

Syrian refugee narratives: "What kind of future awaits myself and my children?"

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Syria

Ameer is a nine months old baby, from Dara'a governorate. He arrived at Zaatari camp on 2 April 2013 with his parents, a four-year-old sister and a two-year-old brother. Shortly after his arrival, Ameer was brought to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) paediatric hospital, suffering from a severe throat and eye infection, resulting in a high fever.

The father, who preferred not to give his real name due to security threats inside Syria, said that they were pushed to leave Syria as the bombings have been very intensive and it was impossible for him to jeopardize the safety of his wife and children by staying there any longer.



“We crossed the border to Jordan at night leaving everything behind us, family members, property and an entire life! My head was full of questions all the way to the crossing point: Will we return to Syria? How long will we stay in Jordan? What kind of future awaits

myself and my children there? And other tens and tens of questions which I couldn't find answers to," said Ameer's father.

After an 8-hour journey from Dara'a to the Jordanian border, we arrived at the refugee reception point and were received by the Jordanian army. They gave us water to drink and blankets before we boarded a bus for Zaatari refugee camp," the father continued.

"Before leaving Syria, we heard that Zaatari camp was big but seeing it with my own eyes is really different. My wife and I were taken by surprise at just how big it is! It's even bigger than Dara'a, I mean, when it comes to the number of population," Ameer's father said.

"Living conditions are very difficult in the camp, my four-year-old daughter cried all through our first night in the little tent, or our new 'house' in Zaatari. She was saying, it's very cold here, I want to go home! I didn't know what to tell her. We were given blankets according to the number of family members and I couldn't get an extra one. I took off my jacket and covered her tiny body till she slept. Our first night in Zaatari was very difficult. Now we have adapted ourselves".

"Within days of our arrival to Zaatari camp, my son got sick. Access to health facilities in the camp is very difficult, you need to wait hours in long lines and the examination you get is very basic and quick. When I arrived at another hospital, I waited for two hours and a half before a nurse checked on my son."

"Ameer needed hospitalization because he didn't receive proper care in the surrounding facilities at the early stage of his sickness, that's why we came to the MSF hospital. Ameer is now much better and can swallow some milk. The MSF doctor said that he will be better if the treatment is completed.

"My father called me from Dara'a a few hours ago saying that he has identified a safe and secure area nearby the village where we live, so I plan to come back soon as my son recovers," Ameer's father said.

"We left Syria seeking safety for our children and fleeing the bombings but if they will get sick because of the dust and coldness inside the camp, what's the point of staying here? It's better to go home."

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Syrian refugees in Jordan: The limits of assistance

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Syrian refugees in Jordan: The limits of assistance

Nearly half a million Syrians are now refugees in Jordan, making up a third of the 1.5 million people who have fled the conflict in Syria to neighboring countries. More than 100,000 of them live in Zaatari camp, situated in the North of the country, less than 20 km from the Syrian border. Up until last month, one thousand refugees continued to arrive daily at the camp, which has become the largest camp for Syrian refugees in the region.

“Thus far, the Jordanian government has made significant efforts to host refugees,” explained Antoine Foucher, head of mission for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Jordan. “But the pressure caused by the massive influx of refugees has resulted in an increasingly difficult situation.” Tensions are a constant factor inside the camp, which has far exceeded its full capacity. They also affect the Jordanian community, which has become strained by the influx of refugees, particularly in the Northern Province, where the population has doubled in just a few months. “There is no existing sustainable solution for hosting refugees, mainly due to a lack of long-term financial support.”

In the Zaatari camp, the plight of the refugees remains extremely precarious. In late March, MSF opened a pediatric hospital, the only hospital facility open to children aged one month to 10 years. The team also increased its staff and expanded its activities to deal with the constant pressure of new arrivals; an outpatient clinic for children just opened in late April. During the first five weeks of its activity, MSF medical staff carried out around 2000 consultations, 60 of which were emergency cases. More than 270 children have been hospitalized and treated since the opening of the hospital.

“Our staff is witnessing more and more cases of diarrhea and respiratory infection, which reflects the precarious living conditions of the refugees in this overcrowded camp, and we expect to see an increase in dehydration cases over the summer,” said Claudia Truppa, MSF medical doctor in Zaatari. Water availability is clearly a crucial issue in the region. Healthcare facilities are also insufficient for the size of the camp’s population.

More broadly, the entire healthcare system remains fragile. Like other health actors present in Zaatari, MSF refers the most severe cases to Jordanian public hospitals outside the camp, which are already nearing full capacity. However, the underfunding of aid has also threatened the ability of the Jordanian healthcare system to properly treat Syrian refugees.

“Without political will and financial commitment from states, the Jordanian government risks resorting to drastic measures: permanently blocking refugee access to the country or restricting access to care in public facilities, undermining the already precarious living conditions of hundreds of thousands of Syrians,” says Antoine Foucher. “Jordan urgently needs greater international support if they are to sustain a real open-door policy.”

MSF has been working in Jordan in a hospital in Amman since 2006, performing reconstructive surgery and carrying out outpatient consultations for wounded persons from Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

MSF staff is also present in Syria, where it currently operates 5 hospitals in the North of the country; as well as in Lebanon and Iraq, where it provides medical and psychological care to Syrian refugees.

