

The Forgotten Men Of Syria

Photojournalist Edward Jonkler has followed Syrian men as they have gone from business owners to refugees

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EDWARD JONKLER

Syria has been ravaged by a brutal civil war for six years and the United Nations' refugee council estimates that more than five million Syrians have fled the conflict.

If they have managed to escape the country safely, it doesn't mean they are out of physical or psychological danger. While we might hear or read about atrocities committed in the country, the battle between President Assad's government army, rebels and Isis, or some European countries' reluctance to help the refugees – we rarely hear about the huge impact on the wellbeing of the refugees who have escaped but find themselves trapped in camps.

Edward Jonkler is the photojournalist behind a new exhibition showing in London: *The Lost Men of Syria*. Jonkler has spent time in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Greek islands including the Rukban

refugee camp at the Jordanian-Syrian border which he describes as being the worst thing he has "ever seen involving the refugee crisis". Amnesty International has said there are 75,000 refugees trapped in the camp since Jordan closed the border. Jordan has taken in more than 660,000 registered refugees from Syria.

Jonkler has primarily documented the plight of Syrian men from a typically patriarchal society where they are used to being the breadwinners. They go on to lose everything, are unable to find work, struggle to provide for their families and often end up living in, what can only be described, as sub-human situations.

"Having something to do helps keep people afloat," Jonkler told *Esquire*. "But in many cases, the men can't work so they just lie around. They also have this double blow of losing their hegemony or whatever you want to call it. This means that they go through a crisis: Being held in limbo, stuck in a tent or house waiting every day. It makes its mark on people." Jonkler stresses that to not work and be supported by others is considered "deeply shameful in their culture".

The Lost Men of Syria by Edward Jonkler, in collaboration with the Worldwide Tribe, is an outreach exhibition hosted by the education department at the Saatchi Gallery in London from 19th July until 9th August.

Whaled



Edward Jonkler

Agricultural worker Whaled was photographed in a government refugee camp in Greece by Jonkler. He was one of nine in a room and told the photographer: "If I knew it would be like this here, I would be in Syria. Bombing would be good. In this camp I hope to die so I don't see what is happening to me anymore."

Khaled



Edward Jonkler

The most meaningful of Jonkler's photos is of Khaled, he says, who has been in the Zaatari village, next to the huge refugee camp, for four years. Jordanians who live in the village are hosting roughly 10,000 Syrian refugees. The villagers let them build houses or tents there but warn them they might have to move at any time.

Khaled has built a house on the land for his family including his six children (five of which are girls which made him roll his eyes at Jonkler). He told the photographer: "There is no future, we could be asked to leave at any time." He looks out the window every day for an hour until he sees his children return from the NGO-run school.

Gebreal Saaed



Edward Jonkler

Gebreal is from Hama in west-central Syria and lost his arm after an airstrike. Jonkler met Gebreal in a camp in Lebanon – where he has lived since 2012. A big football fan, they headed down to the beach for a keep about.

Ahmad



Edward Jonkler

Ahmad was a farmer in Syria who owned his own tractor which is a "big deal", says Jonkler. He lost that in the war and now occasionally does illegal work in southern Lebanon. Many Syrians are from an agricultural backgrounds, they can find agricultural jobs in the new countries they flee too but they are both competitive and often cash in hand. The area Ahmad works in is infested with snakes and, according to Jonkler, he "had snake bites all over him". The only reason he's doing the job is to stop him "going insane".



Edward Jonkler

Jonkler met this boy on the Greek island of Chios. He is an orphan and lives in a shipping container in a refugee camp with 16 other orphans - where they all sleep. He lives with a refugee woman, who had lost her seven children, and took the orphans under her wing. The hygiene conditions are "pretty horrible" including lots of fungal infections which are culpable for the scabs on his face.

Mishrif



Edward Jonkler

This is Jonkler's favourite photo of the series. A truck driver by trade, Mishrif lives in the Zaatari village in Jordan in a house owned by a man from Kuwait who has let Mishrif, his son and mother live there.



Edward Jonkler

Another image without a name is of a Syrian man shown behind bars in a sealed section of the refugee camp in Chios. Jonkler said there are rotting food containers everywhere as well as rats and snakes. This man was found in the section for unaccompanied minors and families but he told Jonkler he didn't know why he was there and asked for their help in getting him out.