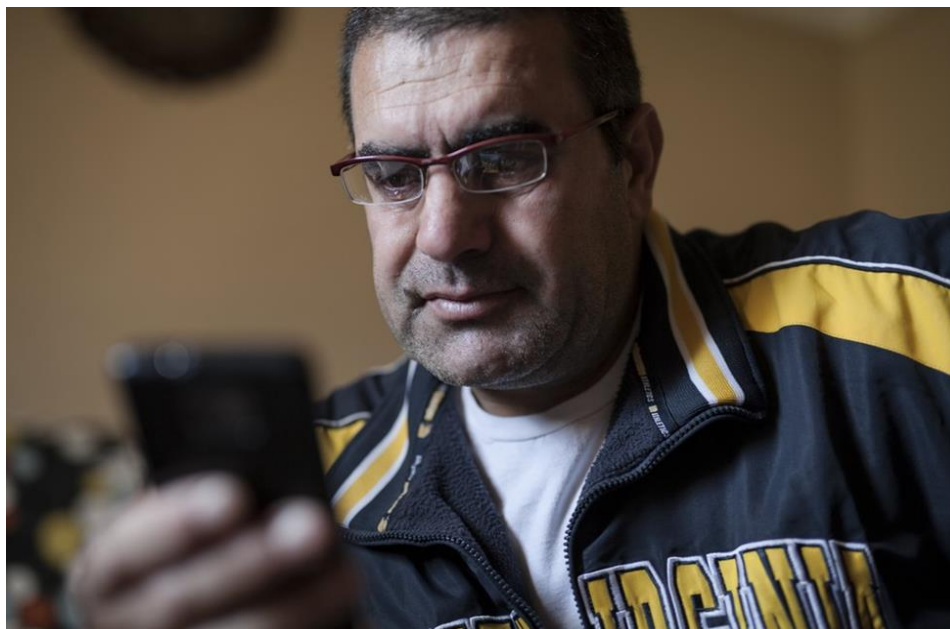


By MIRIAM JORDAN and JOSEPH DE AVILA

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The Many Steps in a Syrian Refugee's Journey to the U.S.

Truck driver living with his family in Michigan fled his nation's civil war in April 2012



Mohamad Almohsen, shown in his Dearborn, Mich., home recently, teared up while looking at old photographs sent to him by family in Jordan. Still, 'We are so happy and relieved to be' in the U.S., he says. 'Our future is now a lot brighter.' *TIM GALLOWAY FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

After his teenage sons were whipped by Syrian troops and he was beaten by forces loyal to the country's president, Mohamad Almohsen decided he needed to flee the civil war tearing his homeland apart. That was in April 2012.

The burly truck driver trekked by foot with his wife and four children over two days to reach Jordan, where he connected with United Nations aid workers. Three years and a litany of background screenings later, he came to America.

"We are so happy and relieved to be here," said Mr. Almohsen, 45 years old, who arrived in Dearborn, Mich., in September, one of an estimated 2,290 Syrian refugees admitted into the U.S. since 2011. "Our future is now a lot brighter."

The journey of Mr. Almohsen illustrates the multistep process—including interviews with U.N. and U.S. officials, security checks and medical exams—that Syrian refugees must undergo to be allowed to enter the U.S.

Since the Islamic State terror group [claimed responsibility](#) for this month's Paris [terror attacks](#) and disclosure that an attacker [posed as a Syrian refugee](#) to enter Europe, many U.S. governors and lawmakers [have called for a pause](#) in admitting Syrian refugees until authorities re-assess whether the background screening is tough enough.

The terror group has become a bigger force in Syria since the early days of the nation's civil war, and most of the U.S. arrivals so far left before its spread further deteriorated conditions.

The growing political backlash could make it more difficult for the relatives of recent Syrian arrivals to follow them to the U.S. Mazin Zedan, who was resettled with his family in Austin, Texas, in August after two years in Jordan, said his close relatives remain in Jordan. Mr. Almohsen's relatives are in Lebanon and Jordan, respectively, awaiting relocation.

"I am really worried that both of my brothers and their families might not come anytime soon, or ever," he said.

It is very much a long shot for Syrian refugees to get to the United States—only a small percentage of applicants are considered, and it can take up to three years to go through an intensive vetting process. Here are the stages migrants have to go through.

For all his adult life, Mr. Almohsen had hauled fruits and vegetables from the fertile lands of Lebanon and Syria to arid Gulf States such as Dubai. But when Syria's civil war erupted, checkpoints began to impair his ability to work, and random violence undermine his family's sense of safety in their hometown of Daraa, a cradle of the revolution against President Bashar al-Assad.

In June 2011, forces loyal to the president yanked Mr. Almohsen out of his big rig, threw him into jail and beat him, he said. Mr. Almohsen, a member of Syria's Sunni Muslim majority, said he took no sides in the country's conflict. Mr. Assad is an Alawite, a Shiite-linked sect of Islam.

"We didn't know if he would come back alive," said his wife, Khadejeh, 38.

He was released about a month later. But in March 2012, troops stormed the family home and lashed his two older sons, Yazan, then 17, and Bahaa, who was 14, for participating in what the family described as a peace rally. A friend's son was tortured to death that day, they said.

Mr. Almohsen decided it was time to leave Daraa. The family locked their home and left with little but the clothes on their backs, expecting to return. A refugee camp in Jordan became their temporary home. But with the conflict escalating, they eventually decided to seek resettlement in another country.

In April 2014, they had their first of two interviews with the U.N. refugee aid agency, each lasting roughly three hours. Officials collected personal documents from the family and asked about their flight from Syria, their hometown and relatives. They asked Mr. Almohsen about his job and whether he had participated in the conflict.

"I told them I had been in peace demonstrations," he said.

The U.N. said it would be in touch after completing security screening of the family. About seven months later, it determined the family fulfilled the criteria for resettlement and referred the Almohsens to the U.S. government for consideration.

Presidential candidates weigh in on the growing debate over how the U.S. should deal with Syrian refugees. Here's where they stand on the issue. Photo: AP

In an interview this year, a Department of Homeland Security official asked Mr. Almohsen questions about work, family, the names and addresses of neighbors, and schools his children had attended. Everyone was fingerprinted. Officials also asked "if I had participated in any armed demonstration or political activity," he recalled.

After an interview on June 16, the family was told to return on July 7, and learned it had been approved. It underwent medical exams. Travel to the U.S. was arranged by the International Organization for Migration.

Mr. Almohsen arrived in Michigan with his wife and four sons Sept. 2 to an apartment furnished with donated items by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, a resettlement agency. His eldest son found a job as a machine operator. The other sons started school.

Mr. Almohsen and his wife are learning English, and he gets around town on a used bicycle. He plans to take his driver's license test in order to start working, he said.

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