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## Refugees Are Losing Hope

by Dima Zayat, ANERA program manager in Lebanon

I met Mohammad in a camp called *Cold River*. “This isn’t us,” he told me. I looked around at his home, a dilapidated shed in the half-century-old refugee camp. His five young children had messy hair and dirty clothes. **“You see us as refugees. But this wasn’t us in Syria.”**

Mohammad is a Palestinian refugee from Syria who fled to Lebanon. That puts him and his family in the unique position of being twice exiled. Back in Syria, they lived in the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk, established five decades ago. They had their own house with a small garden, and his children went to school.

Like so many other refugees, Mohammad left everything behind to seek asylum in Lebanon. He lost his house and his small grocery store. Others, even worse off, lost their families. They left because they had no other choice.

And now, with the changes in U.S. policy regarding Syrian refugees, many are losing hope. Even those who had not yet applied for resettlement have been deeply affected. Many were holding out hope that one day, at least, when they gathered enough money and had the time to file for resettlement, they could move to a place like the United States and live normal lives again.

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# ANERA News

The ANERA newsletter is published quarterly by American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), a non-profit agency established in 1968 and dedicated to providing development, health, education and employment programs to Palestinian communities and impoverished families throughout the Middle East.

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**COVER PHOTO:** Refugee in an informal, tented camp for Syrians in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon.  
Bayan Itani, photographer

## Refugees are Losing Hope continued from page 1

For refugees and much of the region, America signifies freedom and equality. It's a place of optimism, where ambition and hard work can help anyone achieve their dreams. **For many of us in Lebanon and beyond, we look to the United States as a model for all the possibilities we do not have here.**

But now, Syrian refugees are not allowed to come to the United States. Even as the U.S. courts fight the ban, for refugees most in need, hope in America has vanished.

In Lebanon there are 1.5 million registered Syrian refugees, and likely a great deal more without papers. They have managed to escape bombs and constant warfare. But here, they don't even have the bare minimum they need to live a dignified life.

Some, like Mohammad, live in old Palestinian camps like Nahr El Bared that are crumbling, a result of overpopulation and poor infrastructure. Others live in tents made of sheet metal and tarp. Many lack reliable electricity and running water. Over half of the children do not go to school. Others have to drop out to make money and support their families. They live on the margins, with little chance of getting anywhere in life.

Organizations like ANERA are trying very hard to improve the situation. We do as much as we can, given Lebanon's lack of space, infrastructure and services. Financial resources are limited. Schools are overcrowded and operate on shifts. Unemployment is high among Lebanese citizens, so it is hard for refugees to find work. There simply are not enough jobs for everyone.

Yet, still, I am struck by the resilience of refugees. They remain active and work hard with the few resources they have. There are some in Lebanon, America, and elsewhere who, unfortunately, see them as welfare cases. Politicians everywhere use them for their own agenda. But **I work with refugees every day and know they are incredibly productive and hard-working people. They can benefit any country they go to, be it Lebanon or the United States.**

Since I met Mohammad I often think back on what he said about the situation he was living under: "This isn't us." We need to remember that **each refugee once had a normal life, just like you and me.** We must not view them as an amorphous, homogenous group, but as individuals who each have their own dreams.

In times, when all hope and decency seem to be lost, we must make sure we do not forget about these families in need. They may be unable to make it to the Statue of Liberty, but they should at least be treated with dignity.

*This story is adapted from its original publication: [muftah.org/refugees-losing-hope](http://muftah.org/refugees-losing-hope)*



Young refugee women paint a mural in Nahr El Bared Palestinian camp. They are students in an ANERA graphic design course.

## LEBANON

Population: **4.3 million**  
(before 2011)

**4,036**  
miles<sup>2</sup>

**1,500,000**  
Syrian refugees

## CONNECTICUT

Population: **3.6 million**

**5,543**  
miles<sup>2</sup>

**850**  
Syrian refugees

I come from a Palestinian family. My father's side comes from Jerusalem and my mother's from Lod. When I was growing up, I heard many stories of survival. My grandparents suffered through a great deal of adversity and my parents fled the country in 1967, marrying later in Jordan. Even my uncle's sweet shop in the Old City in Jerusalem has seen some tough times. But it's still there!

Almost annually I visit Jordan and Palestine. I see refugee camps and poor communities full of capable, competent people who can't have the life they want. They are suffocating. Being there makes me very aware of all the things I take for granted – freedom, education, opportunity. Those things are largely out of reach for Palestinians. And beyond that there are severe and significant needs. Even the most basic necessities are out of reach for some families. In the meantime, the Palestinian government is not strong or rich enough to provide what people need.

I learned about ANERA years ago from family living in the DC area. They're long-time supporters who always speak highly of the way ANERA operates.

I became a monthly donor back in 2008 and, as time has gone on, I have increased my giving, based on the reports I get about the programs ANERA delivers. I greatly appreciate that ANERA coordinates with other organizations in Palestine to make sure that needs are being met, efforts are not duplicated and things don't slip through the cracks. Grassroots, one-on-one response is great – I have done very meaningful medical missions in Palestine, for instance – but I like knowing that when I help ANERA I am potentially reaching thousands of families with a whole range of incredible programming.

Sadly, the situation in Palestine doesn't look like it's improving any time soon, so I'll keep on with my monthly donations.



Join the ANERA Visionaries  
[anera.org/visionary](http://anera.org/visionary)



# 3 FILMS for 3 DAYS





## **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY** on March 8

Meet Fadwa, a leader in her West Bank community. As a preschool teacher, she has an influence on children during the years that are most important to development. She's also a confident role model for other women in her society who have so much to give. Fadwa is one of 600 teachers to complete ANERA's early childhood development training program.

"The preschool has become a part of my life...The children teach us the love of life. I work with them. I am a student like them. I forget that I am a teacher."

**Watch the film at [anera.org/fadwa](http://anera.org/fadwa)**

## **WORLD WATER DAY** on March 22

Meet a Palestinian farmer in Jenin, who is irrigating his alfalfa and trees with treated wastewater. Before ANERA built the distribution network, water was being thrown away and the Palestinian authorities had to pay a fee to do so. Now farmers' lives have changed: brown fields are green and the sheep are happy!

"When we depended on rain-fed agriculture, we only had one harvest [per year]. Now we use this treated wastewater...Summer or winter, it has allowed us to harvest our plants."

**Watch the film at [anera.org/jeninfarmer](http://anera.org/jeninfarmer)**

## **WORLD HEALTH DAY** on April 7

Meet 10-year-old Malek and his father, Ziad, who has diabetes. They live in Burj El Burajneh in Lebanon. Malek worries about his father's health, following him wherever he goes. Abu Malek is able to enjoy time with his son and the rest of his family because ANERA delivers life-saving insulin to charitable clinics throughout Lebanon.

"The person I love the most is my dad...I like to do everything with him. I get worried about my dad when he goes to work, if suddenly his blood sugar drops..."

**Watch the film at [anera.org/malek](http://anera.org/malek)**





## In Sports, Refugees Find Relief From Trauma

It's no secret that living conditions are dire in informal tented settlements and Palestinian refugee camps. **There's overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of basic services, and even violent clashes within the camps. What's even worse is that many refugees come directly from conflict zones and are emotionally vulnerable.** These circumstances can have a profound effect on the psychosocial health of refugees, particularly on youth.

ANERA's Sports for Peace and Development program is one innovative way to tackle this issue. The program engages refugee youth in a variety of sports, such as soccer, basketball, swimming and even yoga. ANERA stresses the inclusion of girls, too, as well as members of local host communities.

Physical activity boosts psychosocial health and self esteem, and combats post-traumatic stress. Many of the youth participants in our program have already seen positive effects on their mental health.

"The sports field is the space where I can let go of all the negative emotions I've experienced as a result of what I've been through," says Abdel Hakim, a Syrian refugee living in Lebanon.

Another Syrian, Zahar, feels the same. **"Soccer helps me calm down. My mother even said to me, 'you look happier, what's happening to you?'. "**

Refugees often feel social isolation within their host communities. That's why ANERA's programs include Lebanese citizens as well as Syrian and Palestinian refugees. **Youth get the chance to make friends from different communities and play on the same teams, and the end result is strengthened communal bonds.**

"A sports jersey may not mean much to others," explains soccer coach Khalil. "But for these children, who come from fragmented communities and are constantly faced with challenges, it helps them create a sense of belonging and community."



# What's your vision?

[anera.org/visionary](http://anera.org/visionary)

Become an ANERA Visionary and join a group of committed individuals who envision a brighter future for Palestine and Lebanon through a monthly donation of any amount.

**ANERA Visionaries transform lives.**

**Save the date!**

## **ANERA Annual Dinner**

Friday, October 13, 2017

National Museum of Women in the Arts  
Washington, DC

Reservations for the event can be made at [anera.org/dinner](http://anera.org/dinner) after July 1, 2017.



# ANERA

Improving Lives in the Middle East

Since 1968

American Near East Refugee Aid  
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## Refugees Are Losing Hope

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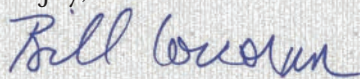
Dear Friend:

Our newsletter opens with an article about our fast-changing political climate and its effect on refugees. In a time when they are being ostracized, it's important to remember that refugees are regular people like you and me.

The work we do in Lebanon touches the lives of thousands of refugees from Syria. Some of our most impactful activities bring youths together in safe places for sports. Don't miss the story on page six that describes how sports helps those who are struggling with trauma and its psychosocial effects.

Over the past month, ANERA has commemorated three advocacy days related to women, water and health – all topics that are so much a part of what we do. Our center spread features three special films that highlight some inspiring stories. I hope the teasers in these pages will inspire you to go online and watch the films.

Enjoy,



ANERA President

