SVENJA FISCHER

Traveler from the East

Christmas is about coming home. Taking a train or jumping in the car and heading back to see our loved ones. That's not an option for Mohammad from Syria. He fled to Germany and encountered numerous challenges on his journey. But he won't be alone this Christmas.

Mohammad Zatima has no idea how many pairs of shoes he got through on his nearly 4,000-kilometer odyssey from Syria to Germany. "Sometimes we even had to walk barefoot." The war in Syria reached his neighborhood in 2011, and his escape took him via Jordan to Turkey. After that came a succession of train and car journeys across Europe, passing through Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Austria and finally ending up in Germany.

Mohammads Christmas Wish : "I hope there will be snow!".

Europe is the future

Mohammad decided to flee to Europe during his time in Jordan. He spent several years there living in a refugee camp with his family. Building a future was impossible because Syrians are not allowed to work in Jordan, though the 27-year-old did manage to complete his bachelor's degree. "So I had to take my destiny into my own hands and find a way out."

His goal was clear: "I wanted to get to Europe to build a future for myself." At the same time, he felt a very real fear of the unknown and about what lay ahead, as well as uncertainty about what would happen when he reached his destination. "But

fear is a normal human emotion."

The worst moment came right at the start of his long journey: "When I was leaving Jordan a border guard told me that once the stamp was in my passport, I could never come back. That was the hardest decision I have ever made." He had to leave his family behind.

An arduous journey

In Turkey, he and his friends encountered armed criminals who tried to rob them. In Greece, they suddenly found themselves in the middle of nowhere after hitchhiking. And in Szeged, Hungary, he was held four days until he had his fingerprints taken. But whether on foot or by car, he always kept moving. "I had nothing to lose."

But he finally reached Germany, and since this fall he has been studying for his master's degree while working at TRUMPF's Global Service Center. "I'm very happy in my department. I can take responsibility for my own work, and that's something I really appreciate."

"The only awkward thing is that I have less time to speak to my mother now that I'm working at TRUMPF, and she sometimes gets upset about that." Mohammad stays in touch with his family via WhatsApp. He hasn't seen his mother, his elder sister – who now lives in Canada – or his younger brother for three and a half years. His father passed away two years ago in Syria. He taught Mohammad the importance of always looking ahead, not looking back, and that inspires him to keep going.

Mohammad came to Germany via Jordan, Turkey, Greece and Hungary.
(Source: © OpenStreetMap-Mitwirkende)

Christmas is about family

Mohammad misses his family even more at Christmastime, so his first few years in Germany did not prompt any happy festive memories: "Everyone celebrates with their family, so of course I felt very lonely. Even though we don't actually celebrate Christmas, the whole atmosphere is so family-oriented!" But this year will be different. He has been invited to spend Christmas with the family of his girlfriend, Sarah. "I'm really looking forward to December 24." Mohammad already knows what he wants for Christmas: "The best thing would be if it snowed!."

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