

# Hope without borders

Sarah Carabott

Qusai very nearly did not make it after his wheelchair was ditched by smugglers into "terrifying" black waters on the Turkish coast when he had just paid \$1,000 for a trip to Europe.

The severely disabled man from Damascus sustained three fractures from the moment he was put on a dinghy until his journey's end at Nera Island in Greece.

Further north, in Lesbos, Ahmed speaks of a square in Raqqa where families used to go for ice cream until Isis militants started bringing people there for execution.

## "Now I don't know where my family is"

They leave the heads of the executed there for three days. No one goes to the square anymore.

Qusai and Ahmed are just two of the people whose tales are told in a publication that Jesuit Refugee Service Europe launched this month to help others understand better what goes through the minds and hearts of those plunging into the unknown to try and remain alive.

*Journeys of Hope* is a collection of stories of refugees on the road to Europe, a project that Danielle Vella from JRS International was entrusted with.

She travelled to Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Italy, Austria and Germany, meeting refugees on the move.

She was accompanied by photographer Darrin Zammit Lupi on two journeys and travelled with Oscar Spooner on another.

A sister working with Caritas hands out hot tea at the transit camp in Croatia.



One point that hits home through the refugees' testimonials is that family life is a serious casualty of the entire journey.

Countless families are separated, especially when men begin the dangerous trip alone to pave a safe

way for their families. This highlights the necessity of organising legal and safe channels to protection, including through family reunification.

Last week, JRS Malta, Aditus Foundation, Integra Foundation

and the Malta Emigrants' Commission reiterated the need to allow refugees safe and legal access to protection.

Ms Vella spoke to one broken man, a distraught father holding on tight to a photo of an Afghan

family of seven. Only he and one of his sons, aged eight, made it to Serbia.

The others got lost at the Iranian-Turkish border: "I was walking with my family and the guards started shooting from both sides. We were



Resting on the deck of the MOAS ship in Italy after being rescued at sea.



**National**

Sheer relief at landing on the Greek island of Lesbos.  
 Photos: Darrin Zammit Lupi (provided by JRS Malta)



stuck. I grabbed my son's hand and ran, and the others went somewhere else to escape. Now I don't know where my family is."

"Ali, Mohammed, Farzona, Mor-taza - four and, with my mother, five," his tearful son explains.

The resilience of the refugees shines throughout the publication, despite their dangerous path - whether through Turkish or North African borders.

"In Libya, we were on the road to Tripoli in three vehicles, about

120 people in each one, most of us Eritreans.

"We were in the first, Isis caught the second or third.

"They let three people go, because they were Muslims, and they chased after our vehicle,"

recounts 21-year-old Tigiste, who escaped conscription in Eritrea.

She met her husband in Sudan after he deserted the Eritrean army in which he had been forcibly recruited as a teenager, pulled from bed one night. They travelled via the Sahara

and Libya and eventually made it to Germany. The journey across the sea was bad, but certainly better than going back to Eritrea. "In the sea, if you die, I guess you die in one minute and it's over. And if you reach Italy, you reach hope."

Volunteers welcome a boat arriving on the island of Lesbos.



Killing time at the transit centre in Slavonski Brod, Croatia.