

Amar, Rolanda, Yasmin Obaid, Syria



The family comes from a Syrian city of Hons and for generations has belonged to the merchant class and big land-owners. After the revolution broke out in 2011, Amar, his wife and their 3 daughters fled to Egypt. He had savings and opened a small import firm in Egypt, he imported furniture from India and Bali. He opened a shop, employed up to eight salesmen, travelled frequently. However, after the revolution, the government's attitude towards refugees changed. The junta imposed visas. Amar could not leave the country to go on business trips. He was afraid he wasn't going to get an entry permit. The media, politicians and the Egyptian citizens began to boycott Syrian shops, insults became more persistent and the hatred towards refugees grew. Thus, Egypt turned out to be a trap: returning to Syria was as impossible as a future in Egypt. Together with the family, they decided they would attempt another flight. This time to Germany. Unfortunately, you cannot do it legally, so Amar left first, leaving his wife and three daughters (the youngest being 5 years old and the oldest 17) in Cairo. The oldest daughter wants to study Psychology and asked his father to take her with him but, due to the fact she has not turned 18 yet, he refused. Amar, together with other refugees and smugglers, takes the coach to Alexandria, where they get locked in a rented apartment and wait for information regarding a ship that will take them to Europe. They spent days locked up in the apartment as they could only leave during the night, providing they had permission and were accompanied by a smuggler. After a couple of days, they received the information that the ship will arrive at night. The journey will take 6 days. Once they're at the beach, they run towards the motorboats. It works on a first come, first served basis. The slowest ones will stay. The motorboats drop them off on an island. The smugglers do not explain anything that is happening. Moments later, the mother ship arrived and brought them on open sea. However, the journey did not last long as they were stopped by coast guards. They're lying squashed together on the concrete floor. Amar spent a couple of weeks in jail. He had given his life jackets and water purifying tablets to the fellow passengers. The Syrian authorities deport him to Turkey. He tried to get from Istanbul to Rhodes, but was tricked by the smugglers. He buys a fake Turkish passport, but gets caught and turned back at the first border control. He takes a plane to Tanzania with a second fake passport, then takes a bus to Zambia and takes a plane to Frankfurt. The whole journey costs him another 3,000 EURO, that he received from his wife. Rolanda had to sell a diamond ring – a wedding present. After many months, he gets to Europe, where he ends up at a small refugee centre in a hessian city of Siegbach. He tries to get his wife and daughters to Europe. He is afraid that his family and marriage may not survive the long time apart.

Source: Bauer W., "Przez morze. Z Syryjczykami do Europy", Wołowiec 2016.

Ashna Rasheed, Irak



Ashna is a young Kurd. He used to live in the north-eastern district of Iraq, Tuz Khurmatu. He owned a grocery shop there. According to Ashna, he had to flee because he was afraid for his life. Last year he received a phone call informing him of the sentence he has been given.

The region that he comes from is at constant threat from the jihadists. A couple of months ago, many villages from the Tuz Khurmatu area have been released by the Iraqi army, but nobody is able to say if they are released permanently.

In 2007, Ashna's uncle, an engineer working for one of the petrochemical companies, was kidnapped by people connected with the Al-Kaida. The terrorists demanded ransom from the family. They quickly collected the money, but his uncle still lost his life. They were able to capture the killers, who spent a couple of years locked up in an Iraqi prison. One of them was killed there. Now the others who were released are looking for revenge.

"They are people who previously worked for Saddam Hussain, then after the fall of his regime fought for Al-Kaida and are now part of the Islamic State" – the man says.

Ashna wanted to avoid the dangerous and expensive journey through the Mediterranean Sea. For months, the media has been reporting about thousands of casualties whose rented boats turned out to be too weak to get to the European coasts. He wanted to get a Czech visa. He decided it would be easier to get there. He gave an 800-dollar bribe to a smuggler who was supposed to help him, but it turned out that he needed an additional thousand and the outcome was not even certain. He decided to leave his passport and to not even ask about the money. He bought a fake ID and went to Turkey. Within a week, he linked up with smugglers who smuggled people over the sea. He got to Italy by boat and went to Belgium from there. "This whole journey cost me over 10,000 dollars. Was I afraid of crossing the sea? Of course, I was afraid" – the man recounts. Now the Kurd comes down to the plaza at Chaussee d'Anvers in Brussels, where the number of tents and people sleeping in them has now been growing for a week. He helps out, because he cannot work. He is waiting for a decision regarding his appeal.

Abu Hani i Yalda, Syria



Abu Hani was the owner of a small supermarket in a Syrian town. When the war started, the officials who were destroying the town, added detergents to the wheat which he was using to bake bread in order to force him to close the shop. Hani spent all his savings to save the shop, which was then closed again. During that time you could see bodies of people getting murdered shown on the television. Oftentimes that was the only way for the family to identify the bodies of their loved ones. But usually people would just disappear. Three brothers of Yalda, Hani's wife, were driving to the hospital to donate blood to their new-born nephew who went through a heart surgery. Those three men never made it to the hospital. They disappeared without any sign.

Hani and his family decided to go to Jordan. They didn't want to bribe the immigration guards which ended up with Hani getting beaten up. The guards would kick him and jump on him for an hour and a half - his wife and children watching. They took all their money. Hani left the border in pain and with a brain concussion. He could barely move.

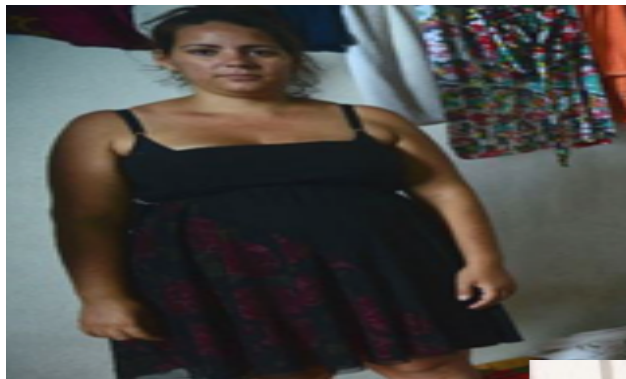
"We would wake up each day glad to be alive and go to sleep every night aware that we might not wake up in the morning. Our relatives were getting arrested, missing, murdered, died in the bomb explosions" – explains Yalda.

Hani borrowed money from his friends and once again travelled to the border with his family. This time he paid the guard who saluted them in return. They arrived at the Jordan border with empty pockets, worried about meeting the Jordan army but they greeted them with a smile and showed them the way to the refugee camp.

Hani works in the camp as a carrier. Because of his spine injury he gets to carry the lighter stuff. Yalda welcomes the new arrivals and helps them during their first days. They both try to save some money to buy hearing devices for their two deaf children. They are worried that if their five year old daughter won't be able to hear, she will forget the words and language she had already learned.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/21/many-ways-die-syria-neil-gaiman-refugee-camp-syria>

Alejandro Labarte, Ariel Jaca i Aily Torres, Cuba



"Brother, there are corpses in the jungle. Don't get frightened when you come across some", Alejandro Labarte, a 32-year-old Cuban, listens to a recorded message. The warning was sent by one of the first Cubans who dared to venture into the "Darién Gap" nine days earlier. "We don't want that, but if it is the only way to escape, we prefer to die there than to go back to Cuba," says Alejandro, who uses his phone as a safe. It stores the confessions of those who have already reached Panama; the films in which the officers of the Migración Colombia (Migration Authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) forcefully remove his compatriots from the Turbo, pictures of the helicopter hovering low over the camp where they slept. "People are scared. The helicopter that circles ominously around all day fills people with fear. Pregnant women are the most affected among us", he adds. Three days ago one of them miscarried.

Forty-one-year-old Ariel Jaca's has a machete, plastic slippers, biscuits, serum and rope. He is a specialist in social sciences and left Cuba because of the hopeless economic situation. He believes that his equipment will be useful in the travel he started last Saturday and the end of which is nowhere near in sight. "They say that animals do not pose a great danger, but that there is a place that is called *La Montaña de la Muerte* – The Mountain of Death, extremely difficult to climb. "The rope will come in handy – we'll be pulling each other up on it." Ariel travels without any relatives. He became friends with other Cubans and together they are planning to reach Panama and then cross the subsequent borders until they have come to the USA. He is aware the challenges are formidable – recently, Costa Rica and Nicaragua have closed their borders to immigrants.

"If others managed, why shouldn't we do so?" Says Aily Torres, a 28-year-old. He speaks in plural. She was four months pregnant when she got on one of the boats loaded with migrants. "Of course I'm scared, but I'm not looking back. I couldn't carry on trying to survive on \$10 a month; I need a decent job. " They were resigned in the face of the refusal of the Colombian government to organize a flight to Mexico, with the authorities being reluctant, as the officials put it, to become a link in the chain of people smuggling. Now the Cubans slowly embark on the unfriendly Darién trail despite the fear of what the future may hold.

Source: *Thinktrip for US-bound Cubans is hard? Do it pregnant* <https://www.yahoo.com/news/think-trip-us-bound-cubans-hard-pregnant-054309223.html>

Carol Monssem, Central African Republic



"My village is at the foot of a hill, which gives a beautiful view over the surrounding valley", says Carol Monss, 29. "The trees are full of fruit, and you can even find gold in the soil. The place, where the minaret stands right next to Christian church towers, had been calm until one winter day, when the piece and quiet were shattered. Suddenly, the streets where children had been playing only the previous day were now full of the dead. It took a week for The Red Cross to collect all the the bodies.

Carol, her husband and their five children were asleep on 4 February 2013 when armed troops from the military formation called Seleka attacked their village, which lies 260 kilometers away from the capital of the Central African Republic, Bangui. The sounds of shooting took them by surprise. They were frightened. The rebels surrounded the village, but Carol and the children had managed to hide in the thickets.

"When I returned five days later, I realized I had lost virtually all my possession", Carol recalls. "The house was burned to the ground and I didn't have any money or food. What is more, my husband had been abducted. I went to the rebels and begged them to let him go, but they were deaf to my requests. With the youngest child in my arms and a piece of bread from a neighbor, I went with my family to Bangui. This trip was the saddest moment in my life."

Carol and her children arrived at Don Bosco, a camp for internally displaced persons. There she is still waiting for more peaceful times, for work and for her husband. "Long-term peace can only be achieved in one way," says Carol. "All parties to the conflict must acknowledge their faults and sincerely apologize."

Source: <http://stories.unhcr.org/pl/historia-carol-republiki-rodkowoafrykaskiej-p126.html>

Dala, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma)



Dala and her husband Mohammed used to live in Burma, where they had a farm, with five cows, three bulls and a herd of goats. The army forced Mohammed into slave labor as a porter. He worked for them without food and water, while the neglected farm was deteriorating. Then, their cows and goats began to disappear, just as other local people began telling them they were not Burmese but vagrants from Bangladesh.

Mohammed does not remember when it was they were supposed to come to Burma because his father, his grandfather and even his grandfather's grandfather lived in the village. They seem to have been there forever.

They decided to flee abroad. For three days they hacked through the jungle and when the Bangladeshi border guards spotted them, the family were in such a state that the guards did not have the heart to stop their progress. It was 21 years ago.

When Dala's daughter was 23, she was raped in the refugee camp they were living in. The tragedy became her pass to the West and her daughter was resettled to Canada. It was five years ago. The daughter calls her mum regularly, but has little good news for her. So far, she has been unable to find a job. Another Muslim family took her in, but they struggled themselves and eventually had to give her away.

Dala is worried about her daughter, but believes that as soon as they are reunited in Canada, everything will work out. However, it is difficult for them to go to the West. They have five children, and half of their life they have spent in the refugee camp in Kutupalong.

Dala and Mohammed occasionally dream that there is no cruel army in Burma or bad neighbors who are aggravated by their religion. In the dream, they live in their village, look after the farm, and there is no refugee camp in Bangladesh – their daughter does not live in remote Canada, but with them.

Source: <http://stories.unhcr.org/pl/bangladesz-historia-dali-p18.html>

Doaa Al Zamel i Bassem, Syria



Doaa, 19 year old Syrian was living in Egypt. She had to survive from day to day, earning per diems with no contract. She moved to Egypt with her family after her father's company had been blown apart by a bomb. She didn't feel safe in Egypt because of an incident when strangers tried to kidnap her. That's when her fiancée Bassem came up with the idea to go to Europe in search of a safe place, a job for him and studies for her. Doaa agreed reluctantly because she couldn't swim and was always scared of water. Apart from that, she knew how cruel the smugglers can be and that 2000 people drowned in the Mediterranean sea, that year only.

Bassem spent all his lifetime savings on a trip from Egypt to Europe. On Saturday morning they got the message that a ship is waiting for them on the beach. It was an old fishing boat with 500 people on board already – 300 on the low deck and 200 on the top. 100 children among them. They sailed for three days – crowded, with no food, no water, not sure what tomorrow will bring. On the fourth day they noticed a smaller boat that was supposed to take them on. When they refused, some men started to drill a hole in their boat to force the passengers to transfer. Doaa didn't want to leave the sinking boat but Bassem found her a life ring so she wouldn't drown. Dead bodies started to float around them. Some would take off their life vests choosing to die. The second day in the water Bassem lost all his strength and drowned.

A woman with an 18 month old daughter swam towards Doaa asking her to help her child. Other people started to hand over their children to Doaa – at one point she had three of them. On the fourth day the airplanes came and rescued 11 out of 500 people, including Doaa and Masa – the 18 month old girl. Doaa as one of the few survivors would answer questions posed by the families of other passengers. Academy of Athens, one of the most prestigious Greek institutions, recognized her with the award of bravery. Doaa wants to move to Sweden where her family is living. She dreams of becoming a lawyer or a politician – so that she will be able to help in a fight against world's inequalities.

Source: The death boats: A survivor's tale [w](http://tracks.unhcr.org/2015/06/the-death-boats-a-survivors-tale/) <http://tracks.unhcr.org/2015/06/the-death-boats-a-survivors-tale/>

Elsa Peña, Colombia



Rosalba Peña and her children fled from Colombia to Venezuela in search for a better life. “We are expatriates from our own country, we are escaping from a wave of murders, protecting our life as well as the life of our children.”

Rosabela highlights that since she’s lived in Venezuela, she’s using the blessings offered by the government of the country, such as free access to medical care and medication, as well as the access to food through the Mercal network.

“I feel respected; old people and children are well-respected here. Our life has improved. Our stay here has slightly reduced the trauma caused by the Colombian violence” – she highlights.

Elsa’s husband – a left-wing party leader is considered missing in Colombia.

“I ran away from violence to save the lives of my children.”

In Venezuela, she received the necessary help and care, “something that they did not want to give us in our country, as I didn’t exist for the Colombian government. The Colombian internal conflict is brutal. They need to stop with the makeshift solutions, because the people of Colombia have already found what violence, bombings and forced disappearances are at their own cost.”

Source: Venezuela y Colombia: Historias de la frontera<http://www.telesurtv.net/telesuragenda/Venezuela-y-Colombia-Historias-de-la-frontera-20150828-0311.html>

Gonzalo Alejandro Gonzales, Guatemala



Gonzalo Alejandro Gonzales travelled to USA through Mexico – just like 120.000 other Guatemalans do yearly. It's one of the most dangerous illegal border crossings. There is police on one side and gangs along with drug traffickers on the other. The gangs threaten children at the border forcing their parents to let go of their money and valuables. They threatened Gonzalo as well. They hit him on the head – the blood was washing over his back and legs. Then they stabbed him with a machete 26 times. He thought he was going to die.

He managed to hang on for 8 hours while his friend was searching for help. Eventually Gonzalo recovered after being given four blood transfusions. He says that he never felt Mexican but the Mexican blood is running in his veins since that illegal crossing. The hardest thing about migration was having to say goodbye to his brother on the phone.

Source: Fronteras - Migrantes en México: Entre bestias y muros w <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rgd7vhYG6TU>

Luis Rodriguez i Daysi Alfaro, El Salvador



Luis and Daysi were deported from the United States in January 2009 because of their unregulated immigration status. Their children are now under the supervision of the US government. Daysi believes that illegal life in the United States is very difficult. The first few questions that she would typically hear from the potential employer were always about education – whether she had finished high school, had a degree, or completed other courses. Without these, one cannot get a job. At the same time, illegal immigrants have no access to education. Daysi finished only 4 classes of primary school and went to an adult school in the US, where she learned some English. In Los Angeles she worked as a cleaner or nanny, while Luis was employed in construction, either as a plumber or "handyman".

Even for a job in a supermarket, diplomas and documents are essential. Thus the only way to earn money is to sell goods in street markets. Now Luis does not expect much from life. She would only like to get a chance to live with her daughters in El Salvador or in the United States.

Source: El Salvador país de migrantes (2010) w <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CfDMXae6Vk>

Mahmoud, Senegal



After leaving Senegal, Mahmoud trekked through the scorching Sahara for about twelve days, traveling through Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria. The migrants with whom he travelled were transferred from one group of smugglers to another, each of which required payment. No one had food or water, and many had died in the desert. When they finally reached Tripoli, they faced a frightening city exhausted by military battles. When Mahmoud tried to find a job to collect money for another trip, the police arrested him and imprisoned for "a month and four days."

The Catholic bishop of Libya, Father Giovanni Innocenzo Martinelli, pleaded with the people of Africa not to risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean. His requests fell on deaf ears. Hundreds more immigrants are still coming to Libya in search of smugglers who can take them to Europe.

Mahmoud never considered going back. The return journey through the Sahara is as dangerous as the sea route.

One late night, smugglers took Mahmoud and other migrants to a ship. But soon after they set off, the vessel broke down and the group had to turn back. The police fired at them when they were trying to get back to shore, killing seven people. A few days later, the smugglers tried again. They took hundreds of people onto another ship at midnight and managed to send them across the Mediterranean.

Although his horrible journey is over, Mahmoud says that this experience will always remain in his memory, exerting influence on his entire future life. Asked what he advises his Senegalese friends who think of a similar crossing, he replies, "Never, ever, do what I've done."

Source: One Migrant's Harrowing Journey From Senegal to Italy w <http://time.com/3829078/mediterranean-migrant-boat-senegal-story/>

Mohad, Somalia



In January of 2013, Mohad came from Malta to Poland, where he obtained the refugee status. Warsaw was covered with snow at the time and the temperature was a negative 15 degrees. It was 30 degrees hotter in Valletta.

Mohad had only one reason for replacing Malta with Poland. A very important reason. Admittedly, he had a stable job in Malta, but so what, if he couldn't be there with his family.

In 2008 Mohad, a fisherman from Kismayo in Somalia, had to leave his home due to threats from the Islamist group. It had to be a lonely escape. His children were too young to survive the hardships of travelling into the unknown and his wife was pregnant. "I'm going to find safe shelter and I'm going to get you to me, you will see. Sooner or later," he said to her as he quickly said goodbye.

He made his promise come true significantly "later" than "sooner". In his search for safe shelter, he crossed the Sahara Desert and got to the Mediterranean Sea, where, together with tens of other refugees, he set off to Europe on a boat that was falling apart. "They gave us a GPS and told us to head towards Malta," said Mohad, looking back. "We arrived there after four days. One more day and I would have died of thirst."

Admittedly, Mohad was safe in Malta, but he missed his family who have found shelter in Kenya for the meantime. When it turned out that the government of Malta does not allow family reunification, he began looking for other options. Five long years passed this way. One day, he received an offer to move to Poland. "I only asked them if I would be able to bring my family," he told me.

His determination finally paid off. Thanks to the support from the UNHCR, the Polish government and a couple of non-governmental organisations, he could finally welcome his wife and children at the airport in Warsaw. The relief on his face was almost tangible when he realised that he just fulfilled his promise.

Source: <http://stories.unhcr.org/pl/mohad-najbardziej-tskni-za-rodzin-p34.html>