Generic photos: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15639&k=9a0f814f66>

“I miss the smell of Jasmine; I miss a beautiful morning ...I miss Syria, I miss my country.”

Father-of-three Ammar, from Aleppo, has a soft smile but a heavy heart.

He suffers with depression and is psychologically scarred by his experiences of the conflict in Syria. Ammar’s state of health has deteriorated at an astonishing rate and in the last three months he has had multiple panic attacks and heart attacks.

“In the past year I have been very unwell. I have had three heart attacks due to the grief and sadness of the situation in Aleppo. I heard the news one evening and I cried all night in grief. The following day I had a heart attack. I have to take three types of pills which cost 70 Jordanian Dinars (about \$100) a month,” he says.

Ammar, 37, his wife Um Saeed and their young family have been living in Jordan since January 2013 and for the past three months they have been living in a three-room home in Baqa’a camp, just outside Amman.

Baqa’a was once a tented refugee camp following an influx of Palestinian refugees in 1968 – but now it’s made up of basic stone dwellings that are poorly-built. Ammar used to be a tailor back in Syria and says he had a good life.

He remembers: “I was a citizen like everybody else. I had a committed life, living with my family in safety and peace and we had a good life.”

But Ammar’s home here in Jordan suffers from damp and is extremely cold.

“We can’t afford to live here, I can’t afford the rent fees which are 100 Jordanian Dinars a month (about \$140). We have no money – not even enough to eat,” he says. Ammar feels isolated in the camp, has few friends and struggles to find the confidence to get out of the house.

Ammar’s youngest child, Sham, was born in Jordan and is now just under a year old.

His second child, Islam, aged two and a half, is inquisitive and loves to draw. She asks questions about everything, but Ammar feels guilty that his family is now safe while there are millions of children still caught up in the conflict.

He reflects on the fact that his son has missed out on two years of schooling – one year in Jordan and another year when they were living in Syria because the violence intensified.

He says: “I admit I was emotional and negligent in taking the decision not to send him to school. Because my sister’s children, my relatives’ and everybody else’s children don’t go to school – and I wanted Saeed to live the same life as they did... However, if it looks like we are going to stay longer in Jordan I will certainly send them to school because we don’t want to create a generation of ignorant people.”

Saeed, Ammar’s son, eight, is the opposite of Islam. He is shy and quiet and it’s clear he has been deeply affected by what he has witnessed and experienced over the past three years.

Ammar speaks of his hopes three years since the start of the unrest in Syria.

He says: “Three years and we’re always asked the same questions and we have the same answers. Let’s eventually end this, we are all humans, we are all brothers and humanity. I feel that no one is feeling what is happening to us...all I want is to be able to eat, drink and earn a living. I don’t want to be rich, I just want to be able to live. I don’t want a luxurious life, I just want the daily basics...”

Ammar is extremely concerned about some family members who have just left Syria. The hardest thing for Ammar is not knowing.

“All of my family is back in Syria, but all of the time the phone network is down. But thank God, the day before yesterday I was able to talk to one of my eldest brothers and ask him about my mother’s health and make sure she’s OK.

“And I learnt from him that some of my sisters are now in Turkey. I have no idea if some of my oldest brothers are dead or alive - I can’t get in touch with them. We are now separated in different countries....Your family is like your body – if you lose an organ, a finger, a leg, the pain is unbearable. And even if the family gets back together this scar will remain and the pain will still be there,” he says.

Ammar’s own journey from Syria to Jordan was difficult – made more difficult by travelling with three children and trying to avoid the violence around Aleppo which intensified when they decided to leave. Ammar is not hopeful of a peaceful end to the conflict.

“The international community should do more - we want freedom in a peaceful way.”

Ammar, with tears in his eyes, expresses some of his fondest memories of his life back in Syria.

“I miss the smell of Jasmine; I miss a beautiful morning when I used to listen to Fairuz [the Lebanese singer]; I miss my friends; the good times I used to spend with them – especially when we used to hangout. I miss Syria, I miss my country.”

Oxfam has provided Ammar with hygiene and cleaning products for his family. These help to prevent disease outbreaks and enable Ammar to spend money on other essential items. Oxfam has also given Ammar cash to pay the rent for his family home ensuring he, his wife and 3 children have a roof over their heads.

Hamdo – Originally from Gouta near Damascus and now lives in a small flat in Baqaa, Jordan.

Photos of Hamdo: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15633&k=f92cd10342>

Generic photos: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15639&k=9a0f814f66>

Memories of horrific scenes haunt Hamdo.

The 38-year-old father is struggling to come to terms with the trauma of leaving his country – and what he saw before he left his home in Gouta, near Damascus.

He says: “I have suffered psychologically – I have seen blood in the streets. I went into an abandoned building and saw dead bodies piled up. I couldn’t sleep for months. When I first arrived [in Jordan] my situation was critical – I was badly affected psychologically. I am trying very hard to overcome this but my psychological situation isn’t improving as much as I would want it to over time.”

Leaving his home behind was a painful and drawn-out experience for Hamdo and his wife and three children, Walaa, 14, Alaa, 12 and Hala, 6, in June 2012.

He remembers: “We received an announcement that we had to leave our home because of heavy fighting. We had to move eight times inside Syria throughout the countryside. It took us two months to get out of Gouta to Damascus and then it took a further three and a half months to get out of Syria.”

Hamdo hopes that moving to Jordan will only be a temporary move.

He said: “When I left Syria I thought the situation would be over in six to seven months. I left Syria because of the children. They were suffering both physically and mentally – whenever they heard planes and trucks they were terrified and they would scream. When they arrived in Jordan they were still scared of loud noises – they thought they heard gunfire.”

The effects of the conflict are most notable in Hamdo’s youngest child, Hala. Although she was only four and a half when she left Syria, she misses her life there.

He says: “My little daughter who is now six remembers our home; she cries all the time and even though we left when she was four she still remembers her toys and the children she used to play with. She also remembers she was cuddled by her uncles all the time. None of this is happening now.”

Hamdo and his family now live in a small, damp and cramped family home in Baqa’a, outside Amman. Baqa’a was once a tented refugee camp following the arrival of Palestinian refugees in 1968 – but now it’s made up of poorly-built stone buildings.

“Before the crisis, I lived comfortably and was happy with my life and work. I used to have a meat business with my six brothers. There is nothing more difficult than to be so close to your family - and then be separated from them.”

Hamdo has three brothers left in Syria and keeps in touch with them by text message - but this is intermittent because the network coverage and electricity supply in Syria are so poor.

“We communicate through messages and it really depends on if the network is available or not and if the electricity is on or off. My brothers in Gouta don’t have electricity or water and they had to drill wells to extract water.

Hamdo says to improve the chances of successful communication, his brothers go up to the roof of a building after midnight or 1am when demand on the network is at its lowest.

“We never, never, never imagined something like this would happen because Syria was really comfortable – even the poor lived a good life. Electricity and water were never cut off and the summer was so beautiful especially in our area - which turned into beautiful parks during the summer.

“As long as the conflict continues, it is more than impossible for me to go back. At the beginning of the events it was possible for a solution to materialise but now it looks impossible.”

Hamdo has struggled to come to terms with the trauma of leaving his country but he’s found volunteering to help other Syrian refugees has helped him overcome his grief.

“I knew nobody when I first arrived in Jordan but Oxfam activities have opened doors for me – I’ve formed relationships. I now live in the same community as Jordanians and Syrians and the relationship between us has improved,” he says.

Hamdo is happy that people are helping each other through the difficult times: “The relationships between Syrians in Baqa’a is very good – when somebody is in need of money to pay the rent we make a collection. When there is a medical emergency – people volunteer to take people to the hospital.”

Jordan Valley – Sara

Photos of Sara: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15635&k=a3cdea86e7>

Generic photos: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15639&k=9a0f814f66>

Sara's grief is etched on her face.

She fled Hamra, in Syria, just over a year ago whilst in the early stages of pregnancy but had complications when she arrived in Jordan and ended up losing the baby.

“Leaving Syria was a difficult journey because there were a lot of bombs on the way from Syria to Jordan. It took us four days to reach Jordan. I was so scared and then I had severe problems with my pregnancy,” she says.

Sara, 24, still has family in Syria including her mother-in-law and uncles. She speaks to them about once a month and the time between each phone call is hard. Sara worries about their safety.

Sara, her husband Yasir and three children (Sulaiman, six, Naser, four, and Zainab, two) live in a small tent in the Jordan Valley in a small camp alongside around 80 people.

There are inadequate clean water sources here and poor sanitation with open sewers nearby as people have built their own latrines next to their tents. The small camp where Sara and her young family live is just one of 45 tented settlements where Oxfam works in the Jordan Valley.

Though access to basic services such as water, medical care and public transport is poor, families have settled here to escape the colder weather in Amman and reduce the chances of their children getting sick. Sara's eldest children Sulaiman and Naser attend a small school which has been set up in a neighbouring tent by another refugee who used to be a teacher in Syria.

Sulaiman went to school in Syria and he misses it. Sara says: “He used to play and have lots of toys but now he has nothing.”

Life is tough and the family struggles to survive day after day.

Sara says: “I have no one in Jordan. I lost everything in Syria... Our children haven't had new clothes since we arrived in Jordan a year ago. My children don't even have nappies – we need to borrow them.”

Sara's husband, Yasir, says: “We don't want to be rich – we just want to be able to afford basic things and the on-going medical care that is so important for Sara”.

Yasir used to be a shepherd, in Syria, and misses his work which he used to enjoy.

Yasir is hopeful that one day there will be a peaceful solution to the conflict.
“ I have hope - without this I can't stay alive... I never imagined that life would turn out like this,” he says.

Sara and her family are too scared to go back to Syria – they say that if they go back they would not be able to reach their home safely and would instead lose their lives.

Oxfam provided Sara with emergency cash to help her pay for surgery after the complications with her pregnancy which helped to save her life though she miscarried and lost the baby.

She said she was left devastated and attributes her health problems to the stress of fleeing Syria. She is still in severe pain and has to visit the doctor regularly. Her visits to the doctor take over an hour and costs more than Sara can afford.

“This support helped me a lot - without the money I would still be waiting for help,” she says.

Sara's medical care and providing her children with comfortable living conditions are the family's main concerns.

“My children face a difficult time here, the weather is now starting to get hot. I'm not able to afford to go to the doctors as I cannot afford to take my children with me – the cost is too high. Also, one of my children is very sick.

“I hope to get more assistance – I hope I'm able to overcome my health problems and become better in the future. We want to eat like people do, and to live like people do... to eat, drink, and to put clothes on our backs, like all people. That's what we want.”

Three years on since the start of the crisis in Syria, Sara has a message for other mothers.

She says: “I hope all the mothers in the UK and in the rest of the world do not face times as difficult as those I faced back in Syria.”

Despite living in a small tent in the Jordan Valley, Sara and her family feel welcomed by the Jordanian people and are thankful for they are able to live in safety.

“Although we are refugees we are still able to live in dignity – everyone respects us here,” she says.

Jordan Valley – Abu Mustafa and a Wedding

Photos of Abu Mustafa and the Wedding:

<http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15637&k=c58e0e729f>

General Photos: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15639&k=9a0f814f66>

Abu Mustafa is the proud father of seven children. He has also just celebrated the marriage of one of his brothers , Mohammed, 21.

Abu Mustafa and his family fled to Jordan from Syria nearly three years ago, during the early days of the conflict, leaving their home in Hamra behind to escape the escalating crisis and to seek a safer life.

The wedding took place in the tent where Abu Mustafa and his family live in the Jordan Valley. The bride, called Samar, was from another Syrian family living in a neighbouring tented settlement. The traditional Syrian dish Mansaf (chicken and rice) was prepared and there was dancing. Abu Mustafa's sad eyes sparkle for a moment as he remembers that evening of joy and laughter.

The 50-year-old says: "We came to Jordan for safety. Now no one can go back to our village, it's too dangerous and life is too difficult...we want people across the world to help us to get back to our country.

He speaks longingly of his life in Syria before the conflict: "In our country, we were among our family, relatives and friends. We would go out and visit each other, we'd spend the evenings at family gatherings. We also planted seasonal crops, like cucumbers and tomatoes... and we'd eat this produce of our own lands.

"We would visit each other and have family gatherings and celebrations together – that is what is possible when we are together in our homeland."

Life on the road as a refugee is constantly changing and Abu Mustafa and his family are now starting to think about moving to the north of Jordan in June because the weather in the Jordan valley will become too hot and unbearable. They will take down their tent and move their few belongings to Mafraq governorate. The constant moving gets the family down.

Abu Mustafa says: "The most difficult thing is the mobility – we keep moving and moving and installing the tent again and again is a burden on us. It's annoying for us as a family as we don't feel stable and it's important to feel stable."

There is an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness in the small tent despite the recent marriage celebrations.

When asked if he feels hopeful for a peace agreement to end the crisis Abu Mustaffa answers: “No, no, no, no...I am not hopeful that there will be any peace, I feel hopeless. We all hope things will get better, but nothing happens. I want to go back to normal life where everything is fine and people have stopped killing each other.”

The future of his children and grandchildren is one of the most important things.

He says: “We hope to go back, so that our children will return to their schools to learn, and to farm their land and be productive in their own country”

- Access to basic services including medical care, clean water and public transport is poor in the Jordan Valley. Oxfam is working with Abu Mustaffa’s family and others living in 45 tented settlements, in the Jordan Valley.

Um Majd - Za'atari Refugee Camp, Mafraq

Photos of Um Majd: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15638&k=5918722f1e>
Generic photos: <http://wordsandpictures.oxfam.org.uk/?c=15639&k=9a0f814f66>

Um Majd fled Syria for her children's sake. She feared they would all lose their lives if they stayed.

She arrived in Zaatari refugee camp just over a year ago and lives in a small trailer in the camp with her 4 children (Majd, 12, A'hed, nine, Mohammad, six, and Abdullah, two).

Um Majd admits they were reluctant to leave Syria and move from their village near Daraa to the camp.

She remembers clearly the day the family left: "At first we were against the idea of coming, but we couldn't take it anymore. With the bombings, we could not go out to get bread or food. Our house is located in the middle of our village. We spent our time moving from one place to another but when our house got bombed we left for Jordan the next day."

Travelling with four children out of Syria in the middle of winter was a tough experience. She says: "We had to go through a lot of hard things. It was raining and was difficult on my children - they got sick on the way. Also, when we got here we didn't have anything much - when you flee, you pack light. You take yourself, your children and the clothes you're wearing."

Every minute of every day she feels trapped and aches to return home.

She says: "God's will, the situation will be better and we can go back [to Syria] again. No matter where you go - there's no place like home. Even though we're staying here we're not adapting that much.

"Just staying there [in Syria] is beautiful. Back in Syria, life was good. We used to go on holiday and to weddings together. You know this and that person, you have family around, that was enough for us. We used to go out, and see green grass. Here there is none."

She shakes her head sadly, and in disbelief: "All of us get depressed – from the little kids to old men. My son here is almost seven and he told me he wants to go back to Syria because it would be better than staying here. I replied that if we go there we would die. He said: 'that's ok but let's just go home'. Can you imagine that's from a seven years old boy!"

Um Majd says many families are already returning, because they have had enough and want to escape life as a refugee. She says: "I hope that we don't stay this year, and that this month the crisis will end. Most of the people here are just tired and fed up with this situation. Some people are taking their kids back to Syria saying that it's ok if we die - at least we're in Syria. That's better than just staying here - it's like a slow death here. It's like they're keeping us in a bottle and every once in a while they let the air gets in just for a little while and then they close it back again."

Um Majd fears for the future of Syria – and for her family who are still there.

"It feels as if Syria is becoming like a punch bag that everyone wants to kick. They shouldn't treat it like a war, they should think about the women and the children. We're safer here [in Jordan] but we have people who we talk to back in Syria and they tell us about their lives.

"They say they have got to the point where they are eating from the garbage and anything that grows from the earth."

Um Majd has a direct message to world leaders and communities around the world: "I would like to ask all the countries to support the Syrians, not financially but psychologically. To stand by the people and take their side and not to just stand by watching."

She hopes they will listen – for her children's sake.