

# **The Financial Journey of Refugees**

**A Compendium of Field Notes from A Three-Country Study  
Greece, Jordan, and Turkey**

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## **Framing this collection: An opening note**

The stories in this volume represent refugee narratives that came into our lives between July 2016 and June 2017 in Greece, Jordan, and Turkey. We, a team of researchers based at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, encountered these stories as part of a qualitative study on the Financial Journey of Refugees. In this study, we have examined money as a key node of the displacement experience: fueling transactions among formal and informal actors along the way; determining livelihood options; shaping or restructuring kinship networks; and coloring risks, vulnerabilities, or protective forces available to refugees. An array of outputs illuminating the findings from this study is available on the [Institute of Human Security](#) website.

Though our study publications range from a full-length report to briefing papers and from blog posts to opinion pieces, we felt a need to present some of our research in a way that more explicitly centers refugee voices. The analysis and writing processes of research, as well as the use of research in policy-making and humanitarian practice, necessitate fragmentation. We edit narratives, drawing a broader analytical point from quotes about people's lived experience of forced displacement. In this collection, we present refugees' narratives with as much wholeness as we could preserve. The initial prompt that led to the narratives that follow was "tell us how you got here." There are stories of violence and coping, of resourcefulness and humor, of the types of experiences that may deplete one's faith in humanity or, in the next breath, restore it.

We hope that this collection can serve as a teaching and research tool for students of forced migration. We, alongside faculty colleagues who have supported this research project, hope to use these materials in order to enable students and researchers to learn how to work with refugee narratives without placing the burden of re-narrating violence on those who experienced it. At the same time, illuminating that not all storytelling about forced migration is a site of narrative imposition, many of the refugees we encountered expressed a desire to tell their life story in whole, with the agency of a narrative "I" preserved in the retelling. This collection seeks to balance these considerations of, on the one hand, preventing and responding to research fatigue while on the other, making space for refugee narratives to emerge in forms that resonate with those who shared their life stories with us.

At the time of writing, many of the conflicts that triggered these individuals' forced migration are ongoing. Threats to the lives of our research participants and their families and friends continue at the points of origin, in transit, and at some of the aspirational destinations. For this reason, while we have preserved as much of the structure of the narratives as possible, we have chosen to edit details that may compromise the security of our research participants. In doing so, we acknowledge that notions and experiences of security are constantly shifting and non-singular: there is no single, objective account of what may represent a threat to the life of a refugee. Examples of elements we edited include abstracting references to specific locations,

identities, or professions that would make research participants more likely to be identifiable. Our editing decisions were necessarily subjective, necessarily partial, necessarily contestable. Throughout the life cycle of this project, we have sought to embrace these elements of the research process, be honest about them, and reflect on the ethical and political dilemmas of knowledge production.

Roxanne Krystalli, *on behalf of the research team*

September 2017  
Thessaloniki, Greece

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Age, gender, wealth, health, social networks, family status, ethnicity, religion, literacy, education, modes of travel all contribute to a person's resilience or vulnerability while traveling. Additional considerations shape the two parts of this document: distances traveled, number of political borders crossed, number of languages traversed, and number of new currencies negotiated. These added considerations affect journey vulnerability and prompted us to divide our compendium into two parts—longer journeys (greater distances, more languages, more smuggling networks, more currency conversions to negotiate) and shorter journeys (perilous nonetheless). Not taken into consideration into the Part 1/Part 2 division, but we hope evident in the notes themselves, are the vulnerabilities caused by sudden departures.

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# **Part 1 – Longer Journeys**

## “Unusual Under Normal Circumstances”

Afghanistan to Greece: two young women travel with their parents via Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, every transaction accounted for

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*On July 17, 2016, we conducted an interview with two young women inside their tent at Piraeus Port, an unofficial and temporary camp at the main port of Athens where at one point thousands of asylum seekers lived in tents under bridges or in warehouses. We met the women while they were washing carpets at one of the waterspouts set up by aid agencies. Before the end of the summer, Piraeus Port would be officially evacuated by Greek authorities, and all those living there were either relocated to different camps set up outside of Athens or voluntarily left to find accommodations on their own. Understanding the circumstances of inevitable evacuation, the sisters were expecting to leave the Port for a camp the following day.*

*We spoke with the two sisters, Sam (24) and Sim (21), over the course of an afternoon. The interview was conducted in Farsi and English. The women graciously served us tea inside their small tent, which was tidy and neatly arranged, and close together with a number of other tents in a particular block of friends and relatives, covered by a large tarp. There was a multiple outlet plug with an extension cord that led to a power source near the adjacent warehouse, through which the girls had set up a fan, charged their phones, and boiled water in an electric kettle for tea. While inside the tent, a young girl of about seven or eight joined us, drawing pictures with the pencils and paper we brought in hopes that our interviewees would draw maps.*

*We began the interview speaking with just Sam, but the younger and more outgoing Sim took over telling the majority of the story about their journey from Afghanistan to Greece. The sisters and their family are Shia Tajiks from Afghanistan. They are both unmarried and well-educated, and appeared to be from an upper-middle socioeconomic class. The following story of their journey is told from Sim’s perspective.*

Note: The term saraf refers to a money agent who may operate formally or informally. Sarafs perform a variety of services. They can transfer money from one party to another. They also can hold “in trust” deposited sums of one party to be later transferred to that same party or to another party (e.g. a store, a friend, or a smuggler) based on the instructions of the depositor.

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**W**e traveled here with our parents, our fourteen-year-old brother, and our seven-year-old brother. My eldest brother, who is twenty three, is in Sweden. My fourteen-year-old brother has psychological issues after witnessing a bombing in our neighborhood in Kabul.

My family is educated. My father went to university in Moscow and was a military officer. My mother completed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. My older sister was a language and literature teacher in Kabul, and I was studying to become a doctor. We never had financial issues—we survived the

insecurity of the war, but we had to flee our home because my oldest brother had a personal clash with some people that made it dangerous for him to stay in Kabul. This ended up making our entire family unsafe. I cannot elaborate on what this was, but last Ramadan, my brother left Afghanistan. At that the time, all of the borders in Europe were open and he made it to Sweden. After he left, his enemies started to harass our family. We did not pay much attention to the threats originally, but about six months after his departure, it was clear that it was too dangerous for us to stay in our home.

We sold most of our assets to afford the journey, except for some of my father's property in another town. My father used information from friends and word-of-mouth to choose a smuggler for the trip, and the smugglers told us which *saraf* [money agent] to use. The smuggler told us not to carry any money along the way. We gave all of the money we had to the saraf in Kabul—he would hold the money and release the payments to the smugglers along the journey. The smuggling network managed logistics for each leg of the trip. The combination of the name and account number we used for the money transfer interactions was called the “ramz” so every time a payment needed to be made, my father contacted the saraf, told him the “ramz,” and the saraf would release the money to the smuggler. There are a number of different smugglers all in the same network, each with a specific job. The journey to Iran cost \$1,000 each for the six of us, and overall the entire journey to Greece cost about \$3,500 per person. Now in Greece, we are completely out of money.

We began our travels eight months ago during the winter. From Kabul, we traveled for 24 hours by bus, passing through Kandahar. We were very afraid because we heard that Daesh stops buses along the way looking for Shias passing through. We spent two nights in a border town, and then we made the journey across the border into Pakistan. This took about 28 hours, and we traveled sometimes by car and other times by foot. There were about eight families traveling all together, along with 13-14 single men. When we were in Pakistan, we were sometimes followed by the police, but once we reached the smugglers' safehouses, the police no longer bothered us. The safehouses in Pakistan belonged to families who had some connection to the smugglers. We had no food for the first night in Pakistan, and we had just enough cash on us to buy some bottles of water and cookies to give to the young children. The smugglers told us not to carry any cash at all because of thieves, and we were not allowed to leave the safehouses to try and access our money through the saraf.

After spending the night, we departed at eight a.m. to make the journey into Iran. This was a 13-hour trip, once again by both car and on foot through desert. When we were in cars, we traveled in the back of large, open top vehicles—every inch was packed, carrying 70-80 people. The young men sat around the perimeter of the vehicles, holding on for dear life, and the women and children sat towards the middle, clutching each other. The men sitting at the perimeter sometimes fall out of the vehicle and are left behind in the desert.

We arrived across the border to Iran by nine p.m. and slept in the desert that night. The next day at noon, the group was split up into smaller groups, each group going with a different smuggler. Sedan-sized vehicles came to pick us up and take us to Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Baluchistan province in southeast Iran. We had to fit fourteen people per car. The driver sat alone and two people sat in the front seat—one in the seat and one on the floor. These seats cost more than the others. In the back seat, four people, usually women, sat in the seat, and 4 more sat at their feet. The trunk was reserved for young, single men. One young man would lay down in the trunk, the two would curl up into a “sajda” position, the position of prayer. This journey took six hours, as we had to take breaks every couple of hours to give the boys in the trunk a break and to either change vehicles or change the license plates on the vehicles to avoid

detection. The drivers of these vehicles were Baluch people, the local people who have ethnic ties to the Baluchi in Pakistan.

We arrived at a safe house in Zahedan and crammed seven families in a dirty room of about 18 square meters. We departed the next morning at five a.m., this time heading towards Bam, Iran. We were in the same cramped setup in the car, until we reached a desert area where the cars could no longer travel. The next leg of the journey was Bam to Kerman. The smugglers gave us an option to pay an additional \$100 to fit three people on a motorcycle. While some families had enough money to agree to pay extra, our family did not, so we left some of our belongings that were too heavy to carry and walked for 30 hours. In the desert, we had no cell phone signal, plus the smugglers never allowed us to keep our phones on anyway to ensure there were no informants. This part of the journey was very difficult.

When we finally reached Kerman, the journey across Iran became easier as we once again traveled by vehicle. We continued west towards Shiraz and stopped at Neyriz in Fars province. We were told to get out of the cars and wait under a bridge for different vehicles to come, along with dozens of other migrants. Within minutes of our arrival, the Iranian police came threatening arrest and started to beat the younger men. The smugglers spoke to the families and said that for an additional 1,500,000 rial per family, the police would let them go. We had no choice but to agree to this amount and it would be added to our overall fees. It was clear that the smugglers and the police had a deal, and this was only the beginning of many scenarios that allowed the smugglers to exploit us for more money.

From Shiraz, we traveled another fourteen hours north to Isfahan and eventually to Tehran. In Tehran we slept in small tents on the property of a house that was reserved for the smugglers themselves. We called this “tent city,” because the smugglers were in the large house looking over all of us refugees. Tehran was the next point at which all of the refugees were required to pay the smugglers, but we had arrived on a weekend and the sarafs were closed, so we stayed there for two nights. At this point, since we were getting closer to Turkey, the smugglers were worried that the younger boys in particular would flee without paying them, so they had guards stay up to make sure that nobody left at night. They separated the men and the women. They had the single young men call their families and then would beat them so their families could hear and promise that they would make the payments.

On Saturday morning, the sarafs reopened—we all made the required payments and then departed at eight a.m. towards Urmia, a city that is about 55 kilometers by road to the Turkish border. At this point, we knew the chances of being caught by authorities would be greater and it would be safer for us all to blend in with the local population—since we are ethnic Tajiks, we had a greater chance of passing off as an Iranian, whereas the Hazara people could be easily identified (and Hazara are more abused in Iran). We used buckets of water to wash ourselves and our belongings and tried to look presentable. To get to Urmia, we were finally able to sit normally in a car, with my dad in the front with the driver and the rest of us in the back, but we sped through back roads to avoid the police stations and the driver told us to pray for our lives as we were moving too fast to feel safe. We reached our destination in Urmia by six p.m. and rested there before heading towards the base of the mountains that would lead us to Turkey.

The mountains were snowy and the area was inhabited by local villagers. At ten p.m., we walked through the snow to get to the next safe house and prepare for the walk into Turkey—our feet were already soaked and freezing. The smugglers gave us a more substantial dinner of eggs and tuna to prepare for the difficult walk. We began walking at one a.m. and the smugglers

told us it would take about 40 minutes to get to Turkey, but we had a feeling that the distance, made more difficult by the snow, would take several hours. They said that for another \$100 per horse, the families could travel on horseback rather than by foot. Some of the richer families who had already been based in Iran could afford to get horses for themselves and their belongings, but our family could only afford to get one for my mother. After two hours of walking, the smugglers told us that we were moving too slowly and that the sun would start to come up at four a.m., increasing the likelihood that we would be caught—by their estimation we were still three hours away. So our entire group, at this point utterly exhausted, walked back to the base of the mountain. This seemed like just another tactic to force the families to pay more to ride by horseback.

We rested for an additional two nights to regain the energy needed for the difficult trek. We made another attempt at the journey across the mountain, this time starting at eight p.m. After many hours of walking, we reached a point that was too steep for the horses, so all of the travelers, including my mother, started walking by foot, relying on the younger men to help drag us up (even if they were not blood-related, which would be unusual under normal circumstances). At the top of the mountain, the smugglers said that we had reached the Iranian-Turkish border and that they were not authorized to continue the journey into Turkey. Us travelers would have to walk down by ourselves and Uzbek Afghan smugglers that were based in Turkey would meet us on the other side. My father led the way with the rest of the men and the women following behind. At this point there were about 30 of us making our way down through the snow and ice. It had only been about ten minutes of walking downhill when we heard my father call out to inform the group that we had been caught by the Turkish police.

The Turkish police gathered us together and had us wait under a cove, joining another group of migrants that they had caught earlier. Together there were about 70 of us. The police took us in two large vehicles to a nearby police outpost. The women with young children were taken inside where it was heated while the other wary travelers had to wait outside. We were all then moved to another area that had two small, dirty rooms where we could rest, but we were too cold, wet and scared to sleep. It was five a.m. and the police had us each empty our personal belongings (money and cell phones) and sealed them in plastic bags labeled with our names. Soon, more police vehicles arrived to transfer us to another shelter. We were frisked once more and separated into two rooms, one for the men and one for the women and children, where we were crammed side by side to sleep for the night. The men had a bigger room so they were a little less cramped, but the women's room had heat.

While we were finally in a sheltered area, there were many incidents throughout the night that kept us uneasy. Initially, we could hear the police harassing the men and beating some of the younger travelers. At one point in the night, one of the police came to the women's side to tell them that their commander insisted that a young woman named Mary join him for the night. Mary was a twenty-year-old traveling with her father and brother, trying to get to France where her fiancé had already fled. The police said they would deport her, her father and brother back to Iran if she didn't agree. She stood up for herself and said that no matter what they threatened, she would not go with the commander. They finally conceded and admitted that it wasn't their commander but another police who was asking for her, so they left her alone. At four a.m., an Uzbek who was among the travelers woke up all of the men and started hitting them with their own belts, chastising them for not waking up for prayer. He said that he was from a group like Daesh and would slit their throats if they neglected their prayers. He made them stay outside in the snow until nine a.m.

During the seven days that our group waited in this police shelter, the smugglers that were supposed to have met us on the other side of the mountain kept visiting the police outpost and bringing cases of food and alcohol to bribe the police. Since they do not receive their payment until a leg of the journey is completed, it was in their interest to make sure the travelers were released so we could make it to our next destination. At this point, a new set of actors became involved in the smuggling deal—the Turkish mafia. A group, led by a tall man with light hair and green eyes, paid the police to release each of the travelers. The mafia had basically “bought” us travelers from the police, and the only way for us to continue the journey was for us to agree to pay an additional \$300 per person through the smuggler to give to the mafia. This was in addition to the \$750 per person it was already costing us to cross into Turkey.

The smugglers sent station wagons to transport us to the next destination, Van, in eastern Turkey, this time in groups of 14 per vehicle. We traveled for five hours and were in Van by midnight. In Turkey, we registered ourselves as refugees, but when we made the final payment to the smugglers we asked them for a contact who would get us to Greece. We stayed overnight in Van with a family that was connected to the smuggling network and departed the next afternoon by bus to Istanbul. The bus tickets were paid by the smugglers (all part of the cost of operations).

We followed the smuggler's instructions to take a taxi to Zaytoun Borno, an area of Istanbul where there are many smugglers. We met our smuggler and went to his house where we stayed for four days in his basement. The smuggler was Uzbek, as were all of the Turkey-based smugglers along the route we followed. From Istanbul, we took an overnight bus to Izmir, arriving by six a.m. and waiting until noon for the next smuggler. Then we were transported from Izmir to Çeşme, a small town about an hour away that is only kilometers away from the Greek island of Chios.

We ate lunch and went to a grassy area on the shore where we were given life jackets and waited for the smugglers to blow up the rafts and insert wood panels for the passengers to sit. As we were waiting, Turkish police came and took all of the life jackets from the passengers, but left us alone. We went back to a wooded area near the shore and waited until one a.m. The smugglers told us we would make the journey to Chios but without life jackets. My family and the group of travelers with us refused and we were transported back to a hotel in Izmir. This was the first of four attempts that my family and I made before successfully crossing by boat to Greece. On the second night, we were transported back to the shore and we crammed 75 people in the raft. We were only in the water for 15 minutes and could feel ourselves slowly sinking when we were caught by the Turkish coast guard and told to turn back.

On our 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt, we went to the wooded area near the shore at six p.m. and waited all night for the Turkish coast guard to stop patrolling the area. By eight a.m. it was clear that we had missed the opportunity and the smugglers decided to change the embarkation point. We traveled by car to another location that was 30 minutes away. This location was further from Chios, whereas from the previous location we were able to see the Greek island. At eight p.m., the sea was too rough for us to make the journey so we slept outside waiting for the waves to subside. We finally set off the following night and after half an hour, the motor on our boat failed. The smugglers used pins that my sister and I had in our hair to fix the engine, and 30 minutes later we continued. My family was carrying a few personal items and the only documentation we had—our tazkira (national Afghan identity card) and documentation from a doctor noting that my younger brother had a psychological condition.

It was March 3, 2016, and by midnight, we were close to the Chios shore. We were scared of drowning and we wanted to call out to the Greek coast guard when we were close, but traveling with us was one of the smugglers who was designated as the captain of the boat, and calling the coast guard would get him caught. Our raft got caught in a fishing net and at this point had holes and water filled the bottom—the documentation we were carrying was ruined. We finally reached Chios and cried out of happiness. Officials and volunteers helped us out of the boat. The smuggler/captain asked us to keep the officials distracted while he turned the raft around and returned to Turkey.

We registered as asylum seekers in Chios which would allow us to stay in Greece legally for a year. Two days later we purchased ferry tickets for \$40 per person and went to Athens, from where we planned to continue our journey into Europe to join my brother. But when we got to Athens, we learned that the borders had been closed to migrants just days earlier. That's when we set up camp in Piraeus.

Now we do not have a plan—the plan all along was to wait for the borders to open and continue the journey. We were only in contact with my brother in Sweden twice, in Iran and in Turkey, and he didn't send any money. Often volunteers and organizations bring food or supplies and ask refugees whether they are Syrian or Afghan, and only give the food to Syrians. Even the cash programs here are only for Syrians. We have seen some friends who have left if they have money to hire smugglers to get them out of Greece. Many young men go to Patra to get to Italy, where they have hopes of getting into France or Germany. But we have no money left. Now that the Greeks are dismantling the Piraeus camp, we are getting ready to move to the camp in Oinofyta.

We do not know what is next for us.

## “First Syrians, Then You”

Afghanistan to Greece: With young children, an illiterate woman flees violence only to face discrimination in the camp

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*Farzana is Hazara, an ethnic minority that is vulnerable to violence in Afghanistan. Many Hazaras are Ismaili or members of the Twelver sect, Shia groups derided by other Shias, in a country that is predominantly Sunni. Often, Hazaras have features that easily distinguish them from other Afghans, making them easy targets for abuse.*

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**M**y name is Farzana. I come from a village in central Afghanistan. I am Hazara, a group that is hated and persecuted. I have never written or read a word in my life. I lived in a village of twenty-eight houses. Two years ago the Taliban entered my village, making business arrangements with the landlords. The landlords grew rich but we did not. My husband had become addicted to the opium he harvested. He, his brother, and his mother would beat me when I could not care for all five of our children, milk our goats, and milk the landlord's goats. He was too drugged to do his share of the work, but not too drugged to hit. My husband would go to town once a month to buy tea and sugar, but I never did. I was never allowed to leave the village. Soon, he became deeply in debt to the landlord, because of his addiction. After a time, he stopped going to town. We had no money to buy tea or sugar.

One night my husband announced that he would be receiving about \$6,000 in Afghani. I had no idea how much that was, just that it was a lot. I asked if it were a loan. He said no, he had gone to the landlord for a loan and the landlord had said, “I will not lend you any more money, but I will pay you \$6,000 to marry your daughter.” My husband agreed. Our daughter was eleven years old.

It is custom in our village to prepare a wedding feast for the engaged couple. I had only one week to prepare. The feast would be at our house where the mullah would come and wed the landlord to my daughter. It is also custom for the wife to join the husband a week later in his home and be welcomed by a second feast. The night of the wedding came. I cooked all day. The mullah came and performed the vows. Later, I could hear my daughter screaming. She broke the door of the bedroom and ran into my arms and cried, “rescue me!” Before dawn I heard the landlord leave for his home. I gathered all five children, tucked as many leftovers in my clothes as I could, took the \$6,000 from the pocket of my husband (he was in a stupor), and ran. We scrambled for hours through the wild. I found the road and eventually the town and a taxi. I told the driver to take me to my mother's town and he did.

When my mother saw me she said, “I must hide you.” Your husband and the landlord will come looking for you here. She placed me with her cousin. Her cousin traded with businessmen in Pakistan and knew the roads well. The next day he drove the children and me to the border

where we switched cars, then drove to Quetta. In Quetta I found work as a domestic cleaner. My patron was a professor and very kind, often buying gifts for my children. One day I bought a mobile phone, my first. My daughter showed me how to use it and I called my mother. My mother said, "They are coming to kill you. You are not safe. You must go to Europe."

I did not know what Europe was nor where it was but I knew I had to leave. My cousin found an elder smuggler in Quetta. We paid a saraf there who took my money for safekeeping. As I would reach a waypoint along the route through Pakistan and Iran, with the help of my daughter, I would text the saraf a four-digit code and he would release a payment to the elder smuggler. Then a new local smuggler would show up and take us to the next waypoint. Across Iran we often traveled like this, passed from smuggler to smuggler. We traveled with other Afghan refugees. We would be jammed in a car, or in the back of a truck.

Even though, the local smugglers were to be paid by the elder smuggler I was often harassed to pay more. So I pretended to be married to one of the Afghan men and he would deter them from extorting more from me.

Like this, step by step, we traversed from Iran to Turkey, over the icy Zagros mountains that took 20 hours to cross. Then we faced the chaos of the sea from Turkey to Greece—a sea where I saw death.

In Turkey, with the help of my mother's uncle and by asking around, we left for the coast. We traveled eighty of us in a small raft. I felt certain we were going to die. We left at midnight and arrived at dawn on the island. A Greek man found us as he was walking along and alerted the police who came to us within an hour. We were completely soaked to the bone and for two weeks, did not have a change of clothes. We were told at the camp: first Syrians, then you. We stayed in a large tent, filled with angry men throwing stones, breaking glass. The only protection we had was the blankets we hung to form walls.

Now in this camp [*on the mainland*] here in Greece I still have some of the money from my husband's sale of our daughter to the landlord. I am saving it to move north. My daughter, now thirteen, has reached Holland and I want to join her. I am able to manage on the monthly cash grant that I receive from an NGO. Many people in the camp complain that it is not enough but I am able to stretch the entire amount till the end of the month. I buy a slaughtered lamb and hang it in the hallway to dry. Every day I tear off pieces of it, wash it, and then simmer it in oil with tomatoes, onions, and herbs. My children eat meat, rice and vegetables every day.

As soon as our card is loaded with cash, I give the card to an Afghan friend who travels to a "machine" in Athens. He knows the PIN numbers. He stands at the machine and asks a Greek passerby to help him. My friend says he does not understand the letters on the ATM screen, the direction of the language on the screen, or the language itself. He is better off asking a Greek. He then takes the money and the receipt and brings it to me. I can't read the receipts but I save them and ask my daughter to check the receipts against the money. We had only one problem, once. My Afghan friend went to the machine and it rejected the card. The NGO came to the camp to help us. They took out their computers and saw what had happened. They fixed the problem right there, giving me a new PIN. This was the only camp where I did not hear, "first we help Syrians, then you." I matter here.

But, I do wonder what else the NGO could see when they look at their computers. They could see my name and how much money was in my account, but I wonder what else and who else can see what they see. I worry still that my husband will track me down.

# Paying It Forward

## Eritrea to Greece: A young woman crowdfunds her journey to Europe

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*Rose is a female Eritrean in her mid-thirties. She describes herself as educated, but lower-middle class. She also details the untenable constraints of living in Eritrea, so limiting and violating that she feels forced to leave her husband, whom she loves, and travel alone to escape a punishing array of government controls. She, with her male companion, also Eritrean and also traveling alone, tell of the propaganda, the spies, the lack of freedom of movement and expression. The following is told from Rose's perspective.*

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**B**ack home, my parents had a shop. We had a nice house and all our family—my brother, my husband, my parents—and I were living together. Money was okay. My parents were able to choose their job because they were from the previous generation—before the new national service system. Now, all people under forty five have same life as me and the people who are older are issued weapons and told by the government to protect the neighborhood because of the “Ethiopian threat.” All propaganda.

I went to school until the eleventh grade. And then I had to enter the military training for 1.5 years like all other Eritreans. For three months you receive no classes at all. At three a.m., they wake you up for exercises. You obey always. It's very hot and the food is bad.

Then, the government decided to make me work for the Ministry of Defense. They could choose which department and which city I should work in. If I did not do what my boss wanted me to do, or if I was not good with my boss, they could move me.

This lasted ten years. I left because they put my husband in jail. They caught him while he was at work. He held political, pro-democracy views. After they put him in jail they would come to my house regularly to intimidate me, to look for documents, proof of his guilt. They were very violent. I was scared.

I spoke to my parents and told them I wanted to leave. I called my Eritrean friends in Sudan. One of them arranged everything for me. She looked for a smuggler. I had to pay \$5,000 to go from Asmara to Khartoum. It is so dangerous to leave Eritrea that it is very expensive to corrupt the guards. I didn't have to sell anything: my husband's family, my family, all our friends in other Arab countries sent money to my friend. I didn't arrange anything. My friend told me I had to meet a driver at three p.m. a week later, in Asmara. I stayed home for a week and waited. I had about \$200 only with me. I didn't take clothes with me—only something to eat. I knew nothing about what would happen. In the car, there were four other women. The driver was nice. He didn't speak or anything. He brought us to Khartoum – the driver knew everything about the border and he went through a secret way. Maybe he paid police. I don't know.

When I got to Khartoum, I called my friend and told her I had arrived. She paid the \$5,000 to the smuggler and I went to her house. I spent three months in Sudan, not working. I was very afraid of the Eritrean security in Sudan. I knew people who had been sent back from Sudan, so I was hiding. I realized I couldn't continue like this forever. I talked to my friend about going to Europe. She helped me to get to Europe. I am not sure if it was the same smuggler. My friend took care of everything for me. She told me she needed to collect \$5,500 to go to Istanbul and then an additional \$1,500 to go to Greece.

In April I got a passport with a tourist visa to go to Turkey. I took a flight with a transit in Qatar. Everything went smoothly with security.

At the airport in Istanbul, a Sudanese man was waiting for me, my friend had told me how he would be dressed. We took a taxi to his house. There were about twenty people of all ages and nationalities, women and men staying there. They locked me up in the house for two weeks until they had received the money from my friend. My friend needed more time than the first time [*Eritrea to Sudan*] to collect the money because she needed to contact relatives and friends in Israel, America, from all over the world. About twenty people participated in funding my journey.

*Her companion says: "We Eritreans are very supportive of one another because we know the hell that Eritrea is. Also, Eritreans know how bad smugglers are. We know very well that they will abuse and rape women if they don't get their money. So people feel pressure to give. Your relatives and friends cannot leave you to die. That's why we have become very fast and good at sending money to each other over the decades."*

*I ask if they are expected to pay back the people who help them. Rose says: "No, no, no, not at all. But if my Eritrean friend asks for my help, I must give. I will give back this way. It's a collective system. All Eritreans understand each other on this."*

I stayed one month in Istanbul. Then the Turkish smuggler—the one my Sudanese smuggler knew—arranged for me to go on a private bus to Izmir. There was another Eritrean woman in the bus but most people were from Syria and Arab countries. When we arrived in Izmir we stayed in the bushes for two nights. There were no tents. We slept under the trees. They told us not to make any light, not to smoke or to use our phones. They gave us food once a day. They had given us a life jacket in Istanbul. Suddenly someone said "Yallah" [*"let's go" in Arabic*] and we prepared to go.

The two first times the marine patrol came and caught us and I had to go to jail for one week. Some stayed three to four days, some stayed for more than two weeks. They released Syrians automatically. Each time, we were sent back to Istanbul. We had to pay to go back to Izmir every time. I would call the smuggler when the police released me. I had to pay around €50 each time for the bus. For some it was €70 or 80; it depended. The third time it worked. I had \$500 dollars when I arrived in Turkey and I converted \$100 for liras as I needed it.

# Hercules

Eritrea to Greece: A man escapes Eritrea, endures kidnapping, makes it to Israel to be returned to East Africa, and tries again

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*For about fifty minutes, Hercules and his friend Rose, both from Eritrea, tell about their country's military regime and its inhumane military system. They study for three months in Sawa and then start their military service, which is only supposed to last a year and a half but can last forever—unless you want to go to jail. Once Eritreans complete the first year and a half of service, Hercules and Rose claim, the government nominates some citizens to pursue traditional military service while others are selected to pursue secondary studies in a National College—they closed the only real university in 2006. The government also chooses what each citizen will study, and what position he or she will occupy within which department of which ministry. The government arranges everything for you, there is no rule of law, no freedom, only the government. They tell me about the propaganda, the spies, the lack of freedom of movement and expression, and their history. "If they catch you trying to cross to Ethiopia," Rose says, "they shoot you automatically. So everybody goes to Sudan." The following interview is from Hercules' perspective.*

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I did about one year of military service in Eritrea. Then, my friend and I wanted to study but the government had already decided our professions for all of us. They wanted to choose for us. We were very angry. We realized we should leave the country, but we decided to study English like the government asked for the next two years. We thought that if we spoke English, things would be easier in our future, and it would give us time to collect money to leave. In Eritrea, the wages are very low; a doctor makes less than 15 dollars a month. The regime doesn't want rich educated people because they are influential. It's a danger for them to have rich Eritreans in the country.

In 2010, we started working in the fields for about three months illegally. Whenever security came to the field we ran away—we each managed to make \$350.

A Sudanese nomad, a shepherd, would come to the fields occasionally so that his animals could drink. He had two passports, one Sudanese passport and one Eritrean passport, so he could cross easily from Kassala to Eritrea. We weren't sure he was a smuggler but we knew he would be able to smuggle us out from Eritrea, so we didn't hide from him. We would bring him coffee and tried to become friends with him. We didn't tell him we wanted to escape until very late because we were afraid he might have been a spy. When we told him we wanted to go to Sudan he told us it would cost us \$700. We said that we only had \$350 each and he accepted to take us for that amount. We gave our money to a friend we trusted in Eritrea and asked him to give it to the smuggler once we made it to Sudan. We ran away the same night.

After hours of walking with the smuggler we reached Sawa - where I had done my military service. Suddenly, a patrol started shooting at us. Their dogs were running after us, we never ran so fast. We were lucky we stayed together and didn't die.

After about 20 hours of walking towards Sudan, the smuggler told us he didn't want to go to Sudan and that he would get in a truck to go back to Eritrea. We were yelling. We were very angry because he had promised to stay with us and to take us into Sudan. He said he would bring us water from a nearby village, and would take only half of the money from our friend. We then found out he did not and had pressured our friend to give him all of the money.

He came back with water after three hours and showed us the direction to reach the next town. We walked for hours. Our feet were hurting. We took many breaks. We arrived in the town at three thirty a.m. We entered the first mosque we saw. The Imam let us drink and shower from the pipeline. He made drawings on the sand to show us where the Eritrean restaurants were. There, we found Eritrean people who gave us clothes and took us to the UNHCR office.

We told the UNHCR that if the Sudanese police caught us they would take us back to Eritrea and we would be killed. We stayed in a temporary housing for vulnerable people for five days. But we had to be moved to a camp because we were 80 in the house. That camp was terrible. They didn't provide anything to us, there were no organizations helping us. I spent four months there.

You couldn't leave the camp unless you had money because you are not allowed to leave. In 2011, the only way to leave was to pay \$100 to a smuggler to cross the river that was surrounding the camp and reach Khartoum. I think it must cost \$600 now. My friend managed to leave after three weeks because his older brother sent him money. He received the money on his phone and sent it to the smuggler on his phone too.

I called some friends from Eritrea to ask them for money. They helped me. [*Hercules received \$200 through hawala system.*] Then, I gave \$100 to the same smuggler my friend had used. I was caught by the police for the first time and had to return to the camp. The police beat me with a stick in the police station. They brought me back to me camp after three hours.

After two weeks I made a contact with someone who said he could give me a job occasionally. I worked on a farm, harvesting, in the morning for three days. The guy would take us from the camp to his land and back. We made \$2.50 a day with two other Eritreans. We had to be careful not to get caught when leaving and coming back to the camp.

On the third day, while we had just started work, the guy told us to take a break. He gave us food and water then he disappeared. He had made a secret arrangement with white Arabs from the Sinai in Egypt, "Bedouins" that we call "Rashaidas" in Tigrinya. They were two and they had guns. They kidnapped us and took us to Sinai in a car. Seven other people were thrown into the van. When we reached the Egyptian border they put us in a bigger van—us three and other Eritreans who were in three different cars. In the big van, we were almost 56 Eritrean people. The back of the van had three to four shelves. There were more than ten Eritreans per shelf. We were squeezed. There was a layer of bricks on the top of the car so that from the outside, we couldn't be seen. When the car stopped, we could not breathe anymore. We would stop and get out of the van very rarely. They didn't feed us and gave us dirty water so we got sick. Some of us died from diarrhea. This lasted for a month, until we settled in Sinai, somewhere where there were no soldiers. We were slaves. I don't want to tell you everything.

They made me call my family. They forced me to cry on the phone and to beg them for \$3,500 so I wouldn't be killed. Some were asked for 40,000, 30,000. I was released after two and a half months. [*Hercules' family made a ransom payment through the Hawala system.*]

They released me and a few other Eritreans at the border with Israel. There were three fences, one to Egypt, one international border, and a third Israeli border. The Bedouins told us to climb the fences until *[we reached]* Israel. Egyptian police tried to shoot us. We managed to reach Israel by going under the international fence and climbing the Israeli one. Back in 2011, it was feasible but now it's very difficult. When we put our feet in Israel, we told the military we were civilians—they saw we were very weak, we had no clothes. They arrested us.

They took us to a refugee camp. *[I see online that this was actually a detention facility for African asylum seekers.]* There were doctors there that took care of us. We were like skeletons. After three weeks, I felt much better and they sent me to Tel Aviv with a few other Eritreans. There, I obtained police papers that allowed me to stay in Israel for two months—this visa had to be renewed every two months. I tried to get asylum but they told me this was a Jewish state.

I stayed in Israel for four years. I worked in restaurants and then at a swimming pool as a cleaner. My boss would take me to renew my papers every two months. I learned Hebrew there. I was working 15 hours a day, and made 2,600 shekels/month *[about \$700 now]*. I was sharing an apartment with four other Eritreans.

But at the end of 2015, the Israeli government said they did not want Eritrean and Sudanese refugees to stay in the streets in Israel. I got an appointment with Asylum Services to get into the concentration camp in November. They told me that I had two months to choose between three options: to be voluntarily returned to Eritrea and to receive \$3,500; to stay in a concentration camp forever; or to be deported to Rwanda with \$3,500. I chose Rwanda. I gave all the money I had collected to my Eritrean friends so they would transfer it to me when I needed it.

Before they deported me the Israeli authorities told me I had the right to work in Rwanda. In Rwanda we were placed in a hotel that the Israeli government paid for, and stayed there for three nights. Then we were given the \$3,500 in cash *[Hercules was hiding his money in holes in his jeans, under his belt]* and the Israeli police took our papers so we would not resell them.

The first night in the hotel, a smuggler known by Rwandan authorities approached us. “It’s governmental work. The governments of Rwanda and Israel are doing business with us and the smugglers,” he said. He told us that if we gave him 250 dollars, he would take us to Uganda. He said it was much easier for us to work there. I said yes because I already thought that Uganda would be better for us than Rwanda.

When we reached the border in Rwanda with nine other Eritreans, the smuggler took us to a small bridge and we crossed and arrived in Uganda together. The smuggler then took us to Kampala. Once there the smuggler asked us for \$300 to take us to a hotel in which we could stay for a week. I had no friends nor family in Uganda so I said okay.

The owner of the hotel who was Eritrean said I should go to Sudan because Rwanda and Uganda were difficult countries for Eritreans. I knew nothing about these countries so I wanted to go to Sudan. I had no more papers and needed a smuggler. The owner of the hotel introduced me to a smuggler who asked for \$700. I agreed to pay and said I give him the money once in South Sudan. He trusted me because it is apparently common for Eritreans to do this trip that way. The smuggler told me that the two other Eritreans wanted to go to South Sudan and that we would travel together. Two days later, we met in the hotel and left with the car.

Before we reached the border, policemen in Uganda caught us and asked for \$300 from each of us to let us cross. I had heard of other people who had had to give \$1,500. The smugglers encouraged us to obey.

We continued and reached the border with South Sudan. Our smuggler suddenly told us he had finished his mission. He called another South Sudanese smuggler and asked him to take us from the bridge to South Sudan. We had to give him \$700.

Once in South Sudan, three other smugglers on motorbikes came to us and told us to go on the motorbikes with them. They said that we could only avoid the patrol and police if we went through the jungle with them. They asked for another \$400. However, we did not reach the capital on the motorbikes. We had to stop and get in a minibus. *[This was included in the \$400.]* The drivers warned us there was a checkpoint and said we had to pay them more, we gave them a 100 dollars. Then, the police caught us and asked us for \$500. We were forced to give it to them. All of our money was almost gone.

Once in the capital, the smugglers showed us a hotel full of Eritreans. We moved there. Eritreans helped us find a smuggler to reach Sudan. With \$900 dollars, I got a fake document valid for six months that allowed me to fly from Juba to a small village at the north of South Sudan. From which I was picked up by a Land Cruiser—there were goats, oil bottles etc. in the truck. The whole trip lasted eight or nine days until I reached Khartoum.

In Khartoum, I had to pay \$30 to get a mandatory identity card. This was a valid document. But any time police arrest me in the street, they would take me to an “Arabi” *[a detention center]* and ask me for money to let me out. Sometimes it could go up to \$200. Whenever, I saw the police I had to run away. I stopped going out. I was very careful always. I stayed in my home and did not go out for nine and a half months. I got my Eritrean friends to send me more of my money from Israel *[via hawala]* because I was not feeling safe and couldn’t work. The government was telling the Sudanese police: “You can take your salary off Eritreans.”

In October 2016, I decided to go to Turkey. I found a smuggler who could make me a visa for \$7,350 *[for every €100, I have to pay a €5 charge]*. My Eritrean friends in Israel paid one of the agent’s smugglers in Israel.

## “The Man in The Black Dress”

Ethiopia to Greece: A taxi driver’s sister becomes his banker as he finances his smuggling costs across Africa

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*Salah is a male in his mid-twenties, showing some very deep scars from the violence he suffered in Ethiopia.*

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I am from the capital in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. It means ‘new flower’. I was a taxi driver for four years there, and my family and I are from there. I know the capital very well. I left my country in June 2016 and arrived in Turkey in July 2016. It was very quick. I left in a hurry and didn’t have time to plan much.

I was a part of the opposition party. We were in an anti-government demonstration and they shot me and other people. Too many people were injured, too many people died. Demonstrations are still happening and there is still violence.

*[I spent]* three months in a hospital bed. As soon as I went back home, the government started looking for me to put me in prison. They were looking for me every day, to intimidate. I lived with my parents and every day the police were coming to find us, so we had to move from one friend’s house to another. At the end, I told my parents I should be on my own, because they were very tired. I went to my mother’s friend place for a few months.

I went to the bank, took all of my money out, and asked my sister to keep it. I had money from my taxi job - about 300,000 Birr [*\$12,000*] in my bank account. I was making good money. I was working full time.

I wanted to go to Sudan. I called my friend who lives in Germany and he gave me the phone number of a smuggler and I contacted him. There were two smugglers actually, one from Sudan and one from Ethiopia, but they communicated. The first smuggler [*a go-between*] was very afraid, because this is illegal work.

We were communicating discretely for two weeks—we talked on the phone three times. I was always the one calling him. I told him this is an emergency—that’s why I want to meet with you. The smuggler was afraid the first time so a friend of him called me and said that he would meet me that same night. I went where we were supposed to meet but the smuggler did not come. I call him back after three days. Same thing happened. And finally, the third time it worked, he showed up. I had sent a picture of my face so he recognized me. I met the real smuggler after two weeks. We discussed the travel – I told him: “I have money and everything. Whenever I can leave, I’m ready.” The smuggler said okay. He asked for \$1,200, to go to Sudan only to which I said: “Okay, anywhere but Ethiopia.”

After three days the smuggler gave me an appointment. He had arranged for me to leave with a car. I had an agreement with the smuggler that once I arrived in Sudan my sister would give him the money. I had told my sister. In the car, there were two other Ethiopian men. They had the same political issues.

Someone working for the smuggler drove us to Metama [*at the border with Sudan*]. The driver told us to get out and he left us in a small house there. He told us to wait for a Sudanese man. When the Sudanese smuggler came we crossed the border at night with him by foot. We walked for four or five hours. Then we took a car to Khartoum. By the way, the smugglers communicate through so many different people. There are many channels. We don't know who he [*the local passer—the person who actually shepherds them from point A to point B*] is beforehand.

The driver doesn't leave us for a second until we arrive in Metama. But I liked the smuggler [*local passer*]. He was okay.

The Sudanese smuggler called the Ethiopian smuggler when we arrived. Then the Sudanese smuggler gave me a phone to call my sister so she would pay him. I think she met one of them in person but I'm not sure who or how she paid.

In Khartoum I had to stay in the smuggler's house for ten days without going out. I heard an Ethiopian had been deported from Sudan to Ethiopia. I tried to collect information and when I realized it was too dangerous to stay there, I told the smuggler I wanted to leave.

I said I wanted to travel to another country, farther away. I wanted to go to Turkey and stay there. The Sudanese smuggler put me in contact with a Turkish smuggler. I didn't speak with the Turkish smuggler, just with the Sudanese. He asked for \$2,000. I stayed in the same house for four more days. And then the smuggler gave me a fake passport with a visa to Turkey. [*He didn't know what type of visa.*] To go to the airport, I had to go to a square in Khartoum and look for a man in a white dress. I was told the Turkish smuggler in Istanbul would be wearing a black one. I took a direct flight to Istanbul. And didn't have any problem with security.

I exited the airport and found the man I was looking for and went with him to the car. A Somalian woman was inside. She spoke only English, not a lot of Arabic. Same process: I call my sister and she pays. We did not speak a lot so as to not put her in danger. The Turkish smuggler driving took me to another smuggler's house in Istanbul. There were eight or ten other people, including three women. I stayed there for ten days, but I left the house on the second day to go to church. On my way back, Turkish men insulted me and beat me. They told me not to come back to the church.

When I was back in the smuggler's house I told the story to the smuggler. He told me: "This country is not good for you. You have to leave from here if you have money." I still had cash but I hadn't told the smugglers—I had \$1,500 that I was hiding in my socks. So at that point I had to tell him I had money. I said I only had \$1,100 so I could keep \$400 at least. He said "OK." I had to pay \$1,100. I gave all the money to the smuggler right away because I trusted him. We had a good relationship.

Even if I didn't trust him specifically, I trusted the system. If you trust one of them, you trust the whole network.

In the evening a small van came in front of the smuggler's house in Istanbul. On our way we stopped at different houses to take on other people. This journey lasted six hours. I didn't know

where I was going. I arrived and saw we were on the coast. There was a boat and about sixty other people from different countries. It was night. I had a bag with me. Things went smoothly. Halfway from Lesbos, the protector boat, the UK ship, came to take us here.

Since then I cut all contact, even with my sister. I don't want to put her in danger. Money is not too important here. I have everything: a place to stay, food, a bit of money. If I really need money, I will ask. My family is a little bit rich so they don't expect money back.

## “No Mouse Hole in All of Afghanistan”

Afghanistan to Greece: A man averts Taliban recruitment with the help of his bank

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*During my meeting with Rahim, tea is brought to us, heated by electricity available under the concrete pillar supporting the flyover. About halfway through the interview, his friends in his makeshift tented courtyard join us for snacks and more tea. The automated chimes from near the broken down hangar peal notes from Melina Merkouri’s song, “Ta Paidia tou Peiraia.” A boy in the next tent plays a pink and purple plastic recorder.*

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I was born in Peshawar. My family traveled from their native Kabul to Peshawar 31 years ago. I had many problems in Afghanistan and even the journey to Pakistan was fraught with problems. My parents were able to give me a good education. I studied dentistry in Pakistan and decided to return to Kabul to establish my own practice. My parents returned as well but again they faced problems in Kabul. The Taliban were bothering me. I was asked repeatedly by phone to help them. One day, two men approached me at the clinic in person. They were nicely dressed and very clean. They said that their “brothers” had broken teeth wounds that needed tending. They pressured me to work for them.

I knew that if I did, the government would also pursue me. I had little choice. If I said *yes* to the Taliban there is not a mouse hole in all Afghanistan or Pakistan where I could stay hidden from the government or the ISI. If I said *no* to the Taliban, there is not a mouse hole in all Afghanistan or Pakistan where I could stay hidden from the Taliban or the ISI. In fact, the Taliban said they were working closely with the ISI and that they in partnership could give me a lot of money for my trouble.

At this point in time, I was earning about \$50 per day so I had some savings. I had money stashed around the clinic and money in the bank. After the face-to-face visit by the two Taliban gentlemen, I knew I had to leave by morning. I immediately withdrew all the money from my bank and combined it with the funds hidden at the clinic. I brought some to my parents and some to friends. I knew the approximate cost of the trip because I had heard friends discuss similar journeys.

From Afghanistan to Pakistan, I traveled with the assistance of one smuggling network, led by a single elder smuggler. I would call the elder as soon as I reached a major waypoint. At the first two waypoints [*entry to Pakistan, entry to Iran*], I called my family and gave them a four-digit code. My family knew that this code meant I was okay, and they called the elder, giving him the code. This signaled to the elder that everyone was satisfied that I had made it to the intermediate destination as planned. My parents then paid the elder by transferring cash from their bank to the elder’s bank account. After the second waypoint, we no longer used the code system. I simply called my parents and told them to transfer funds to the elder. The elder then sent the next smuggler to transfer me to the third waypoint. From there, no more payments were made in Iran and I was simply smuggled from person to person. In Turkey the smuggling network changed.

Now I'm contemplating my next move. I already attempted to travel to Italy by boat, but I had to return because the police noticed my fake ID.

There are two ways to travel to Italy. You can pay €1,000 and travel in the cargo hold and take the consequence of police capture and detention. Or, you can pay €3,000-3,500 to travel with a passable false ID, a fake passport. Or you could go through Macedonia and prepay €2,000. In this case you would be traveling with 50-200 people. I tried the Macedonia route, as well as attempting to cross on the boat. They both failed. I prepaid through a local shopkeeper, a Greek with Pakistani and Afghans working for him. I deposited €2,000 with the shopkeeper and an additional 100 fee for a total €2,100. The shopkeeper had been doing this work for almost twelve years and could be trusted. I made my payment and my smuggler assisted. But I was caught on the journey by NATO police. They were nice to me and offered me chai. I made it across to Macedonia but was caught right before entering Serbia. I was in a forest without water and bread for three days.

My friends—their experience is similar to mine, but with a twist. When they crossed the Zagros mountains, they were fired at by Turkish soldiers. Their smugglers fled. They finally made it across to learn that eight people had been killed by gunfire.

Syrians are given priority for registration. If you are Afghan, whether you steal or not you will get apprehended. If you are Syrian and you do steal, you will not get apprehended. We have no destiny here. We wait.

# Half A Son's Finger

Afghanistan to Greece: A broken man endures an uncertain financial journey through Iran and Turkey with what is left of his family

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I used to live in a large city and worked at an oil company as a project manager. I speak a few words of English. Because of my work with Westerners, the Taliban had called me a few times giving me warnings, including a written warning *[he shows a photo of it on his phone]* asking me to stop working for the foreigners.

I worked for an oil company which sold oil to Americans through contracts with European oil companies. *[How did the Taliban know you were working there?]* I had asked that same question to the Taliban and was told that they have people among my colleagues who report to them.

*[He paused and pulled out his phone and showed a photo of a teenage boy lying on bed. It was a photo of his 14-year-old (twin) son who was kidnapped on his way to school.]*

My son didn't return from school one day and was absent for three days—nobody knew where he was. After three days I found my son's body lying in my front yard. Ten days before he was kidnapped, I kept receiving calls asking me to quit my job and leave the high paying salary. *[He earned \$1,000/month which is high for Afghanistan]*. My son had been tortured. I could tell that boiled water had been poured over him.

One of my relatives who had an 11-year-old son also had a similar tragedy happen in their family. The boy's mother sent him to buy bread one day. The boy did not return and was murdered by the Taliban. Three days later his head was found in a different place. One of my acquaintances had also received warnings, too. Then the Taliban cut half of his son's finger off sent it to his parents, threatening that if no money was received then they would cut the rest of the finger and keep chopping up the rest of his body until they received money.

I was once beaten up with a Kalashnikov rifle by someone who drove behind me on a motorbike, while I was walking. *[He then leaned down and pointed to the back of his head to show the spot. There was a bump as if there was something inside.]* That is a piece of metal that got inside from an RPG. I had a brother who used to work for an international organization with a high salary and his own house. He was also killed by the Taliban a year and a half ago. I had three brothers who were older than he. Right now I have only one brother left who lives in our city. The first brother was killed by the Taliban, the other two died during the war with Mujahiddeen. One of them was a Mujahed soldier during the Soviet invasion and died 34 years ago. The other one died 29 years ago. I was only a small boy then. The fifth man who died in my family was my son. The Red Cross has the records of my son's case.

With my three sons, we traveled into the city by car. From there, to Tehran by plane. From Tehran, we went to the border of Turkey in a van with 20 other people. It took about 22 hours.

Look at my son. He was the one who was in a shock because of what happened to his younger brother, and is still traumatized. I have two sets of twins: the first two are 16-years-old and the

second is now only my 14-year-old son whose twin brother was killed. My 8-year-old daughter has been in Germany with her mother for the past couple of months.

*[His son, the one whose twin was killed, would sit and listen and not say a word during the interview just looked in the space.]*

After what happened to my son, I left Afghanistan within ten days. I got Iranian visas from the Iranian embassy for my three remaining sons and bought their airplane tickets from our city to Tehran.

The three boys arrived in Tehran and from there they would be transferred to Istanbul for a price of \$1,200 each, by a smuggler that I found from Kabul. The transfer was first in an SUV and partially by foot: they walked to a border city at some point for about twelve hours. Then they were transferred into a truck before getting transferred to a different smuggler. There was a different smuggler at each transfer point.

In Tehran, our biggest expense was the \$100 bribe paid to the Iranian police. The entire journey from the border town to Istanbul took almost two days and two nights. The smuggler was in Kabul with my sons and I spoke to him from home by phone and secured the money with a *saraf* in Kabul. This cost \$3,600 in total. The boys had some cash with them but the food was covered by the smugglers.

Once we reached Istanbul we stayed in a hotel for four days and paid for it themselves using cash brought from Afghanistan. Once in Istanbul we bought a SIM card for 50 Turkish lira. They exchanged \$100 for 320 Turkish lira in Istanbul which they used for their hotel stay.

Four days after my sons had left, I arrived in Istanbul with my youngest son [12], daughter [8] and wife [37] by plane. I found a smuggler to get visas to Turkey and tickets costing \$5,500-\$6,000 per family member. The actual cost of the Turkish visa is \$60 but it is almost impossible to get it. So I paid almost \$24,000 for all four visas and tickets. Finally, at this point everyone in the family was together in Istanbul.

I found another smuggler in Istanbul from among many smugglers there. Some are Turkish, some Afghan, some Tajik. I found an Afghan smuggler—but the actual mastermind smugglers are Turkish. I gave money I had brought with me to another *saraf* in Istanbul for future payments to the smuggler. I paid €1,800 per person, for seven people total, the whole family to be transferred from Istanbul to Samos island. The smuggler transferred us in a van that fits fourteen people but we had 28-30 people altogether. From Istanbul we were brought to Didim. There we spent 45 days. Food and accommodation was found and paid for by the smuggler.

I decided to wait for as long as needed before traveling further. The ocean waves were not good, so I checked the intensity of the waves on my cell phone every single day. When the waves were not as strong, the smuggler transferred us from Didim to the boat with 24 other people. It only took us one try to get to Samos.

After reaching Samos, I asked the *saraf* to release the €12,600 to pay for all my family members. We arrived on Samos island at one a.m. on February 9, 2016. *[He pulled out a paper and showed me his refugee registration stamp.]* At five a.m., MSF came and took the us all by bus to a camp. We all got our pre-registration in 3-4 days except for my wife who couldn't get it until 25 days later. For this reason, we stayed on the island until she got that. From Samos, we went to Athens by boat for €49 per person.

First, we all came to camp Victoria because an Afghan refugee told us about it. After spending one night in the horrible conditions at camp Victoria—we had no proper toilets and were surrounded by drug dealers—we left for Elliniko. This is how we came to be here.

## “Worth the 500 Mile Walk”

From Syria to Turkey: Straying hundreds of miles north, in no hurry to face the consequences of his escape, a young Syrian professional takes a circuitous route to reach Turkey

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*Note: in documenting this man’s story we use in quotes “the country north of Turkey” to allude to the land through which he walked 500 miles, without pinpointing the country. He never referred to it as the “country north of Turkey,” always to the actual country.*

*We have switched some of his paragraphs to maintain the flow of his journey from Syria to Lebanon to “the country north of Turkey,” where he sets off on a journey through the wilds for 500 miles, then finally to Turkey where he now has a job.*

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**I** worked for a UN agency in Syria. It was a well-paid position. I spent days at the office working, and at night I spent time with close friends. At one a.m. I would go home, and then rinse and repeat the next morning.

After I graduated from university, I was looking for a job. There was a vacancy in a UN program. I interviewed for it, then realized they wanted someone with more technical knowledge, so I explained that I lacked the qualities they were looking for. I think they admired my honesty and so they offered me another position. My role was an assistant for the program, then I had my finger in all the pies, so I moved into database management and coordinating field research.

I left Syria in late 2012 when my job ended after the start of the uprising. I was arrested twice for participating in the protests. The organization laid some of us off, as my job required me to travel between cities and they could not guarantee our security. I faced trouble at checkpoints, so decided to travel. Turkey wasn’t my destination, I decided to try a northern country. I wanted to go to a university there. I studied the language.

*[He explains that he traveled from Syria to Beirut.]* I flew from Beirut to Istanbul, then on to “the country north-of Turkey” that I wanted to explore. I kept my money on me the whole time I traveled. I brought winter clothes, but didn’t end up needing those because the best way to fight cold is by using layers. I also brought my ID, certificates, passport military service book.

When in the “country north of Turkey” I worked in a bakery when I ran out of money. My boss paid us daily wages. I got bored, and had to leave. So I used my remaining money to buy a tent and a hiking backpack. Working on the farms in the towns wasn’t that easy. There were times when I would not find a job for a few weeks. Then I would find one, and use the money to buy bread and mayonnaise. There was one incident when I could not find work for four weeks. I hunted for food with a Swiss army knife. All my money came and went on the trip, I started the trip broke and earned enough money for each day.

In one place. I was paid cash for day labor and spent that money on a daily basis. I spent as I earned to get some food. I had been able to save money working as a bouncer. I saved \$500. I used that to buy the ticket to Istanbul, some \$180. To get the ticket, I had met an American, part of a missionary group. He helped me buy the ticket online using his credit card. I paid him in cash. We are still friends on Facebook. He “liked” my hiking experience. We were friends.

I remember when I left Syria, I had \$1,800 on me. This was a lot of money for me. It was my savings from the work I was doing. The possibility of losing it was too much. If I’d known how to wire it to a safe account and pick it up there, I would have, but didn’t know how to do that. Even when I was in one place, it was hard for me as a foreigner to open a bank account with a residency. By the time I had been there long enough, the money was gone.

When I crossed to Turkey, the authorities stamped my passport and let me in. I slept on a bench in front of the Blue Mosque for three weeks, looking for an apartment I could afford. I found a room for 150 TRY per month, with only a mattress and a chair. On the bench, I was completely ignorant. I blocked out the existence of other Syrians. I didn’t want to introduce myself to anyone else because I didn’t trust them. I kept my cash with me on the bench, in my socks.

I enjoyed the apartment, with this old guy. He confused English and Russian, combining them to talk to me. I started looking for a job because my \$300 was running out. I ate one meal a day, and sometimes I even forgot to eat because I got used to low food consumption. I started posting on Craigslist to teach Arabic, English, Russian to try to make some money. I asked if market shops were hiring. I found Craigslist through looking for vacancies on Google. I saw that you could post there that you were looking for a job. I had a laptop on me. The apartment had Internet.

I had bought a smart phone in “the country north of Turkey” with a foreign SIM. I carried it to Turkey and tried to use the maps function but it didn’t have service. Then I got a Turkish SIM card, and discovered that the phone was locked and I had to register it in Turkey. I found out online that some shops can hack a phone for a small fee.

For phases where I didn’t have Internet, there was no way to get in touch with anyone. Throughout my journey, walking between towns, for weeks I wouldn’t have any contact with people I knew. I was out of units to call and out of coverage.

I kept my old foreign number to use on Viber until 2014. At that point, I was in a better position financially in Turkey, and I sent everyone a message and switched to my Turkish number on Viber. I used Viber to keep in touch with family in Syria, Europe and Russia. Later on, I started using Skype instead.

To send money inside Turkey to people with bank accounts, like my Turkish landlord, I transfer my rent through the bank. It’s straightforward and easy. But I cannot make any foreign currency transfers. I’ve been warned against it, told to inform the bank beforehand.

I send money to my family in Syria, but there is no way I could do it through an official system. Western Union can be used, but the Syrian government will give them *[my family]* the money in Syrian lira for a bad rate. They will lose a huge amount of money. The way we do it, the way most Syrians do it, is I give the money to someone here, they call their relative or coworker in Syria and that guy gives my family the same amount of money there. Confirmation is on the phone in the same moment.

In my experience, it is a man who does the transfer in Syria. In my family, my father goes to pick it up and my sister goes with him as an extra pair of eyes.

Advantages of unofficial transfer systems are that there is no fee and you can transfer USD. The disadvantage of the system is that it is very volatile. If the person you're working with is not trust worthy, you can lose the money. There is no guarantee, there are no signed papers. This is because it's an unofficial system. People only use it when they've gotten very positive feedback from a trusted source.

In my situation, my cousin gave me their information [*about the person who helps me do transfers here*]. I considered it for two months, and decided to try it once with a small amount. It instantly went through. I handed him the cash. He called his guy. My dad was there. I talked with him and he said he received the money right then and there.

I'm doing well financially now. I can send my family a good sum of money each month if I want to. But they resist my doing this because they want me to use it myself. I send them a sum every few months, whatever I feel is suitable. They are in an ok situation in Syria, they are not in financial need. The money I send, they are saving for emergencies.

I've never heard of issues with my dad traveling to get the money, I prefer not to send a large amount because it could be dangerous for my dad to carry it back and forth. Most Syrian families I know tend to save money at home, within the household, not in banks, so they prefer to carry smaller or medium sums. The trip is not a huge deal for my father, he's healthy, so it's not an issue.

No major challenges come to mind about my finances here, just the Turkish banking system that prevents Syrians from transferring foreign currencies to other countries. I have a cousin in Saudi and I cannot send him money from here. The other issue is the fact that the debit cards issued to us cannot be used online. I cannot do online transactions to buy books online. I do not have Paypal because it's no longer legal in Turkey. When I had Paypal I only used it to buy things.

Along the way there were a few people who helped me. There was the guy who let me use his credit card to buy my airfare. Some truck drivers allowed me to ride with them for a few days.

Hope? I had a very unexpected experience as I traveled. One day I found an isolated town on the coast in the countryside. There, I realized they are from my tribe. They hosted me there for two days. They considered me as one of the decedents of the people who fought in their wars 200 years ago. I felt like it was worth the 500-mile walk.

## Ten Euros and a Bowl of Spaghetti

### Nigeria to Greece: A man uses family land to finance his journey and ends up rescuing two women along the way

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*Bob is a male Nigerian, single, in his late thirties. Although he says he studied local medicine for ten years, he claims he is uneducated. He come from a large, traditional family. His father had many wives and was very religious. He had been living in Greece at the time of the interview.*

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**I**n Nigeria life was very hard, no jobs but we had big problems in our country. Our government was not treating us well. In 2000, I lost my mom—she was so sick. Really, sick because of life there—no food, no medication. My dad had problems, too. My father’s young brothers were trying to get his land, while he already gave them some pieces of land to us, his sons. *[He explained that in Nigerian families the oldest son inherits all the land and passes it onto his first son when he dies.]* My uncles attacked my father. They beat him and threatened to cut his leg and now he is partially paralyzed. He treated his legs and the brothers came back.

I have one older brother in France. He went to Italy first but he had problems there.

In Nigeria, you cannot sell your family’s land because it belongs only to the family. If you sell it to someone else, both will have problems—it’s “the bad eye of ancestors.” So there is a system that allows us to lend land in exchange for money. People can borrow your land if they give you money, but they cannot build a house on it, they can only bring in their animals to graze, or to harvest crops. My brother lent the land to a cousin for two years and asked for 1 million Nairas in return *[about \$3,100]*. He used that money to go *[to France]*.

I studied medicine for ten years. But for five years I could not find a job because of the political problems. If you don’t know someone in the company you want to work for, they don’t take you. Even the hospital is corrupt. So, I became a bus driver. I also sold water in the streets. I am not lazy and I want to do something with myself like my brother. I wanted to go to Europe to do something with my life.

I talked to my dad to ask if I could sell some of our land. He told me my ancestors would be mad at me. But he told me who I could lend it in exchange for money. I went to the cousin he recommended and begged him to lend me 1 million Nairas *[about \$3,100]*. Then I went to look for friends who could help me to find assistance. I went to see my aunty. She gave me 500,000 Nairas *[about \$1,500]* and didn’t want me to pay her back.

I then asked a brother to help me get papers. I went to make *[get]* a passport in Abuja. It cost me 200,000 Nairas *[about \$630]*. A friend who worked for an airline helped me get a visa for 120,000 Nairas *[about \$380]*. I don’t know exactly how we got it. He called me when it was done and I picked it up. I wanted to test my visa before traveling so I went to the airline office to

buy my plane ticket to Turkey, which cost me 180,000 Nairas [about \$570]. I showed the man working there my visa and he didn't say anything, so I knew it was real enough.

Before I left, I converted 300,000 Nairas [about \$950] in Abuja—about \$200 of that I kept in my pocket. [He does not say where he kept the rest.]

When I arrived in Istanbul I went to the park and I saw a guy I recognized as Nigerian. I spoke to him and we became friends. He introduced me to three other Nigerian guys with whom I could live. We shared a house and I had to pay fifty “tele.” [He explains that's how Nigerians refer to Turkish Liras.] They helped me find a job serving people in a restaurant.

But soon, I had problems. Turks robbed me twice right after I got my payment from my Turkish boss—they were paying me after every three weeks. They caught me walking home and took all my salary. Twice. On October 9, 2015, I decided I had to leave that country. I couldn't continue.

I asked a Turkish man who was living behind our house to help me. I used to wash his clothes, bring him food from the restaurant and other stuff for him. I even used to cook for him with food I bought with my own money. He said he would take care of my trip for the price of \$600. I negotiated for \$400 because I told him I had no money but needed to leave very soon.

In December, I left Istanbul with the Turkish man. We took a bus to Izmir together and were received in the smuggler's house together. There were about forty-eight Africans in the house. Women, kids, men. Once we got there, I gave the \$400 to the Turkish man and he gave it to the smuggler. I had no contact with the smuggler. We spent two days in the smuggler's house. We were waiting for the police to be gone. Then we left at six a.m. I had to inflate the boat with other people and then we floated it in the water. A guy from Mali was leading the boat. He volunteered to do it from the beginning it was planned this way. In Lagos, I learned to swim in the river so I wasn't afraid, but the people were very scared because we don't swim a lot in Africa.

When the boat started moving, some people fell inside and two women fell off the dinghy. The women had already paid the smuggler; it was bad to leave them there in Turkey. I felt for them. The sailor didn't want to stop so I jumped off. I swam to get the woman back on the boat. It was so cold that I had to go deep in the water to warm up. Once on the boat it was even colder. I was hiding my money—\$150—inside my jeans, in holes I had made under my beltline. So I knew my money was safe. I had nothing else with me. When I arrived here I dried the bills on the heater.

We arrived in Greece easily because the Greek boat rescued us. The two girls I rescued gave me €10 Euros each and bought me spaghetti.

Now I am waiting to get more money from my land in Nigeria. I talked to the cousin borrowing my land to extend our deal for two more years. I already need to give him 1 million Nairas. But I make him a good price for the next two years—500,000 Nairas. I believe he will send me the money. And I will pay him as soon as I can. Soon I hope, once I get a good job in Europe and save money.

## “Tatana Zahar” – The Blue Suit

From West Africa to Greece via Iran: Two football players get a big chance only to escape harrowing detainment, through no fault of their own

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*Jean and Jerome came together to Greece. Though their country of origin is in West Africa, they never met in their home country. They met halfway in Iran. While there are many West Africans in Greece, we are withholding their specific country of origin. We begin with Jean's interview.*

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I arrived here in September of 2016. I had big problems back home. Family problems. My mother died when I was a very young. My dad got married again and then he died. My stepmother wanted to kill me. She killed my twin sister. My sister got breast-surgery and my stepmother gave her poison instead of medicine after her surgery.

*[Jean shows me pictures of his sister after her surgery. She is almost naked. She does look exactly like him.]*

My stepmother accused me and took me to the police—she had friends there. And they put me in jail. She did all this because she wanted all of my father's money. I stayed in jail for a month and a half and then I called a friend to bail me out. It's not my friend who paid. It was an adult whom I didn't know. When I got out of jail, it was the first time I saw him [*the adult*]. He told me I should leave the country. He paid for everything. He gave me a passport and a two-months visa. He arranged my whole trip to Iran. He gave me some money to stay in a hotel. He said I could play football there and have a good life.

When I arrived in Tehran I looked for football clubs. I found a Turkish man who helped me play for an Iranian team and paid for a hotel room for me. That's where Jerome and I met. We became good friends because we were the only ones from our country of origin.

*[I asked Jerome to tell me about what happened on his side that lead him to meet Jean in Iran. I tell them once I know Jerome's past, they can then tell me together how they made it to Greece as they had done the trip together.]*

**Jerome:** I didn't have a mother either and in 2008, my father died during the coup because he was a policeman. Militias killed him and then they threatened the rest of our family. I have many brothers but I don't know where they are now. We lost contact because each of us had to flee. One of them is maybe in Tunisia, but I'm not sure. I think one of my sisters is in Germany.

We all tried to leave very quickly because we weren't safe without our father protecting us. My oldest sister took care of dividing the inheritance. We had a lot of cash in the house. My sister gave €3,500-4,000 to each one of us depending on our age.

Between 2011 and 2016 I was always traveling between Mali and Senegal with my national identity card. I was making money by playing football here and there and winning games—about 1 million CFA [*about \$1,600*] per game every month. I was saving up to go to Europe.

I was told that from Iran I could easily go to Europe. A friend helped me get a passport and tourist visa for €2,500. I had to pay him €1,200 extra for my flight ticket. When I arrived in Iran, I met a Turkish man who said he would help me play football for the Iranian team. I told him I wasn't in Iran to play football and that I wanted to leave. He said that if I played for the team, it would be able to get legal papers in Iran and go with them to Europe easily. I said okay. And he asked me for €1,700 to arrange for the hotel and bus. I gave him the money. All my money I stored in a little pannier that I always kept with me except to play football.

*[Jerome shows me pictures and videos of him playing with Jean, other Africans and Iranians on his phone.]*

The Turkish man asked for our passports to register us at the immigration center and start the process for us to get legal papers—that's what he said. We did. We all trusted him. All was going well.

After a month the Turkish man suddenly told us we had to change hotels. We learnt later that the he hadn't paid the hotel and owed the owner \$15,000. He had been keeping all of the money we gave him at the beginning. We got in a van and he took us to a village called Karaj. The hotel where we were living in was very bad and we hated living there. Tensions were rising.

During the weekend, the neighbors called the cops and said there were illegal migrants in the hotel. The cops came and asked for our passports. We told them to speak to our Turkish coach as he had them all. They called him. The Iranian police put us in a van.

*[Jean shows a video of them in the van and of the Iranian “white men” who arrested them.]*

They met the Turkish man and saw our passports. But they also saw that our visas had expired. They didn't give us back our passports. They took us to a small sort of detention center. We stayed there for 45 days. They took our clothes and forced us to wear “Tatana Zaha” (“Blue suit” in Farsi). They treated us very badly, like slaves. It was terrible. We became very close to a man from Cameroon. We became very good friends. *[Jerome calls him “mon vieux – “my old man” – in French, an affectionate nickname for French Africans.]*

He had given us the number of another West African man that owed him a lot of money in case we left the jail and wanted to go to Turkey. The Iranians asked us for money to let us out. But, after two months, they saw we had no money and they got us out anyway. They threw us at the border between Turkey and Iran. We were with other Africans, Syrians and Afghans. We were eleven. They left there at the border without anything. It was snowing. We walked for ten days. A guy from Tanzania died of the cold. Jean shows me videos of Jerome and him walking through the snowy mountains towards Turkey.

It was so cold, so long, so difficult.” *[He shows me his cut and bruised feet.]*

**Jerome:** When we reached a small village in Turkey. We begged villagers to take us in. They asked for money but they saw we had nothing and pitied us. Once we had rested a little, we called the Senegalese smuggler and said that our Old Man from Cameroon told us to call if we needed to get to Istanbul. He arranged for our trip to Istanbul and took us into his house there.

He introduced us to a Turkish man there who employed us to work “Kabutchabu” (construction work in Turkish) from 8 am to 4 pm every day. After three weeks we had enough money to go to Greece.

## An Inconvenient Detour

Afghanistan to Greece, after pausing for 14 years in Iran: A family is finally able to save enough to leave a life of violence and harassment

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*We met this family in Athens. They had come in from Malakasa camp to get medicine. They joined us at a shady café table at the edge of a square. Amir was from the north of Afghanistan and begins the conversation.*

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I am Shia. The Taliban are Sunni. They came into our town and right before my eyes, I saw them sever my father's head. And then they burnt his body parts. I was forced to watch. I ran and found my mother, my 13-year-old sister, my 17-year-old sister and my 3-year old brother. We fled to a village 5-6 kilometers away. We stayed there for a week and returned home to tend our cattle. But when we got home, the Taliban had taken them all.

I am staying Malakassa camp with my wife and two daughters. We met after I fled with my siblings to Iran. First, we walked from Mazar-e-Sharif to Hirat and then "got a ride" from there to Zahedan. From there we moved on to Tehran. I got various jobs in construction. A couple introduced me to my wife, also from Afghanistan.

*[He introduces us to his wife who joins us at the table. Her parents, his in-laws, tell their story.]*

**Father-in-Law:** We also fled the Taliban and went to Tehran. In Tehran we took whatever jobs we could. Some were in construction.

**Mother-in-Law:** I earned wages as a domestic cleaner. Life in Tehran was very difficult. They—the government and police—took half our pay. They would not let us open a business of our own. We had nothing we could call ours. But we stayed there for almost fifteen years. It was difficult. But, life in Afghanistan was also difficult. We saw the Taliban target children without mothers and would stamp them to death. We had to leave. We traveled five days to Hirat (also from the North) and three days to Zahedan and from there to Tehran via a smuggler. Afghans and Iranians never got along. The Iranians were using a lot of opium and the Afghans in Tehran started to use it too. We were scared for our children. It was difficult to educate our children.

**Father-in-Law:** All our various income sources added up to €350 a year, more or less. To register a single child for school cost about €160, per year and we had three children at the time. Plus, we had expenses for water, electricity, etc.

We have six children: one son in Afghanistan, one daughter in Germany, two sons in Germany, and two daughters in the Malakasa Camp, one is the wife of my son-in-law here. My son in Afghanistan was living with us in Iran and deported four times to Afghanistan because he did

not have proper Iranian ID. Iranians do not issue ID to children born in Iran, though they take our money. It cost us 1.2 million rials [*about \$40 USD*] to have the child in the hospital.

We left because we wanted a better future for our children. Our older children had already made their way to Germany and were doing well. [*The 15-year-old and 17-year-old son.*] Or at least beginning to. They were studying but did not have permission to work. The eldest had won a medal in a writing competition. The future for our sons had begun to look brighter.

*[How did they prepare for the journey?]*

**Mother-in-Law:** All of us were working. Doing whatever we could. My son was making tables. My husband was in construction and I was cleaning. Our daughter was sewing clothes. We saved everything we could. Often, my husband was cheated and rarely paid for his work, so saving was difficult.

Most of the money went to a local shopkeeper for safekeeping. The shopkeeper was able to keep it for us without a fee. Of the 50 million Iranian rials [*about \$1,600 USD*] we were able to save about 45 million with the shopkeeper, an Afghan. We had no choice. If we kept the money at home, the locals would steal it. My husband and sons would walk home, and a local with a knife would block them demanding money or in two instances “give me your mobile.” This became very inconvenient as someone always had to be at home, else our money and our things would be stolen. If both were working at night, as was sometimes, the case, my husband would give a neighbor a key and ask him to spend the night.

When we started our journey in Tehran, we withdrew all the money from the shopkeeper. He knew what we were doing. He wished us well and charged no fee. By the time we left, our son-in-law was in Turkey. He arranged for a smuggler to get us through Iran into Turkey. It cost €500 per person. There were three of us traveling.

Another expense was renting a horse for €250. The horse was to take me up the mountain but he could only travel about a third the way. The path turned into sheer boulders and we had to abandon the horse to finish the climb on our own. We kept our money and papers in a knapsack. When we reached Turkey, the smuggler converted the remainder of our funds into a Turkish Lira. We felt so scared for the rest of our trip. The smuggler knew so much about us but we had to our Iranian rials would have been useless unless we changed them.

## “A Shot of Whiskey”

Afghanistan to Greece – A family transforms its identity to reach Germany, and banks on assets back home

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*Interview with (will call him) Rami (42) and Z (43), Husband and wife. Uzbeks from Afghanistan. Rami was planning to send 2-3 family members at a time to Germany. He has children – five in the camp with them, under eighteen years of age. One still in Kabul with her husband. Rami’s older brother has been in Holland for the past twenty years. Her younger brother lives in Germany.*

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**W**e owned one shop and three houses in northern Afghanistan. We sold one house for about \$100,000 to get money for our journey – didn’t have to borrow; the second house is now being rented for \$300 a month.

We decided to leave due to insecurity reasons and safety of our children. We were threatened by the Taliban. They said our sons would be abducted and released for ransom because they were wealthy. We left Afghanistan six months ago through the route suggested by a smuggler we found in Mazar-e-Sharif.

The smuggler suggests a route depending on how much money they we were willing to spend. First, I wanted to go to Turkey on my own [and send for my family later] and tried to get Turkish visas for everyone in my family. Initially, I had paid \$5,000 for one Turkish visa and waited for two months until it was rejected. It is very difficult to get a visa to Turkey legally.

After failing attempt to get Turkish visas, I paid \$1,000 to a smuggler for each Iranian visa totaling \$7,000 for seven family members [\$1,000 per member] – that included the visa fee and their flights to Tehran.

We flew to Tehran from Mazar-e-Sharif. In Tehran, we were picked up from the airport in a car by another smuggler and were directly taken to the Turkish border. The smugglers transferred us to a van with others (20 people in total) from the Iranian border at night and drove very fast. First, we were brought to Tabriz and from there to the border town in Turkey. From there they got in an ambulance and were transferred to town called Mardin in Turkey where we stayed overnight.

In Mardin, we gave cash to the smuggler to bring us food and tea (I loved my stomach and needed to feed it with meat) and spent the night at a safe house. We washed up and rinsed our dirty/muddy clothes and prepared to depart the next day. I bought a sim card for 50 Turkish liras and used my cell phone brought from Afghanistan.

The next day they I was asked for the name of the smuggler who sent them and were split up to different groups and cars which were assigned by smugglers' names. From the border town it took about 22 hours to get to Istanbul by car – with stops for food and prayers on the way. We made a stop in a town called Gumruk on the way to Istanbul.

Once we reached Istanbul we released payment to the smuggler using a saraf in Kabul. In Istanbul we stayed for a week at a house found by a smuggler.

There, we exchanged USD to Turkish liras used it mainly for food.

From Istanbul we took the Bandirma-Yenikapi ferry to Bandirma (they bought their own tickets for ferry) and from there they took a taxi in the evening to Izmir. The next day we arrived to a town called Çeşme.

Once we reached Çeşme, we walked for about two hours and when we reached the shore, we could see the Greek island from there. The smuggler brought us to the boat. The boat was new. I inserted the wood panels [into the inflatable raft] myself with the help of four other people and got to inspect the boat beforehand.

I took a shot of whiskey and didn't care if I died, or not ... and drank to have some calmness on the boat. I bought life jackets for each family member for 100 lira each (\$30). There were about 45 other people in the boat and we were fortunate that our boat did not deflate or have a hole. Nobody except for me and my youngest son could swim.

We left at night. I had a flashlight and kept flashing it so that others would notice our boat. Once we reached the territory the Greek police saw us. They came to rescue and transferred everyone from our boat to a ship.

We had put money with a saraf (sarofee in Dari) and the saraf released payment to the smugglers once we had each reached each of our destinations. The smuggler has people in each location, which transfers refugees through their pre-assigned routes. The smuggler doesn't get paid if anyone is deported – only if the destination is reached.

The saraf (sarofee) is usually in a "do'kon" [which means a store/shop].

In Greece, we received blankets, food and shelter. We spent about \$7,000 in total for all family members from Mazar-e-Sharif to Tehran and another \$7,000 from Tehran to Athens.

"Here is my bank where we keep our valuables (about €5,000) [he points to a safe in their tent.] Thankfully, we have been safe and didn't experience any theft. I wrapped \$2,000 around the waste of my two children in order to transfer the cash as we cross the sea.

**Interviewer:** In case you needed more money, how could it be transferred from Afghanistan?

I have a bank account at Afghanistan International Bank (Baynalminal) and debit card which I can use anywhere outside Afghanistan to withdraw money with my passport.

We arrived in Greece in spring of 2016. We didn't stay on the island for more than a couple of days and bought tickets to Athens. My wife offered to show our paperwork, which has the arrival stamp on it with the date. We spent one week at a hotel (€50/night) in Athens initially before going to the camp.

## **Part 2 – Shorter Journeys Perilous, Nonetheless**

## “My Sister Is My Banker”

*Syria to Turkey via Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt: A family man zig-zags across income streams, kinship ties, banks and modes of money transfer*

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*Ahmad's route:*

1. Spring 2012: hometown => city (+/-3 days), returns to hometown
  2. hometown => city (+/-3 days), returns to hometown
  3. hometown => city (+/-3 days), returns to hometown
  4. hometown => city (several weeks)
  5. August 2012: Syrian city to Beirut, Lebanon airport by car with wife and twin babies – cousin in the Gulf purchased tickets for them, money for journey from sister, friends, and cousin
  6. Beirut airport to Cairo airport. Wife carries cash in her clothes because she is less likely to be searched
  7. The friend-of-a-friend picked them up at airport, bought groceries for several days
  8. They live in “awful” rented apartment for several months
  9. They move to a new apartment, still awful, mother joins from Syria. Ahmad works three jobs at once.
  10. In 2013, Ahmad flies to Turkey to begin a new job.
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Protests in my area of Syria started late, about a month after they started in Damascus. The security situation wasn't very risky until late 2011, early 2012. That's when there started to be checkpoints around town. We were still able to move in and out of town. I had to move in and out every day, almost everyone did, because our jobs were downtown in the city.

In the middle of 2012 the security situation deteriorated, with more FSA presence in town and even a new, make-shift courthouse with a prison inside. Staying felt risky. We had no choice but to move. Our city had become too expensive. Regime security forces broke in on a monthly basis to inspect every room in every house. They would execute some people to scare people off. They killed one neighbor, a shop owner, and arrested another. It was really scary. In July-August 2012, there were two or three attempts to destroy regime checkpoints in the area, in an effort to invade. We would call each other to figure out how to leave. I moved to my brother-in-law's house in for a few days at a time, then we would return. The last time, almost everyone left. We were ten people in the car. My sister asked if anyone was left. I said, “we've all left except for our father.” He was dead, so we couldn't bring him.

Before our final departure, it was hard to move in and out checkpoints so I stopped working. A friend offered me a job as an interpreter. His clients were in the Gulf. I

worked for him for a while. I was paid \$500-\$600 per month which was enough then. The client paid my friend. My friend paid me by hawala, similar to Western Union. He would send money in my brother's name. Because I didn't leave the neighborhood, my brother would pick up the money in Damascus and send it to me. There were no challenges with the transfer.

My friend got arrested in my hometown. He was released a few hours later and his brother and father were arrested and beaten badly. My friend told me that the work would need to stop. He was too frustrated and angry to stay in the country. He wanted to move to Jordan.

So I was out of work. I don't remember what I had saved, but it was not enough. I got some money from my family. My father had had a shop before he died and he had sold it, so we had divided that money between us.

I decided to leave my town, knowing that I could not support my family by working in Damascus, so I went to Egypt. I asked my friends, my sister, my cousin in the Gulf for money. They gave me some that I could use for tickets to get to Egypt and rent until I could get a job. I lived in a neighborhood of Cairo. My friend had rented an apartment. It was awful, but it was ready.

To get there, we (me, wife, twin toddlers) went by car to Lebanon, then flew to Cairo. My cousin bought the tickets online for me. He also sent \$500 to me in Egypt through Western Union. My friend in the Gulf did the same. My sister gave me cash. Another friend gave me \$250 in cash. A friend in a difficult situation offered to give me \$200, in cash. His brother carried them to my brother who gave them to me before I left. I had about \$3000 on us. My wife hid the money in her clothes. I had some daily money in my pocket.

We weren't very concerned about carrying the cash with us, they didn't inspect women then. It wasn't a huge amount, anyways, I mean, we would have been on the street if we lost it, but it wasn't a fortune.

In Syria, friends and family gave me the money for traveling mostly in dollars but some was in Syrian pounds.

There were no issues with Western Union in Egypt. I had to wait a long time for it, but it went smoothly. I had used Western Union before, when I was in the Gulf, but just once or twice. You didn't need an account, you just needed a passport.

I applied for jobs, but didn't get any so used the time to learn the transportation system. A couple of months later, my friend with the translation company was settled, so we resumed the translation work. I started interpreting online again. I was also able to teach some courses online. Later, my cousin who was also in Egypt told me about, a customer support company in Egypt. So I began to work in that company full time. I had three jobs: translation, online teach, and the technical support job. After three months I was so exhausted that I resigned from the technical support job. For the translator job, I used Western Union to receive wages from the Gulf, and got the transfers in USD. Later

the brother of that friend, who lived in Egypt, sent the money through bank transfer and I opened a bank account with an Egyptian bank. I used the bank to receive the transfers, I did not store any money there. For the work originating in Syria, my brother in Syria received the money in person. Payment was always delayed. We'd get the money six months after finishing. The money was paid in Syria and it stayed there. My family in Syria used that money. For my work in technical, payment was received through a bank that the company had opened for me, I can't remember why I didn't use it for the translation transfers. I would access my cash through ATMs.

I was ok in Egypt, making enough money to pay the rent. We had moved out of that awful apartment. I lived with my cousins for a while, like twenty days, then I found a worse apartment but with a nicer landlord. Another cousin lived in the building so we felt safer. My wife and our twins were still with me. My mother joined us in the second apartment.

A friend of mine had a job in Turkey and asked I would be interested in a similar job. I interviewed on skype and was offered the job.

To work, I had to move to Turkey. My mother decided to go back to Syria because she and my wife were not on great terms, so there was a lot of fighting. At this time, the coup in Egypt had happened, and they required visas for Syrians. So I knew that the move to Istanbul would be a one-way journey with no option of returning to Egypt. There would be a two-week trial at the job. I decided to bring my wife and children after that if it was stable.

To prepare to travel to Istanbul, I brought everything that I could within the weight allowance on the plane. I brought my desktop computer and my clothes, and some of my clothes for the family. I had 45 kilos of stuff on the plane. I brought some pots and dishes, too. I brought all of the documents, my certificates, Syrian official documents. I didn't have enough money. I brought \$200 only. I came to Istanbul with only \$200. My wife had \$300-\$500 with her in Egypt in cash in the apartment. At the airport in Istanbul I thought I'd lost the money. I wanted to get a luggage cart, but I didn't have any Turkish lira to get it. I looked for the \$200, but I couldn't find it. I asked a police officer to allow me to exit the airport. I needed help because one of the suitcases was damaged and I needed to get the money to get the cart. He wouldn't let me. A female officer let me do it; I left my passport with her. My friend was outside, I got a lira from my friend and went back in to get the cart. Then two bags were lost. I found them, and then left, 3-4 hours after arriving.

Now, when a Syrian is traveling here, I tell them to keep two coins in their pocket, any currency, just to be ready for the carts. My friend that met me at the airport paid for my taxi, and brought me to the hotel. The company later refunded me.

The company had booked me a hotel. I was exhausted and very upset about the money. I got there and as I was unpacking I finally found the money in my bag. [In the meantime, I had posted an ad online asking for financial help. The guy who had posted the ad gave me \$3,000. I owe him a million dollars for that. He didn't know me and he loaned me the money. I paid him back in installments over the coming months. I used the money

to rent an apartment, buy some furniture and buy my wife the ticket. Then I bought her tickets. I paid cash at the airline office. I didn't have a credit card then and I don't have one now.

For the first four months of work, I couldn't open a bank account, maybe because I didn't have a residence permit. The fixer at work was too busy to help me. I got my salary in cash but finance was upset about it. I brought the cash home and hid it there. I was paid in USD, I would exchange it in small increments. So, I finally opened an account at a bank and was able to receive received my salary there.

For the first few months, I was testing the waters with my work and trying to get a sense of regular expenses. Then I started to pay back the money I owed to people all around the world. I started to allocate money for the people I needed to return money to. My salary was better than before, so I could keep aside money to pay my debts. I had paid some debts in Egypt, but not all of them. I kept the money aside in my mind. To pay back the debts, first to my friend in the Gulf, who had sent me \$1,000. A mutual friend of ours came from the Gulf to Turkey, and I paid him. My cousin in the Gulf came to Istanbul by chance and I gave him the cash. My friend who had been in a desperate situation and had given me money said he didn't want it back. Some others said they did not want it back. Both of them said, "pay it forward, if you want to." I can't remember how I made my first transfers to Syria. I never did it the official way, through Western Union or anything. I transferred to my brother and sister the same way I do now. Which is through friends who want to move money to Turkey.

Say a friend of mine lives in Istanbul, and his family wants to send him money from Syria. I give him the money and then his family gives my brother or sister the money in Syria. In my mind, no matter how big the amount they want to transfer is, it is better if I give it all to them, even if I have extra funds in Syria. I know I will need it in the future. My sister is my banker. She has been doing this for me for three years. I don't know how much money I have there, probably between \$2,000-\$2,500. It's in cash in her husband's safe at his office in Damascus. He has a shop there.

Interviewer's prompt: "What are the challenges or drawbacks to using this system?"

I wouldn't say there are any challenges. There is no commission. I trust the people involved in the transaction. I trust my contact and her family a lot. And my contact is my sister, who I trust. There are no risks at all. Other than people finding out about the transaction, like we got money from my wife's father. He's a business person. He was detained once. If my brother or sister goes to his shop several times, and he's being observed by security services, and they keep a record of who is coming and going, it could be risky. I haven't thought much about it. In a recent transaction, when I told my sister to go to my wife's father's shop in Damascus, she asked if it were safe. I told her I trusted the guy. This area is now known to be an area for these transactions, and my sister had heard of people being arrested there for doing this. I told my wife about it and she said it was still safe. My sister liked my wife's father. She liked him. Just a few days before my sister picked up the money, they owed me \$4,000. I thought because he's a business man, it would be safer for a business man to have some USD in his safe, whereas my sister would be vulnerable because it is illegal to have USD on you. But, my

wife's father's neighbor's shop was robbed the other day and so they asked to take the money.

In Syria, I opened a bank account for me and my father. My parents had rented the shop and so needed an account to hold the annual rent. My mother had sold a house and needed an account to hold the money. I don't remember why I opened the account, but I did. Maybe just because we were all opening accounts. I got an ATM card. I didn't use mine, but I used my father's, to draw money for him. We were only able to withdraw \$500 per day. When he needed more I would go to the bank. I used the bank several times there, but it wasn't usual to me. I had an account in the Gulf that I didn't use much.

I started using Paypal until I moved to Istanbul. I rely on it a lot. Now, it has closed in Turkey. I use paypal because I do not have a credit card. I have two bank accounts in Turkey. They say that foreigners cannot get credit cards. It's not because I'm Syrian, they say. They are nice, so they make it sound like a universal problem, not just for Syrians. My main bank account, where I receive my salary, is the bank in which I applied for a credit card, with the fixer at work. They needed him to get a document from municipality in my area proving my residence. It turned out that my apartment is registered as offices, not a residential apartment, so now I'm waiting for my landlord to do it. He's in the Gulf so it's delayed. I tried again, they said they would let me know in a few weeks. Immediately after leaving, I got an SMS that my application was rejected. She said she solved the problem and then I got the same message a moment later. I decided not to go back again. I think the hold-up is the residence confirmation document.

Money transfer is an issue for us now in Turkey, you cannot make any transfers in USD. It must be in Turkish lira. I've heard that we cannot use Western Union to send money from turkey. Transferring money to Syria is still an issue through hawala systems. I wouldn't feel confident about it, I would worry about the person receiving the money. If I'm wanted by the regime, and I don't think I am, but if I am, and someone received money from me, it would put them at risk. Regularly receiving money from someone in Istanbul would put someone at risk and they would ask why they are receiving it. The hawala system would register the transfers and security services could find out.

Syrian refugees in Europe cannot send money, because they must declare it. My brother-in-law owes me some money, wants to send it back. We are struggling to find someone to transfer the money to me. I loaned him money for the journey, and some is left over. He's trying to send me my money that he did not need to spend. We are looking for a way to get it back. I bought tickets for his wife and children.

Similarly, a friend wanted to give \$1,200 to nephew here. I gave it to him but have no way of getting the money from him unless he travels here.

Moving money from Europe to Turkey is a problem. But it still happens through personal networks and informal hawala systems. I haven't tried it. My brother-in-law is going to try. They take 10%.

There are so many people who helped me. Wow! There is my brother-in-law, actually my wife's brother-in-law received us in his house in Syria, even we had brought the babies. He lived in a big apartment with three brothers and their families. They were generous to receive us even though they were already three families. They received us three times.

All of my friends who gave me money, I still think that my friend in the desperate situation who gave me the money without my asking for it. My friend in the Gulf who said he didn't want the money back, he gave me even more money as a gift for the children.

A friend who was a regime supporter gave me \$250 when I was trying to leave.

There's a guy in Egypt. I had never met him before, but a friend of mine knew him and called him. He received me at the airport, bought breakfast for us, stocking up the house with cheese, yogurt, jam and juice. That was the only time I ever met that guy. We were never able to meet again. There were a few guys who helped me when I felt threatened by the landlady. One of my neighbors, an Egyptian guy who had given me an internet cable. He came over with an older guy and they talked to the landlady for me. They made me feel safe. I was a stranger. In Syria, if you are in trouble, your neighbors help you. I didn't have anyone in Egypt. But this guy brought an older guy, to calm the crazy lady who was threatening my wife. I wish I could thank them.

## “Become Muslim, Get Killed, or Pay to Remain Christian”

Iraq to Jordan: A young family evades its repellent options, then copes with life in Amman

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*After meeting Mohannad on the street near the bookshop we'd found on Friday, he greeted us in a friendly and confident manner and invited us upstairs to a well-kept spotlessly clean apartment three stories up. A baby smiled at us from a car seat that was rocking gently on the floor. An overtly Christian TV station played on the television. Mohannad's wife brought cold water for us, and later Pepsi. She moved about the room during the interviews, feeding the baby from a bottle, clearing glasses and listening in on the interviews.*

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I was living in a good situation with my family, and my relatives in a Christian area in Iraq. We had no problems, no mines or explosions. After the collapse of the regime, for the first two years, things were relatively calm. We were working, and I had a normal routine. I would go to the market and cafés, my wife tended to the family houses and went to markets. My brothers had their own houses so we would gather to visit with one another. Life was nice and normal.

I worked in a welding shop owned by my father. It went out of business, so then I started working building kitchen cabinets. Then that ended and I took different jobs, like slaughtering chickens.

Terrorism came to us in 2014. We were forced to run away. We lived near Mosul and when Mosul collapsed the whole area deteriorated. ISIL cut off water, electricity, and all services. The mafia came to our area. We looked towards Erbil. When the Iraqi army withdrew things became very uncertain. People were afraid that the mafia and others would enter our area.

We quickly went to our cars and went to the north. The Kurdish army surrounded us to protect us. The local government sought wells to find water for us. There was no way to bring food to us, and they could not get through the dangers beyond the Peshmerga.

We could not work. No one wanted to spend their money because they were unsure about the future. After a month, ISIL and the Kurdish forces clashed in our area. There was fighting between the Kurds and terrorists. Terrorists bombed the area we were staying in. 55,000 of us moved at one time soon after.

All we had brought with us were small backpacks. Our documents were ready because we had anticipated problems. I didn't have enough money. I had had a share in the workshop, but it had gone out of business. I had a small car. Instead of selling it, I used it to flee.

We stayed in a church in Dohuk. The Peshmerga was between our village and Mosul. We lived in the church there, having driven in our car. After ten days, we returned to our home. The

situation settled down but everything was paralyzed after two months. Clashes happened again and were worse. We could not withstand it.

Then we went to Erbil. We were going in and out of our village when it was safe, but finally had to leave for good. It was so crowded in Erbil. So many people were trying to get there that the drive, which normally would have taken one hour, took 24. We ran because ISIL had captured women and girls in another area close to our village and we were afraid that it could happen to us. ISIL was giving people three options: 1. Become Muslim, 2. Get killed, 3. Pay money to remain Christian. For us, those weren't options, so we finally left.

For five days we stayed in a park. People were providing three meals a day for us. Then we traveled to Amman on a plane. We have been here since then [2014]. At the airport, we had bought visas in Iraq, for \$140 per person. I sold the car and we used that money to travel here. I had \$6,000 with me. This wasn't a lot compared to our normal money in Iraq. Many in Iraq have lost millions.

As we traveled, I kept the money in my pocket. At the airport, I didn't tell them I would register with UNHCR because I'd heard that they didn't want Christians to leave Iraq. I said we were coming for fertility treatments. This was not the case.

People helped us along the way and let us stay in empty houses. In the church in Dohuk we were welcomed. When the situation quieted there, UNHCR set up tents in Kurdish areas. We had been in the park, but we were moved to a big hall with three other families.

In the park, I kept the cash close to me, taking care of it. [*Here he gestured as though rocking the money, holding it tightly to his chest.*] Friends shared information about the journey with us, everyone knew what to do, even though we were going back and forth.

A friend received us at the airport in Amman and brought us to this neighborhood. We stayed with him for one week. Then, we went to a small apartment and rented it. I used the leftover money we had gotten from selling the car to live here.

Since coming to Jordan, I haven't used transfer services. We have only small amounts of money, food stuff from churches and individuals who have helped us. There is no money to transfer or receive. Every six months we get meat for the holidays. We get rice and sugar and olive oil too. An organization gave us a coupon for a mall, where I can get food. We prefer cash to food packages because we like long rice and loose tea and the packages have other kinds of rice and tea. Also, we cannot buy meat or chicken with the coupons.

We have not gotten any help from UNHCR in the past three years. The Australian Embassy has opened immigration procedures, and I am pursuing resettlement options with them. If this does not work, we will have to go live in a camp in Iraq because Jordan is just so expensive. One year ago, another US citizen wrote things about me, we had a meeting. But it came to nothing. For now, I am happy my wife and baby daughter are here with me, safe.

## “Like a Tourist”

### Algeria to Greece: A young man fakes his identity to escape power and privilege hierarchies

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*The young man (we later learn he is 23) motions us toward his tent. Next to him sits a Palestinian man with a broad smile. He does not enter our conversation except to egg on his Algerian friend about telling the details. They speak in a mix of Arabic, French and dotted with English now and then. At one point the Palestinian friend says, “Do the map, friend, make it colorful. They want to know the story of your journey. You must tell it like it happened.” And so the Algerian, in the spirit of bonhomie, gives his narration great gusts of enthusiasm. It’s clear these tent-mates know each other well.*

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I am not ashamed of saying I am Algerian. I am proud and there is no reason for me to hide. I made the trip on €1,400, €400 for the ticket from Algiers to Istanbul, and 1,000 in my pocket. I love my family and had a job but I was not really making a career for myself. I felt there was so much more I could do, but I had to leave my hometown. I was held back, not getting anywhere. It was selfish, really, but I had the encouragement of my family. I needed to move on.

From my hometown I took the bus to Algiers and bought a ticket—in December 2015, to be precise. The fare for the bus was negligible. I really don’t remember it. From Algiers I bought a ticket to Istanbul, as though I were a tourist. I had the papers and the trip is perfectly legal. For €400 I traveled uneventfully to Istanbul by air.

From the airport, I went to the bus station by taxi and took a bus to Izmir. Again, it was not expensive and I was traveling as a tourist. I was not being smuggled, just traveling and enjoying the sights. But, I had a destination in mind—though at that point did not confide it to anyone. I spent 22 days in Izmir. Friends had signaled to me through correspondence and Facebook that there was an excellent smuggler in Izmir. Because it was December, the smuggler said I had to wait until the sea was calm, that it could be rough, cold, and deadly. So I waited. One day, I got a call from him and said the time was right. I was taken by van to the coastal departure point. I don’t remember the name of the village. It was not a village really, just a place to launch boats.

I paid the smuggler €800 to go to Samos. The transaction took place back in Izmir and it included my hotel and food. The crossing was peaceful. The smuggler had taken good care that there were not too many of on board. Someone knew how to work the engine and steering.

On Samos, the police transported me to a different part of the island to process me. It did not take long. I told them I was Iraqi. They did not request papers and put a bracelet on me. From there, I got to the town of Samos. Inside the town was a refugee camp.

As I exited the bus and walked a ways, I noticed people like me [*North African*] talking to people who were being registered. I hung back. The refugees were talking to them in an Arabic that I understood, but sounded slightly different. They were pretending to be Syrian and I could hear the people registering them trying to trip them up by asking things like the name of a local

Syrian chicken. But, the refugees were found out, fingerprinted and—I later learned—sent to prison. I could see that from their accents and different language they had been detected. My heart pounded. I backed away from the queue and vanished into the town, again, like a tourist.

For twenty days I stayed as a tourist in Samos town. I did not really have a plan. I befriended a Greek who spoke French and bought me a ticket [*on his identity*] for Athens. For €50 I sailed into Athens by ferry, first class. The journey cost me €1,000, all of which I brought in my pocket, plus my €400 Euro. But now I have nothing. I wait.

Overall, I am very happy about my smuggler from Izmir to Samos. I had a kind man. He did not push me into the boat. I had relatives killed just five months ago. My smuggler was the opposite. He waited 22 days to make sure the weather was calm enough to ensure a smooth crossing. He only charged €800, which included the hotel plus food. It was cheap because it was winter and the hotel was not full. The friends I made along the way only paid €700 but they did not get the same treatment. I felt like a tourist in Izmir. There was so much to see, so many ruins, so many nice people and good food.

## “We All Sold Things”

### Syria to Greece: A mother worries about her son and the prospect of his livelihood as a sex worker

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*A woman saw us talking to the previous research participant. She approached the interpreter to ask if I were a journalist. The interpreter said no, I am a researcher (and then had to explain the difference). The woman waited a small distance from us until the previous conversation ended. “Can I talk to you now?” She sat down and asked me a lot of detailed questions about what I do. I did mention my background was in gender-based violence. She said, “maybe you can help the boys in this park.” This became the entry point of the conversation. Her son (15 years old) is an only child. This woman is in Greece with her son alone, but she has banded together with other women.*

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A few days ago, a journalist came to the camp to ask questions about boys having sex with older men for money. I became really worried. My son goes out of the camp at night with the other teenage boys. I didn't think anything was wrong. People come in and out of the camp all the time. I worry more about the men in the camp than out. So many are troublemakers. They start fires, they pile up trash, they drink, they do drugs. Especially the Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians.

My son was fine—he was my rock. My husband died in Syria. My sister told me I had to leave immediately or we would all die too. I didn't want to die. I didn't want my son to die. I just had to leave. We all sold things, whatever we could—we just wanted money immediately to pay to leave.

Our neighbors left before us. We were in contact via WhatsApp and Facebook. After a while, Facebook became difficult and people got scared. But you always find a way. Our neighbors told us who would help us get here. They sent us phone numbers and updates of which borders were open. I called the man and told him our situation. My voice was shaking. I packed two suitcases and got ready to leave. I don't know if I will ever see that house again. When the man came to pick us up, he told me I couldn't bring the suitcases.

*[When I ask which route they took, she declined to say and seemed scared to share details.]*

The first time, the driver said we had to change plans. We had to go to a nearby town and spend the night there. We were there about a week. I didn't know anybody there. Then one day, the driver said we could start Turkish border and said, “now walk.” I said, “which way?” and my son said, “Mum, there's GPS. Kids are always smarter than you.”

When we walked to Turkey, they asked my son a lot of questions. They let us pass. I met some other women in the camp and they all wanted to leave. Some had family in Europe. I joined three of them. Some had husbands, some had kids. You make a lot of friends when you are a refugee. You share a misery and a joy. Where you are from matters less.

We all tried to find smugglers. The smugglers aren't used to dealing with women. But they take our money just like other people's money. They sometimes tried to talk to my son, but I said, "no, you are dealing with me!" The first boat we tried was a failure. We got caught by the Turkish police. They threatened to throw my son in jail and I said, "no, he's only 14!" We went to the police station and they let me wait inside with water and food. They let us go when it was dark.

The second time, we made it to Samos. From Samos, we took the boat to Piraeus. When I looked at the Piraeus place where all the refugees are, I knew we couldn't stay there. They offered to move us to the camps. I don't understand any of their names. Nobody knew where the camps were. A few of the other women were worried we were outside the city or that they wouldn't let us leave—that's what they heard from some of the volunteers. In the end, I decided to go into the camps because I didn't have much money left. In the camps, you get food and a place to sleep.

I started joining the women near Victoria Square because I heard that sometimes Greeks look for help—cleaning ladies, nurses, taking care of old people. That's not what I did in Syria, though. I was a teacher.

In Victoria Square, I noticed all the men. We don't trust them. I try not to talk to them. If one of us has to talk to them, we all go together and we bring the kids. Then one day, a journalist showed up at the camp and started asking us questions about the men in the parks. We thought she was asking about the men who help. She said she heard there were men having sex with children.

I did not believe it, but some of the other women did. They said it happened to boys who left the camp at night and that they did it to make money to pay the smugglers and leave. Some of the women said they thought their sons did that. We all started wondering about the girls too. We all started asking our kids. Do you have children? No? One day you will understand. One day, you are in your house in Syria with your family. The next day, your husband dies. And now your son has sex with old men.

*[I don't say anything and let the silence hang.]*

I don't think my son does it. But I don't know, I'm worried. So now we are all staying up at night to see. And I wanted to come here today to see if there are old men in the park. This is what the journalist said happens. One day, I hope to get to Germany. That's where my husband wanted to go before he was killed. I want my son to be smart and finish school.

## “Screw You, I’m Going to Germany”

Syria to Turkey: A physician in her mid-thirties juggles smugglers, conversion rates and borders to face bias in her new safe zone

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*We are sitting in a café in Sanliurfa, where I have spoken to others a few days earlier. It’s warm, and we are both looking forward to drinking “çörçil,” a drink made of fresh squeezed lemon juice and soda water.*

*Maha is a Syrian woman in her early 30s. She speaks quickly and has distinct, lively features. She came to Sanliurfa after Daesh took control of her hometown in northern Raqqa, in February 2014.*

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I was working as a pediatrician at a hospital in my hometown at the time. I could have continued working under Daesh, but I didn’t want to follow their rules. I might be the last one who crossed the border legally—after that it became so difficult. I traveled with a close female friend and a male relative. It was difficult to convince my family to allow me to leave – in the end they let me go because I would be with my friend.

I was able to take one bag and some money with me; I carried it in my bag. My friend and I crossed at the gate, which was just outside my town. When we arrived, we rented an apartment with another friend. My relatives had connections there, so they were able to find the apartment within one day. The friend who accompanied me from home started working immediately a medical agency. After one month, I also found a job with the same agency in a small town. The agency was managing a hospital remotely and I did remote rounds with patients. After eight months, the office moved from that town to Sanliurfa, so I moved as well.

During that time, the border was basically closed – it was only open for special medical cases. Eventually I lost my job with the medical agency and applied for other positions with humanitarian NGOs. I was offered a job that was actually one grade higher than the position I applied for. From the time I started working in Turkey, I was sending money back to my family in Syria. At first not that much, and after a while, more. It’s pretty easy to send money and I have always used the same method and dealer. In Raqqa, there’s a shop with the same branch in Urfa. I give them the amount plus 5 to 10 TL [*\$2-3*] and they transfer it. I also provide the name of the person who will receive the money; that person will then be able to pick up the money the same day. Fees depend on the amount being sent... I have never had any problems sending money this way; I have a lot of trust in the shop because the owner is a relative of mine.

My family lives in a Daesh-controlled area and receiving money from Turkey or other countries is not a problem. I returned to Syria for three weeks in 2014 to attend my brother’s wedding in Raqqa and take my final medical exam in Damascus. I was able to cross from Turkey to Syria relatively easily: the Turkish authorities let people cross back into Syria two days per week. On the Turkish side, they checked my bags and asked some illogical questions. They also tried to

fingerprint me, but I resisted and didn't show my passport. The Daesh guards receiving returnees didn't check or ask any questions, but did require there to be a man to pick me up.

I stayed in Raqqa for one week following my brother's wedding, which he had postponed it so that I could attend. My uncle then took me to Damascus by bus; Daesh would not have let me go without a man. I had to pay 1,000 Syrian pounds [*\$6*] at a government checkpoint.

I took the exam in Damascus and didn't pass. I noticed that doctors from Damascus had an advantage because they knew the style of questions while I didn't; I remember thinking, "screw you, I'm going to Germany," because I was angry about the unfairness of the Syrian medical certification system.

I left Damascus for Raqqa, still angry. Things got worse when I realized I forgot my "Daesh cover" [*black abaya*]. I put all my Daesh clothes in one bag and I forgot it—all the way back I was imagining myself beaten by Daesh. Eventually, I exchanged my pink scarf with the black one of a woman next to me and borrowed a man's black jacket to wrap around myself. I avoided detection at the first two of three Daesh checkpoints, but dreaded the third, which was right next to Daesh's "punishment office." The bus driver allowed me to get off before this checkpoint and I was able to rush home. Usually this neighborhood was crowded with Daesh but there was no one and I escaped.

To return to Turkey, I had to cross illegally because the border gates were closed. I crossed with my 13-year-old brother and seven to 10 other people. I paid 200 TL [*about \$ 70*] for myself and my brother, and we crossed by walking at night near the official gate. Because my brother was with me, I was able to bring more stuff. My brother stayed for two days and then returned to our hometown.

If the Turkish police catch you, they take your luggage and money and send you back. I recently heard of a family who was caught and held for six hours in a border police station before being sent back to Syria. It was really horrible because they sold their gold to be able to come.

I seriously considered making the journey to Europe in 2015. Ten months ago, my friend and her husband planned to go, and I was really thinking, almost preparing my stuff to go with them. Eventually I decided not to go because my family was worried about my safety, especially traveling by sea. I communicate often with my family in Syria, mainly by phone, WhatsApp, and Facebook.

People found out about smugglers through Facebook. Some draw maps and post them on Facebook to help others. If someone was stuck in Greece, they could ask for help, for example. In the beginning, it was really expensive [*to cross from Turkey to Greece*], like \$1,500. In the end it was \$700 because there were more and more smugglers. I didn't hear about any cases of fraud or exploitation, but smugglers sometimes took people almost to the coast and dropped them off [*the boat*].

I applied for a visa for Germany in March 2016. My fiancé lives in Germany and I want to go there to take a supplemental course for doctors. I have never met my fiancé in person but we often speak through Skype. In order to obtain the necessary documents for my visa, I hired a smuggler, whom I had heard about through word of mouth, to pick them up in Syria. I sent him my passport and Syrian ID—he had to be my representative to pick up my transcript and other academic documents in Aleppo.

At first, the smuggler and I agreed that it should take around three weeks, but it ended up taking three months because Aleppo University was bombed. It cost 1,100 TL [*\$370*]. I sent the money via my usual gold shop and asked the owner to hold the money until I received my documents.

Because I was so desperate I paid another smuggler, who supposedly has connections within the German embassy, to expedite my visa application. I sent this smuggler my documents and paid 150 TL [*\$50*]. So far, I have heard nothing from the embassy and feel like I wasted my money on the second smuggler. They say they will support you, but they don't do anything. To get more information, I talked to another smuggler, who said the smuggler with embassy contacts is trustworthy and that I should wait. I now contact the embassy smuggler every one to two weeks, but he can never give me any meaningful updates. It's really risky, but sometimes when you need a hope, you cannot think legitimately...Now I question myself, how can I send my documents to a stranger?

I save little money but send most of it to family and friends. I have participated in a *jameziya* [*savings collective*] in Syria, but not in Turkey; however, *jameziya* is common among the Syrian community in Sanliurfa. In Syria, I would put 11,000 Syrian pounds [*\$25*] in the *jameziya* pot each month. My group consisted of 10-12 people, but groups could be as small as five or as large as twenty. I don't like using the bank—I just take my salary, put it in the house, send some of it to my family, and the rest I keep.

Some big news in my life is that two of my brothers came to Turkey from Raqqa this month. One paid \$1,500 for himself, his wife, and two daughters; the money was his savings from working as a doctor. They were not able to carry any bags. The crossing was not risky and the family crossed in the daytime via a road and a canal. There was a Turkish guard in a field near them but he didn't shoot. They had to pay the smuggler beforehand, but would have been able to get their money back if the crossing were unsuccessful.

For the second brother, however, the crossing was difficult and dangerous, especially the border between Daesh- and FSA [*Free Syrian Army*]-controlled areas. At this point, men and women were separated. The smuggler was not professional, so the two groups lost each other. The smuggler had told them to walk toward a light, which he said was one hour away. In fact, the groups had to walk for five to six hours, without water. The women slept in a stable, where they had to stay very silent to avoid Daesh detection. Eventually, the two groups were reunited near the Azaz border gate. My sister-in-law had a fake medical report so she was able to cross, but initially the guards said her husband and child wouldn't be able to. However, my brother called someone with money and the whole family was able to cross. They were supposed to pay \$3,000 but paid \$1,500 because of this relationship.

My brothers both immediately registered for their Temporary Protection IDs in Sanliurfa; one has applied for a German-sponsored scholarship and the other has opened a dental clinic. Both are studying Turkish and highly-motivated to succeed. When they came, they had plans. Most Syrians in Germany transfer money to Syria. They don't use banks because it's expensive and because they don't want the German government to know that they're transferring money, as they fear this could lead to a reduction in state support. Instead, my friend transfers money through a Pakistani guy who says he's trying to help Syrians. The man charges a fee of 7 EUR for the first 100 EUR and 3 EUR for each additional 100. Another agent charges €14 per €100. Funds are sent first to Turkey and then from Turkey to Syria, also using a *hawala*, and people find out about the agent in Germany through word-of-mouth.

My friend says that the exchange rate is really different in regime and FSA-controlled areas, around a 25% difference. My friend also knows about a man who has money in Syria, so he takes money in Germany and gives his own money through an associate in Syria, thereby avoiding any physical transfer. This man charges a 10% commission.

Some Syrians have also set up businesses importing under-the-table goods like clothes and cosmetics from Syria to Germany and then selling them to Syrians who are uncomfortable shopping in German stores or unhappy with German products. There are Facebook groups that advertise and say how to buy these products.

One of the biggest difficulties for Syrian families is dealing with separation, both due to internal and international displacement. Sometimes I am afraid that in the end it will affect our relationships. Another difficulty is bias—on behalf of banks, consulates, and other authorities—against people from Daesh-controlled areas. I hate Daesh and had bad experiences—to be re-victimized by this discrimination is terrible.

## “It’s Only Symbolic Help”

### Syria to Jordan: A young man and his family face daily challenges with cash assistance

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*We exited our car and approached the home in a suburban neighborhood on the outskirts of Irbid. On the front step, at least ten pairs of children’s shoes were heaped in a pile, and we stepped around them as two women, both in black abayas, greeted us warmly. They showed us to the sitting room, off to the side of what I imagined to be the main house. The thin walls barely contained the children (many popped in and out during the interview), and their noises as they played and cried just beyond our sight. We took off our shoes inside and sat down on the cushions that lined the room. Five men then entered, and the women quickly disappeared (we did not see them again until the end of the interviews, when they said goodbye to us, although they appeared at the door bearing first coffee, then Pepsi for us as we spoke with the men).*

*Our first interviewee, Fareed, is seated closest to us. He’s dressed sharply, despite the heat. Polished shoes, dress slacks, and a casual button down that he’s dressed-up with a tie. His socks have one lone hole, with his toe poking out. His hair is slicked. He is eager to talk to us.*

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**S**yrria is the most beautiful country in the world, despite the ruling system. Before things started to collapse, there were no restrictions on life, people could move freely. I often took trips outside of Syria, to visit other countries, and now I regret this, since I didn’t see the value of Syria while I was living there. I really want you to understand that Syrians are not “conservative” people. *[By this I think he meant restrictive towards women, very dedicated to religion etc.]* We just like to live our lives freely.

In Syria I was a government officer, but when things in my hometown became unsafe I needed to leave with my family. The government began to indiscriminately shoot people in the streets, and that’s what compelled me to finally go. Better to die than be captured by the government. Even people just close to demonstrations were rounded up and tortured. There was no value for people’s lives anymore.

I brought some clothes with me and the documents I still had. My other important documents were destroyed in a fire in one of my supermarkets that I owned. I also brought a little cash. My wife, four children, and I fled on foot. Along the way, community leaders were helping those on the move, opening channels and providing information about where and how to continue. We traveled on foot because I felt like traveling by car would make us easy targets. Local people helped, free of charge, especially those who were injured, when they could. We walked until we reached Wadi Yarmouk in Jordan, which is where the Jordanian army received us. The Jordanian army was human, very gentle. They provided us with food, water, and medical treatment. From there, they took us to Zaatari, and we stayed there for 25 days. Then, we moved

to a small town in northern Jordan. We have a friend of our family there. We stayed there for three years. Then, we finally came here to Irbid.

The little cash I brought with me did not last long in Jordan. Now I keep my cash at home, I don't use a bank. In Syria, I used government banks to apply for loans and for a savings account. *[Accounts were special for government officers.]* If you wanted to save a large sum of money, however, this was a process that required a lot of vetting- you'd have to answer many questions, and the account would be scrutinized and monitored by intelligence agents. You need a security or intelligence clearance just to open a falafel shop, the smallest of enterprises!

In Syria, I was an officer in a government ministry, and I had studied at university. But here in Jordan, I take whatever work I can get, usually labor or construction. This is usually paid under the table in cash. Since I've been here, I've been able to take a few university level courses, but these have not amounted to any job prospects. The cash I get from my day-to-day work goes quickly to cover daily expenses for me and my family.

You might go to a restaurant, or visit cafes, but my friends and I don't have that luxury. We simply enjoy visiting each other, since we don't have the money to do anything else. *[He waxes a bit poetic, about how much Syrians love life. There is an awkward exchange, which Ruby doesn't want to translate. I press. She explains he was trying to emphasize how much Syrians love life by saying that they really love their women—sexual, yes, but meant playfully, generating bashful chuckles from the other men.]*

My friends and I have no use for money transfer services—there's no money to transfer! Generally, the biggest challenge is dealing with the Iris machines. This is the way most people receive their financial assistance, but in Irbid, there is only one machine in each bank—compared to four or five per bank in Amman—and it's usually broken or malfunctioning. Some people attempt to collect money two, three, four days in a row with no success. The four branches of the are *very* crowded come collection time. The crowds are volatile, people often physically fight in line, and it's not safe. It's not just men in the lines either—women, the sick, and the elderly have to make it through this mess as well. The bank tellers are also very rude to us *[refugees]*. Because of this, some Syrians don't bother at all, and just don't collect their financial aid. Bank officers never help us, either. We have to take care of each other in order to keep each other safe. I go all the way to Amman to avoid this mayhem when I need to collect my assistance. To do this, I use almost a third of the money I collect to pay for the trip back and forth. It's only symbolic help.

Now, I receive 95JD a month from UNHCR through the iris machines. In the beginning, my neighbors here helped me feel at home. I have good relationships with them, but they've never been able to help me financially, and I haven't been able to help them either. I'd say 90% of Syrians are working to make extra money under the table, but they can't admit this for fear it will affect the little aid they do receive. It's well known that Syrians love to work. Even if I could earn 1,000JD just sitting on my back, I wouldn't do it.

Living here in Jordan means better conditions for me and my family, but also more dignity. After the issues with terrorism in Europe, refugees' situations in Europe, Lebanon, or Turkey are probably worse than ours are here. Arab people are pure. The gangs you read about in the headlines are not the reality for most Syrians. I hope to one day be part of the effort to re-build Syria.

## “You Can Always “Do””

Syria to Jordan: A woman and her family sell olive oil and honey to along their journey, then stitch together a living in Jordan

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*The following interview took place in a group setting, although each participant was interviewed individually. A contact of our interpreter owns her own business, a shop, in downtown Irbid. The shop is just a small, square office, with a few chairs and a desk. When we arrive, we're greeted by over ten women, but there is simply not enough room in the space for all of us to be there, so only some stay. Some of the women leave, all carrying large bags of crafts (decorated tissue boxes, beverage trays) that they made together. The owner of the shop is a woman of many talents, and also volunteers with the women to produce handicrafts for them to sell.. It was a very relaxed and setting, as the women were clearly all friends and knew each other well. Sana, Jenan's mother, tells the story of how they came to Irbid.*

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**W**e had a peaceful life in Syria along with our family. All of my children are very clever, and I want them all to continue their educations. I used to work as an administrator in my children's school in Syria. I had a nice garden at home, and my husband and I raised bees for their honey.

The decision to leave Syria was a conflicted one for my family. I wanted to leave and take the children, but my husband wanted to stay. The public shelters *[from bombs]* in my town were too crowded, and I felt that the schools were like targets. I hadn't had my salary paid to me for over a year. Because of this I had started working as a substitute teacher. I even borrowed money from my neighbor and bought us a cow, since food was difficult to come by. Eventually, I took my children and left Syria, and my husband followed us a year and a half later.

I traveled with family and friends, as well as my mother. I brought a little food with me, my documents, my children's documents, and clothes. I also brought some small bottles of olive oil and my honey that I knew I could sell along the way at the camps for extra cash. I had always saved my money at home, not in a bank, and it was safe. I took the money I had in the house with me when I left.

I traveled with my children, relatives, and other friends in a group of cars through the Yarmouk Valley of Jordan. This is a very common route. I paid for spaces in the car with the cash I had brought with me from home. When we left, people were shooting at us as we sped out of the village.

Once in the Yarmouk Valley, we were rescued by the Jordanian army. They gave us food, water, and let us use their toilets. That same day, we took a bus from Yarmouk to Sahran camp, then on to Zaatari, where we stayed for three months. At Zaatari, they gave us blankets, food, carpets, tents, and other necessities. But I didn't want to stay there. I felt it was unsafe for my daughter—

at that time she had just reached puberty—she was too young and beautiful. I also wanted my children to continue their education. The schools in Zaatari were not good.

A Syrian neighbor of ours in Zaatari helped arrange for my son to work in a small town nearby, and then we could move there and my other children could attend school. In that town my son worked and earned a monthly salary in cash. My son's employer offered us to rent his house and my son could work it off through his salary. I didn't use a bank, I just used the cash from my son's work to pay for day to day expenses. We stayed in that town for ten months, at which point my husband was able to join us, through a stroke of luck. From there, we made the decision to leave and come here to Irbid.

Now, we receive 40 Jordanian dinars [JD]/month in food coupons from the International Organization for Migration, and once we got one time aid from a German organization [283JD] and from a local organization [200JD], and from CARE [130JD]. We also received rent assistance once from a Norwegian organization, for our house which we've lived in for one and half years and share with many other relatives. *[Sana clearly had these numbers memorized and listed them off to me.]* Now I work cooking and selling food out of my home.

Our biggest expense is rent [100JD/month] and my husband recently had a heart attack, so he is unable to work. My son still works on and off for cash under the table, but it's rarely enough to make ends meet. We are unable to register for the iris system, since it's assumed her son *[based on gender and age]* is working. While this is true, the consequence is that he cannot attend school, which is all I really want for him.

Income generation projects are really helpful. Learning how to start and run a business is sustainable, and a skill I hope I can put to use in the future. Throughout this experience, I've learned that people should not be pessimistic or give up hope. You can always do, you can always change things in your life. I still hope that one day my son will be able to stop working and return to his education.

# Grandmother Goes First

Syria to Jordan: A young man and his extended family share resources across borders

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*Souriyat is a community organization in Amman that provides English classes for Syrians in the community, but mainly serves as a rehabilitation center for Syrians recuperating from surgery or war related injuries. When we arrived, Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) was there giving vaccinations and medicine to Syrians visiting the center. It was also a placement testing day for English classes. The center was very busy, with people heading in different directions with a sense of purpose. One of the directors there connected us to Majed, who was there and had just finished taking his placement exam. We met with him in an empty classroom upstairs. He was keen to talk to us, despite describing himself as a “nerd” and an “introvert.” He was confident and very endearing.*

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**I**n Syria I didn't have many friends growing up. My main memories were of spending time at my grandparent's house. When I was a kid, my father watched a lot of movies. This is how my English got so good. I grew up in a suburb that used to be rural, but developed a lot during my childhood. When the conflict began my family and I stayed for one year—we were not worried about the danger initially. However, there was a battle near our home, and we moved to Damascus for safety. We spent a year at my grandfather's house in Damascus, and had to travel through many checkpoints to get there. Over the course of that year, we went back and forth to our house, transporting our things by car to my grandfather's house. My grandmother was the first to leave and go to Jordan, and we followed her from Damascus to Amman by plane, and then by car to Irbid. My parents sold both our cars in Syria for cash, which they used to buy the plane tickets. The remaining funds they used as back-up until they found jobs [*about 5 months-worth of money, he said*]. We spent five months in Irbid. During this time my father was looking unsuccessfully for work. We were losing hope and money during this time. My family didn't like to ask others for help.

Eventually my father found a job in Amman, and we moved to the city so he could be closer to work. We stayed in one apartment for a year, then found a more convenient apartment in our current neighborhood.

*[What preparations did you make before you and your family left Syria?] I was concerned about packing up my tools [he repairs computers]. I was still a teenager when we left Syria, and it was hard leaving my family there. Now they are all divided and scattered between Jordan, Turkey, Sudan, Egypt. We became very close as a family during the year we lived in Damascus. 20 of us all stayed together in my grandfather's house. We escaped together and when we left, it left a hole in my heart. The holidays are particularly painful.*

Along with my tools, I brought some clothes and my books. Now I've read them all at least twice, but I still keep them on my bookshelf anyway. I carried my passport and secondary school certification with me, but I lost the certificate in Irbid, and it was a problem. I went one month without being in school until I found it again.

*[What was your experience like crossing into Jordan at the airport?]* Officials at immigration wanted to see proof that my family had resources to support ourselves in Jordan, so we had to show the officials that we had \$2,500 in hand.

My uncle has a Jordanian friend who we've relied on to physically transfer money from Syria to Jordan and vice versa over the past few years. It's safer, and of course, since he's a family friend, he doesn't charge a fee like transfer agents do. Most of the help my family receives comes from either friends or family. My parents have a UNHCR card (VISA) that they use to make food purchases, but that we rely mostly on family to get by.

Information about the journey came directly from my grandmother, as she was the first in the family to make the trek. We also got some information from Facebook and through other friends in Syria, but that not all of the information was reliable. The best tips we got were to take a plane and not a car and that we would need to have cash ready to show at the airport *[the aforementioned \$2,500]*.

If we had made the journey by land, I heard there was a 90% chance of getting rejected at the border, but that at the airport, the likelihood of this was much lower, more like 50%. And since we had the cash to show, we would be almost certain to make it through.

My family makes money transfers from Amman to Damascus regularly now that many of us have jobs. We send money back home, and the fee depends on who you're dealing with. For example, if you sent 30JD, it might come with a 6JD fee. I'm not 100% sure about what the fees are because my father does most of the transfers, but between 10 and 20% is normal.

We transfer money to our relatives still in Syria every Eid and we make monthly transfers when we have enough money to do so. This is easy, you can go to any bank or exchange place, most are run by Western Union, and do the transfer quickly with no hassle. There is no particular place we use, just whatever office happens to be closest and most convenient. We're often asked when making the transfer if we want the commission taken out of the total we're transferring or to be charged on top of the amount. As it is traditional to share money with relatives and the poor during the Eid holidays, the transfer agents tend to be very busy during this time and so there can be delays. Sometimes we have to wait until after the Eid ends to confirm with family members that they received the money.

*[Did you or your family members ever use banks in Syria?]* My mother used to receive her salary through the bank in Syria, but she withdrew the sum as soon as it arrived and did not use the account to store money. We saved money in the home or would transfer it to gold, which we also kept in the house.

*[What kinds of assistance have been most useful, in your opinion?]* Every family knows best what they need and the best ways to manage their own money. Food aid is not as useful—if all you receive is food, your suffering will continue. Some families who receive only food aid are going to stores and buying the cheapest things, like sugar, and dividing them into smaller amounts to then sell to get cash. This gives them more flexibility. I just received a scholarship to study electro-mechanical engineering in Canada. When I go, I'd like to open a binary account, and use online services like PayPal to make transfers back to my family.

One thing that made me hopeful when I first arrived in Amman was putting my technical skills to use. I remember the first mobile phone I fixed for a customer here *[under the table]* in Jordan. He paid me the market price *[5JD for the repair]* and I was so proud. Now I work in a

mall giving out free samples for 10JD/day, which I get in cash. I contribute the money to my family, and they spend it quickly.

In the future, I want to design a tech-based solution to help with these issues. I wanted to open up a bank account in my own name a few years ago, but couldn't because at the time I was underage. Hopefully I will be able to do this in Canada, despite my residency status. I leave to pursue my education there in August.

## “You Shouldn’t Have Money, You’re a Refugee”

### Syria to Turkey: A married couple struggle to send and receive money

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*The interview is taking place in the interviewees’ home in a poorer neighborhood in Sanliurfa. The home, a third-floor walk-up apartment, is tidy and sparsely furnished. Yousef, a man in his mid-30s, greets me warmly at the door, holding his two-year-old son. He introduces his wife, Shaima, who is a few years younger than him. We sit in the living room, with the TV running on mute in the background, showing cartoons. It’s quite hot in the apartment as the late afternoon sun shines directly inside. The two-year-old plays near us at first and eventually falls asleep on his mother’s lap. Throughout the conversation, Shaima offers me water, juice, Syrian coffee, and baklava.*

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**B**efore the crisis, I [*Shaima*] was studying chemistry at university. I didn’t really enjoy chemistry, but it was the “highest” subject my high school grades allowed me to study. Yousef and I got married after the crisis began and moved from our hometown to a nearby city in the east of Syria. After that, our son was born. In May 2014, Yousef lost his work as an engineer. I wasn’t working. So we decided to try to move to Turkey. He would go first and then we would follow.

**Yousef:** I was able to cross legally and without problems through the border gate. I took only one bag with me. I took just one suit. I moved to Sanliurfa because I had uncles here and the people living [*in Sanliurfa*] are like Syrian people. Although there are officially 400,000 Syrians living in Sanliurfa, in reality it’s probably more like 700,000 [...] in the last eight months, no new [*Syrian*] people have been registered [*in Sanliurfa under Temporary Protection*].

I soon found work as a volunteer with a Turkish humanitarian NGO. In March 2015, I found a full-time position with an international humanitarian NGO. Then, Shaima and I decided that she and our son should try to join me in Turkey.

**Shaima:** My son and I crossed near the [*detail removed*] gate. We couldn’t cross legally because the gate was not open, so we hired a smuggler.

**Yousef:** You pay the money and they find a suitable way.

**Shaima:** We walked for five hours through the night. I paid 200 dollars to the smuggler in Syria, thinking this was the entire cost, but later I had to pay more in Turkey.

**Yousef:** Even with this unexpected cost, it was cheaper than it is now—now it costs about 1,000 dollars. Nowadays they are shooting people at the border. I was willing to pay more for safety. I used my social contacts to verify that Shaima’s smuggler was a professional person.

**Shaima:** There were over 50 people who crossed in the same group as us. Our group might have been one of three or four others who crossed with the same smuggler that evening. Yousef traveled from Sanliurfa to meet us border. I was so happy.

**Yousef:** I cried.

**Shaima:** We have uncles in Sanliurfa, but the rest of our families are in Syria. Yousef's family is in a regime-controlled area and my family is in a Daesh-controlled village. We mostly use WhatsApp to communicate with our families. Everyone here or in Syria has a smart phone. There are many airstrikes where my family lives: more than 12 people were killed a few days ago. Also, Daesh don't allow the people to go out [...] you have to find someone you trust and give them a lot of money. Sometimes they kill people who try to travel.

*[Do you make money transfers to Syria?]*

**Yousef:** There are a lot of informal offices of transferring money. Sometimes I give my friend *[in Sanliurfa]* money, and their family gives it to my family in our town. Compared to this fee-free method, hawala offices are so expensive: they take about 10%. On the plus side, with hawala it's easy and there are no problems [...] They just take the phone number and the name; also they don't ask about documents.

With formal money transfers, the PTT *[Turkish Post Office]* and Western Union have a lot of problems with the Syrian people; they need passports and documents. PTT takes more than a month. They say 'system yok' *[the system is broken]*. If you go to Europe it's so difficult to send money. They check your account. You shouldn't have money, because you're a refugee. If you start to transfer the money you will involve yourself in problems.

**Shaima:** Now, I'm looking for a job teaching chemistry in a Syrian school or working for an NGO. I'm also studying Turkish at home. Our son is going to a mixed Turkish-Syrian kindergarten. We considered traveling to Europe last year, but decided not to because it was so difficult and dangerous.

**Yousef:** If Turkey gives us any hope for the future, we will stay, but nothing is clear here. Every day they change the rules. My family's future ultimately depends on the relationship between Turkey and Europe and Russia—it's a politics situation.

**Shaima:** The biggest problems for Syrians in Turkey are that it's so difficult to find a job, *[and]* also the language.

**Yousef:** The Turkish government should do more. They should remove the difficulties for work *[and]* provide the Syrian people some special jobs. The tension between the Syrian people and the Turkish people is increasing [...] Syrian and Turkish people fight each other in *[the local park]*, so we avoid going there. Life is so expensive for the Syrian people *[in Turkey]* and it's so difficult to find a job, but *[it's]* still better than Jordan and Lebanon, and also better than Syria. [...] The difference between Turkey and Syria is there are no bombs here.

We don't know anyone who arrived in Turkey from Syria recently. Even though the situation for our families is so bad, it's so expensive and so risky for them to move from there. It's especially dangerous to move between different areas of control within Syria. It's also becoming increasingly dangerous to cross illegally from Syria into Turkey. We know a lot of women and children who got shot by the jandarma *[Turkish military police]* at the border.

I have simple message for the American people: the Syrian people moved outside *[their country]* just to save their lives, save their families, just to stay alive. We just want an honest life. Everyone is responsible for his family. As an example, I came to Turkey for my son [...] the people in Syria see death every day and also the schools have stopped for five years. The most important need for Syrians in Turkey is education because if we fail to solve our problems, our children can solve them.

We survived a lot. One time from the airstrike, one time from the tank. I'm lucky maybe, but there are a lot of unlucky people.

# “The First Thing You Do Is Buy a Phone”

Syria and Palestine to Greece: Three men explain crucial survival strategies

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*The large, red ferry named Knossos is our marker. Beyond the ferries are hangars with broken windows, structures in ruin. Toward the right, with the water to the left, stretches a large concrete apron that is a combined road and staging area. Tucked under the bridge are hundreds of tents chock-a-block, a ferment of stranded travelers. They can't move forward as the borders are closed to the north, and don't dare move backward.*

*The tent is at the edge of the camp, facing forward. In the distance, you can see a cruise ship and vacationers disembarking. In the middle of our conversation, the afternoon food distribution by Panpiraiiki takes place—women and children run towards the food distribution. I do not see a single man running. Three men are sitting in the tent. There are flies everywhere and the area smells like sweat and dirt. One of the men is playing a triangle musical instrument (common in Greece around the Christmas holidays).*

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**W**e have been in Piraeus for three months. We sleep on the floor, in the dirt. I wake up every morning and say, open the border. We originally traveled alone and met in Turkey. Now we travel together. An NGO worker in Turkey had told us that we would have problems as single men. We say we are family, cousins. Do you think we look alike? *[They all laugh.]*

*[The Syrian man is from Aleppo. The other two men are from Palestine, but they are less talkative.]* We first made our journey through Jordan, and then took a flight to Turkey. Then boat to Samos, and then boat to Piraeus.

In our three months here, we have not received any money. If you had money before, you have money now. Someone sends it to you, you have ways. If you didn't have money before though... *[I ask how people receive money in the camp.]* Western Union. *[I ask about documentation and papers.]* The registration paper that you get if you register in Greece is fine. Or you borrow a passport. Papers aren't the problem. Not having money is the problem.

The first thing you do is you buy a phone. You need a phone. You need to connect with people – agents, smugglers. My phone was stolen in Turkey, and I thought, this is how I'm going to die. Everybody knows about the smugglers—the police even know! It's not a secret. Without a smuggler, you die—with a smuggler, you sometimes die too.

The first time we tried to leave Turkey, we were caught by the Turkish police and went to jail for two days. When we were released, we went straight from the jail to the area where the smugglers are. You don't waste any time.

*[The Palestinian man says]:* I have problems because nobody cares about the Palestinians now. If you are Syrian, Iraqi, okay. Everybody knows there is a war in your country. But there is also war in Palestine. Why do the organizations make differences?" *[What are the differences?]* In the early days, there were different lines: food distribution for Afghans, food distribution for Syrians. That's it.

The other problem is the lines are for families, first. Look at the food distribution *[they point to the area]*. It's all women. It's because the NGOs give food to the women and the kids. The men eat last. Sometimes we meet nice people from the next town over and we sit with them and say we are family. Otherwise, you wait and nobody cares.

*[What did you bring with you?]* Water, clothes. *[Any valuables?]* If I had valuable things, I would have brought them.

*[The Syrian man brought \$900 in cash. Our translator asks how, the man seems embarrassed to say in front of me. Our translator explains]:* There is a special pocket in my underwear, but I don't want to discuss in front of the lady.

# “Everything Was Black”

Syria to Turkey: A young man negotiates constantly changing financial rules as borders shift within Syria itself

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*We are meeting in a café in Sanliurfa. The ambiance is similar to past evenings – small groups of people chatting and drinking soft drinks and tea. It’s Friday and we are both looking forward to the weekend.*

*A is a man in his mid-30s from Deir Ezzor. In addition to his parents, he has six younger sisters in Syria ages 13 to 27 whom he feels deeply responsible for: “For me, I’m staying responsible, all my life, as long as I can take a breath.”*

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I graduated from university in 2009. After completing my studies, I registered with the local bar association and practiced law for two years. After these two years, I took a written and oral exam. My family and friends supported me when he passed. I was then able to open my own office—I hired a secretary, and bought a computer, furniture, and reference books. I worked in my own office for two years. My work depended on my relationships with judges, the police, clients, and employers within the Syrian government. When I go to any place, I make relationships with any person to make my work easier. Looking back on this time, life was so good [...] I established special relationships and I cared for this work [...] I had good social status and I met many important people.

I took a test to be employed with the Syrian government and passed, but didn’t end up accepting the job because the salary was too low. I’m a successful person and I take good money from my work, but the salary in the Syrian government is not good for me. I took the test mainly to challenge myself. I also took tests to become a judge and a police official, but in both cases I didn’t pass because I lacked an inside “connection.”

After that, the problems started in Syria. The court stopped because the police officers can go and arrest any person. The law—it stopped. I had money from my work; I took it from the bank to put it in my house. I wasn’t able to work. I spent my savings. I rented a shop and ran a mini-market.

The situation worsened when Daesh took control of my hometown in early 2014. I decided to go out of Syria because Daesh came to my city and my life was now dangerous [...] Those people hate the lawyers. I stayed a few days because any person who had a problem with documents or property came to me. People were trying to obtain documents and titles to protect their assets from being confiscated by Daesh. They took everything—cars, buildings—to use those supplies.

During this time, the judge from Daesh invited me to his court. Everything was black, and the judge asked me, “why are you using law other than what Allah has revealed?” I was not comfortable in front of this judge [...] This judge had strange ideas, he could have killed me—it would have been very easy for him. I had to be careful of every word that came out of my mouth.

I decided to leave directly after this meeting. Many other lawyers from my area—mainly Christians, Kurds, and Shia—left Syria soon after January 2011.

I traveled from my hometown to another village, and then to a larger city by car with family friends. I told them I would go to the city to get something for my shop. I brought one backpack with clothes and documents with me. I had to pay the equivalent of about 150 TL [*\$50 USD*] to cross from the Daesh- to the FSA-controlled area. I stayed in the city for two hours and then crossed to Turkey. The legal way was too crowded, so I paid a smuggler 250 TL [*\$85 USD*] to cross illegally.

I traveled in the evening with around ten other people and the smuggler. The smuggler accompanied us to the border and then just cut the fence. The Turkish government saw and let us go. We then went to a meeting point where a Turkish smuggler picked us up by car and asked for an additional and unexpected 250 TL payment. This smuggler took me to Gaziantep. I might have been able to get my money back if the crossing had been unsuccessful.

I stayed in Gaziantep for one month with a friend. When this friend left for Germany, I moved to Sanliurfa to stay with my aunt. After that I started to search for the work, because I had debts after this long year. I borrowed money from friends and relatives. I have good friends, they are like my brothers. When I'm living with my friends, I don't pay anything. One friend even offered to pay for me to travel to Europe.

Eventually I found work as a volunteer with a local humanitarian NGO and moved into an apartment with three to five other Syrian men. My work was crucial for helping me build a network in Sanliurfa. When I came here, I didn't know anybody [...] After I got my job I established new relationships with Syrian people here.

I began working as a volunteer with a different humanitarian NGO and after six months gained a full-time position. At that point, I didn't have many options, I just needed to work because I didn't have money, I had debts. Now, I have a salary, I can support myself [...] I need money to open many options for me.

I never crossed back into Syria, but I regularly send money to my family through exchange shops. To do this, I give money to the shopkeeper and request a transfer to a partner shop in my hometown. I provide the name and phone number of the person who will receive the money [*the name should match the person's ID exactly*]. Transfer notifications are sent via WhatsApp and the receiver can collect the money in Syrian currency or dollars. I watch the exchange rates closely to see which one is more advantageous. Overall, this [*hawala*] process depends on the trust. If I'm a bad dealer, I will lose my work—so why would I go the wrong way? If all the people trust me [...] my work will be bigger in the future. I pay fees of 5-10% and sometimes the money is delayed because the other shop is closed or a person's phone is off.

Just today I received money from my friends in Germany. They send money through Western Union or a bank, and I pick it up to send to my friends' families in Syria. Western Union is expensive, but in Germany you don't have a dealer.

Now in my area, it's forbidden [*to transfer money*]. So I have to send secretly. I don't know why.

Two months ago, my family in Syria escaped from the Daesh-controlled area. They had stayed in my hometown because my father is an engineer and the government stopped paying his salary, so the family can't go out of the house because they don't have money to rent another house. They had tried twice recently to escape Daesh control but failed both times because they were caught by car. They lost half of the money they had paid.

I made an agreement for someone to come to *[my family's]* house at 4 a.m. and take them to the end of the line for Daesh control. They walked for seven hours with a smuggler. My parents, who are about 65, paid extra to ride as passengers on motorcycles. They were then picked up by car and went to Aleppo, where I had arranged a furnished apartment for them to rent and relax. It was around 1,000 TL [*\$330 USD*] per person to be smuggled out of the Daesh-controlled areas. I sent my family this money because they didn't have income or savings.

After one month, my family moved from their city to a more central city because now their city is not safe; it's so bad. They are still there, and if I can find a way to take them to Turkey, I will do it. Here it's safe for my family.

Daesh control is so bad. Those people have strange ideas [...] it's so dangerous. They are good at recruiting people, especially foreign fighters, but if they sat with me for one year, I could not be convinced.

## “Aladdin and Jasmine”

Syria to Greece: A couple deals with smugglers, currency issues, and money transfers to reach family in Europe

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*Interview with Rasha (wife) and Abdullah (her husband) at a refugee squat near the City Plaza Hotel. Rasha and Abdullah are Syrians, and look like they are in their early 30s, although Rasha might be younger. It seems that despite the advantages of being educated, English speakers, and without children, the fact that they had run out of money was the main barrier for Abdullah and Rasha to move any further beyond Greece. Rasha begins the interview.*

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**W**e were both primary school teachers. We met each other while teaching in the same school, and we've been married for three years. We decided we needed to leave because we had been forced out of our jobs and our city was bombed. From the time we decided we had to leave, it took us about one month to save enough money for the trip.

*[I asked if they had a bank account where they kept their money.]* No, no one does in Syria because there are no real banks in our town. They are all under the control of the “mafia” and the corrupt government. We sold all of our belongings—car, furniture, jewelry—and took money from our relatives to raise the money *[we needed to leave]*. There are many people in Syria who have the money to leave, but just don't want to make the risky trip. Those are the people who can afford to lend to others who are willing and able to risk the journey.

*[Who buys things from people who sell their belongings?]* It's mostly internationals. Foreigners like Russians and Afghans who travel to Syria as jihadis to fight with Daesh. They would pay only \$100 for something worth \$1,000.

**Abdullah:** These are people who pretend to be Islam. There are many Chechens who tell people, “we have come to slaughter you.” Our city is already near the Turkish border. We decided on using a smuggler who had a good reputation from advice from friends and word of mouth. *[How do smugglers get good reputations?]* It's not about treating people well, but smuggling successfully and therefore getting paid a lot. They don't care about people they care about money only.

**Rasha:** We took a car with the smuggler, only the two of us, for about an hour to a nearby town on the border of Syria and Turkey. There, a small river separates the two countries. We crossed the river on a raft that we had to stand on and use paddles. The smuggler crossed with us. The journey for two people to go from our town and cross into Turkey is \$500. *[1 dollar=600 Syrian liras. They said they exchanged the liras to dollars in the black market.]*

**Abdullah:** The black market is overrun by jihadis and there is no government presence or control. There is no law no order no system in Syria. The jihadis make the law. When we were traveling, I only carried my Syrian ID. I didn't have a passport because I had never needed to

apply for one before—it was too expensive and too late to try and do it by the time we needed to leave. Trying to apply for a passport would have gotten me arrested.

**Rasha:** I had a passport, though. I had lived some years before in Hana with my father and he made sure I had a passport.

**Abdullah:** The government would force people out of their jobs to work in the army, which is why we lost our jobs. For the trip to Turkey, the smuggler wanted direct payment. I didn't want to pay the smuggler because I didn't trust him, so I decided to use an "insurance" person to safeguard against the smuggler trying to steal our money without actually transporting us.

We gave our money to the "insurance agent" who gave us a code, "shifra," to use to pay the smuggler, but only if you make it across. Once we arrived safely in Turkey with the smuggler, we gave the shifra code to the smuggler who then called the insurance agent and collected his money.

*[What if they give the smuggler a fake receipt/shifra in order to try to cheat the smuggler out of his payment?]* It's not possible because the insurance agent has the correct code to compare it with. This same type of system is used to get from Greece to Germany, except it costs \$3,000 to get a fake passport so you can go to Germany. When we arrived, we tried to get a "kimlik," the card giving humanitarian legal status to all asylum seekers from Syria in Turkey, but we weren't able to get one because Turkey had stopped giving them out.

**Rasha:** My uncle lives in Turkey, but we stayed with some other friends we knew. We were there for a couple of days while our friend helped find us a suitable trafficker to take us to another city. *[The same trafficker that had taken them to the first town had offered to take them to another city but they didn't trust him, which is why they had friends help them find someone who knew the way].*

**Abdullah:** In the first town, it was more dangerous and likely that you might get caught by police, while the city is run by the "mafia" and we have heard from other refugees that this is smuggling capital. It cost \$140 [700 Turkish liras] for us to take the bus to the city. We paid the smuggler this directly. *[Unclear whether or not the smuggler traveled with them on the bus to the city.]* This price is more than a normal bus ticket for Turks because it is "illegal," as it is the smuggler himself who actually buys the bus tickets. Once we made it to the city, we spent three days there. There were "insurance places" all around.

We were told it would cost \$1,000 each to get to Greece. We didn't expect that it would be this expensive. We were traveling with several different types of currency. We took a boat with 40 people total. We were lucky it was just 40 people.

When we got in the boat, the trafficker asked "who can drive?" and said the trip would be half price for whoever navigated. There was a mix of Syrians, Afghans, Algerians, Moroccans on the boat. We arrived to Mytilini/Lesvos—this is where we received our registration papers. We were in a camp at first—all Syrians were given "papers" for six months and Afghans were only given papers for one month. Algerians steal these papers from Syrians. The six-month papers were most valuable.

After just a week in the camp, we made it to the mainland on a ferry and stayed in Ritsona for two months. We chose not to apply for asylum because we never expected to have to stay in

Greece—we thought we would be able to make it to Germany. No one was applying for asylum in Greece at the time because they were all afraid it meant they would have to stay there.

In Ritsona, we set up a school since we're both schoolteachers. *[They proudly showed me pictures of the school they set up and their classes they were teaching.]* We can't borrow any money from Syria because no one we know there has any money to lend to us.

**Rasha:** I have a sister and brother-in-law in Germany. We had an appointment at the Asylum Office on June 29, and we applied for relocation hoping to join them there. But our real goal is to get resettled to the US.

**Abdullah:** I have visited many different agencies and the US and Canadian embassies in Greece to get help—we even have a letter of sponsorship from a family in Seattle- but we've been told a lot of conflicting information. At this point we've run out of all our money. We are like Aladdin and Jasmine looking for our magic to go to Europe.

## “A Special Drink”

Syria to Jordan: A Syrian woman and her husband use their wits to travel to Amman, but now find themselves dependent on aid

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*Wasan is very animated and active, although she waited very patiently and was the last refugee we interviewed that day. I first shook hands with her outside the shop when we arrived. Outside, she was completely covered by her niqab, and I could only see her bright eyes. As soon as we stepped inside, however, she flipped her niqab right up to reveal her incredibly expressive face. Throughout the other interviews she would periodically interject with tidbits of information, and she was excited for us to interview her. She began mapping her route for us while another woman was still giving her interview.*

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**W**e lived in a small town outside of Damascus, and our first move was into the city, where we stayed for one day before moving on to another town. From there, we went to the Syrian border on a big bus. I arrived at the border with my husband and children, and we were told we couldn't cross without a guarantor [*someone Jordanian to vouch for them*]. I could have bribed the officer, but didn't want to do that. The whole bus was sent back to Homs.

In Homs, we stayed in a hotel for the night with what felt like one million other people in the same room. There were no blankets, so I covered my children with my coat. We stayed in Homs for one week, and I sold my gold for cash there. My husband's annual bonus had paid for the first bus ride, and at point we were low on funds. We attempted to travel to Jordan again, this time by a different route. We went back to Damascus, then from there to Zabadani and then to Lebanon. With the gold I sold, we paid for a car for the family to Beirut. [*They slept in the car the first night.*] From Beirut, we traveled to Tripoli. We had relatives there. Our relatives were very poor, and could not house us, so we stayed overnight in a storeroom.

This wasn't a safe situation for the kids. We trekked back to the center of Tripoli, where we met a man with a van who came and offered to help. I declined, but the same man encountered my husband a bit later [*he wasn't with the family at the time, doing something else*] and he accepted the man's offer. He brought us all to his apartment, and gave us food and showers. I was afraid to stay in Tripoli. It wasn't safe. We rented a car and returned to Beirut and just went to the airport. We had no plan and didn't even know where we were going, just that we couldn't stay in Lebanon. We looked at the board—Egypt, Turkey—Jordan was the only place that still had tickets available. We used the cash from my gold to pay for their flight.

We flew into Amman then traveled to Irbid by bus [*a friend of Wasan's husband was there*]. All we had with us were our documents, some clothes, and a special drink from Syria [*didn't specify*] which I would use to bribe guards at various points. My husband and I discussed and agreed together that it would be safer for me to carry the cash, since women were subject to fewer searches. Other women along the way gave me advice about how best to hide it in my clothes. I felt unsafe and nervous doing this, but realized it was the safest option for our family.

We stayed for twelve days with relatives in Irbid, then we went to a house we rented for one year, then to another, which we rented for five months. An organization from Norway helped us pay rent for the first year and a half we were in Jordan. Now, we rent a house for 200JD/month, but we share it with our in-laws *[a total of 12 people]*.

We've received informal *[charitable]* assistance. Refugees help each other when we can. CARE and other organizations have helped us with cash assistance and coupons. I prefer coupons because if men take the cash, they will spend it on other things. With coupons, I know my family will eat.

An Islamic Relief organization sends a monthly check on our behalf directly to our landlord to help with the rent. *[Wasan's real name (first, middle, and last) are all Christian names, she says with a laugh, so she's been able to "play the game" and get aid from a few Christian organizations and churches as well. Wasan also says you can only get benefits from UNHCR if you have a guarantor.]*

I think that permission to work for refugees in Jordan is essential to them improving their financial situations. Kids also need more access to education. *[At this point, another woman who is listening jumps in and agrees, saying her son is threatening to return to Syria and join an army if he cannot continue his education in Jordan.]*

Homes in Jordan are bad, although Syrian women try to make the best of the situation—to make it feel like a real home—with what they have. Many times landlords will increase the rent with no notice, and families will have to scramble and move around to find a new place. A sense of home is hard to find here. We are physically safe, but other pieces of our lives are very much up in the air.

Inside our home, we have our own *jama3eh [savings club]*. Everyone who can contribute financially puts money in weekly, and it gets paid out to individuals on a rotating basis so they can use the lump sums to pay for personal expenses. Jama3ehs aren't super common outside families because there's always the risk that someone will exit it *[move]* and no longer contribute/take the money with them before the circle is finished. This insecurity makes most refugees hesitant to use this system.

*[Wasan had to leave, so we were unable to finish the interview in its entirety.]*