



LUISAVIAROMA x **unicef** 

A journey with those fleeing from war. Zaatari: the largest refugee camp in the world

LuisaViaRoma, with a delegation from **UNICEF**, went on a mission to Jordan to document the work that the organization is carrying out with Syrian children and families in refugee camps.

Because new wars, such as the one in Ukraine, must not overshadow the needs of those who were forced to flee from past conflicts, and still have no way home.

For almost ten years, Jordan has come to host hundreds of thousands of refugees who, thanks to programs backed by UNICEF and other international NGOs, **receive daily education, protection, health care, vaccinations, and hope for a better future.**

Zaatari and Azraq are two of the main refugee camps in northern Jordan where thousands of people live with strength and dignity despite their circumstances. **Half of these people are children.**

LuisaViaRoma, who has been a partner of UNICEF for the past five years and hosted a biannual charity gala organized in St. Barth and Capri (the next will be held on July 30th at the Certosa di San Giacomo), decided to document what happens behind the scenes and how the funds raised at the galas are used. A documentary by Francesca Petitti and Alessandro Grassani, a photojournalist from the New York Times, and an article written by Raffaele Panizza **demonstrate the genuine support that the camps receive thanks to these initiatives.**

"When I look into my children's eyes, I can't imagine a better future for them without hoping for a world in which every child can be happy," **says Luisa Panconesi, Committee President of the event held in Capri and St. Barth.** "It was an honor for us to have the opportunity to visit the refugee camps in Jordan, to see what it's really like to live there and better understand the needs of the people, and grasp the importance of what UNICEF and other international NGOs do on a daily basis to guarantee a better life for these children. It is fundamental that we all strive to change things for the better, so that history doesn't repeat itself."

"For over 11 years, Syrian children have been shouldering the consequences of a terrible conflict that has taken everything away from them. Many are internally displaced, about 5.8 million can be found in neighboring countries as refugees," **said Paolo Rozera, General Director of UNICEF Italia.** "This mission in Jordan's camps for Syrian child refugees is significant for two reasons: not only as a demonstration of UNICEF's work, but also to keep our attention focused on a conflict that at times seems to have been forgotten. The children of Syria, like those of Ukraine, are paying the highest price for a conflict they did not want. They deserve all our commitment and support. Again, I want to thank LuisaViaRoma for partnering with UNICEF to support these vulnerable children."

Ten million inhabitants in Jordan, and almost two million Syrian refugees. For the latter, the situation is even more difficult because Jordan's laws prevent them from accessing most public services. **UNICEF guarantees support by providing medicine, vaccinations, clean water, recreation, adequate nutrition, and education. School attendance rates in the refugee camps have reached 73%.**

During the mission, LuisaViaRoma visited the **Makani community centers for education, recreation, and culture** that UNICEF has brought to every corner of Jordan. Boys attend in the afternoon, and girls attend in the morning. "By having them here we contribute to their educations, but above all we are able to monitor all the problematic cases," explains Makani manager Walaia Fatah. "We intervene in instances of child labor, child marriage, bullying, and domestic violence. On average, we register at least three cases a day."

Even in farming camps, far from the city, UNICEF has constructed Makani.

Unfortunately, cases of child mistreatment have also been frequently documented in the many Informal Tented Settlements (ITS). For example, in that of Um Al Basteen, home to 112 families (560 people). Here too, half of them are children. Or the Jizeh ITS, where UNICEF, **through the WASH program, has provided a system of latrines and drinking water accessible to all:** 62 families. 210 people. Dozens of children. UNICEF has provided WASH programs in fifty other ITS around the country.

The mission continued with a visit to the home of Abu Adnan, a Syrian refugee, where he lives with his wife and eight children. Adnan's is one of the many Syrian families to benefit from the **UNICEF cash program which provides 35 dollars a month that can be spent safely thanks to optical scanners,** connected to sophisticated blockchain technology that are present in affiliated facilities. The money is used to buy books, nutritious food, and to keep the family warm in the winter: "All of my children attend school now, thanks to the minibuses organized by UNICEF that come to pick them up every morning," says Adnan, who married off his eldest daughter while still a minor. "Now I understand my mistake: for my other daughters, I want a different future."

Two full days were dedicated to the main refugee camp, Zaatari. **Zaatari is the largest Syrian refugee camp in the world.** Located twenty kilometers from the border, it is an incredible city in which hope prevails in spite of it all, where 38 schools, 52 recreational centers, and 11 Makani were built. In Zaatari, 11,000 children play and study.

Thanks to UNICEF, potable water is piped through to all of the camp's 26,000 prefabricated buildings, through wells dug 350 meters underground by the WASH project, in a country where the risk of water shortage is among the highest in the world. In schools, teachers project the phonemes of the Arabic alphabet on overhead projectors, using tablets provided through donations from NGOs. **Here, children learn to use the computer, instead of how to respond to violence with violence. They learn to defend themselves from bullies, and how to say "NO" to child labor. The girls take Taekwondo lessons, and they compete against each other at soccer matches played on artificial grass fields, enriching their identities and fortifying their sense of female pride.**

There are also **specific programs to teach how to manage emotions**, according to a program outlined by the Life Skills courses, an invaluable opportunity for members of a refugee population where the impact of depressive diseases is very high. "In the camp, there are many opportunities for work and paid volunteering, in areas that are not readily accessible to us, such as teaching or healthcare," explains Manwer, 39, who works as an assistant in one of the camp's schools.

The vibrant "Champs Élysées" was also documented, a kilometer-long main street, that has spontaneously formed over the years. Here, one can find beauty salons, a place to buy washing machines and refrigerators, shops selling fresh produce, and *qatayef* vendors, a type of sweet ravioli that are cooked every day during Ramadan.

According to official data, nineteen children are born every day in the camp, with a death rate close to zero.

Zaatari is a place where life grows and continues despite all hardships, though it remains enclosed in its own bubble of dreams and hopes.

"Our life is a road to nowhere," said Ammar, 19, who is finishing his last year of high school in the Zaatari camp. His future, as well as that of all the other Syrian children, depends on us.

10 Years in Zaatari – Video Documentary



Hamam is 10 years old, the same age as the Zaatari refugee camp where he has lived since birth along with his six siblings. In his own words, he told us about the dust and an uncertain future. But thanks to UNICEF and LuisaViaRoma, there are more possibilities in store for him. This video documentary shows the world through his eyes. It was commissioned by LuisaViaRoma, and created by Francesco Petitti of the Dutch agency, Mivida.