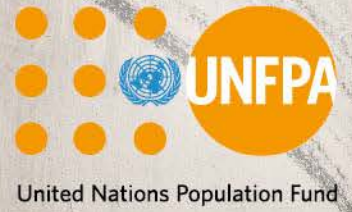
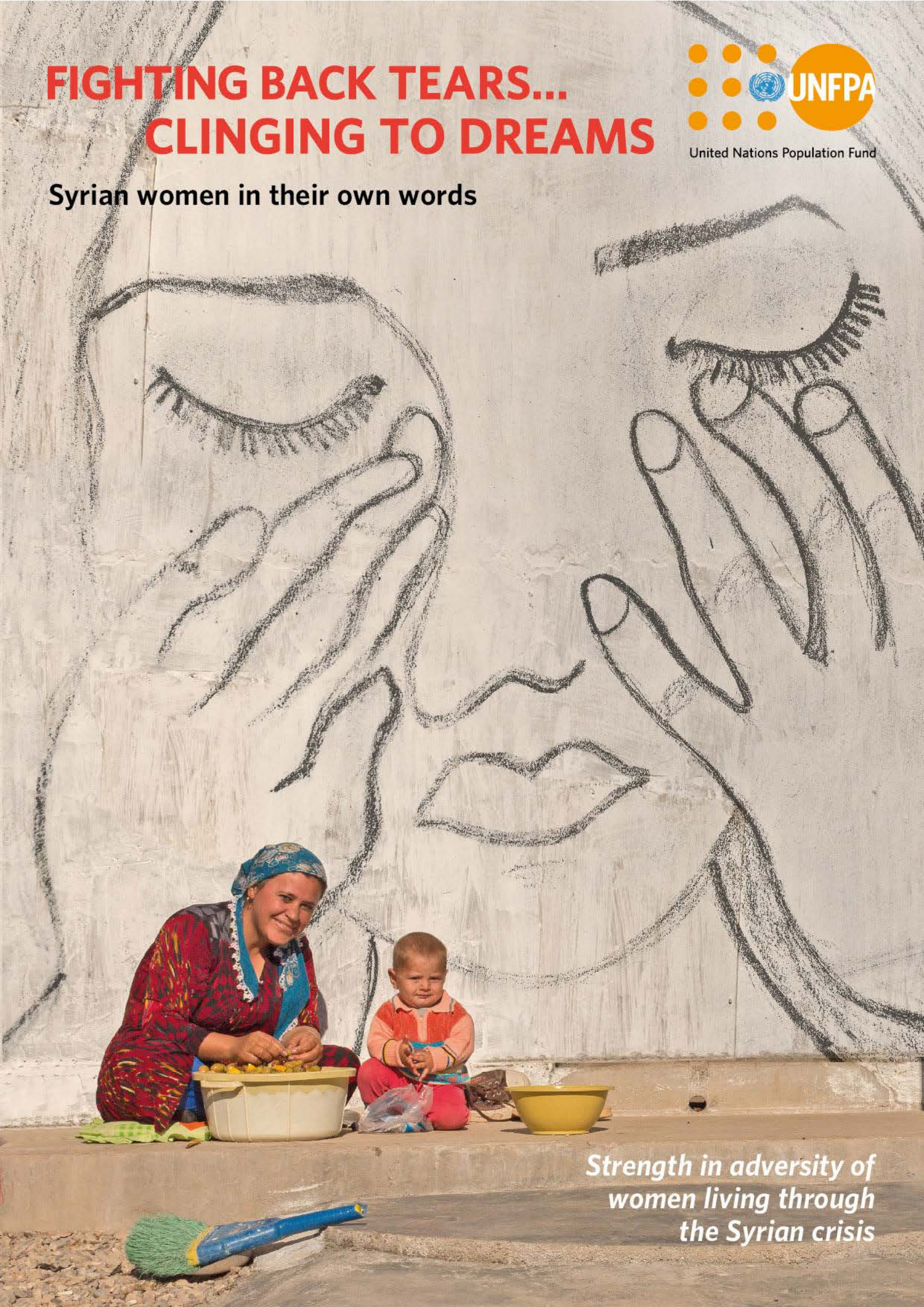


FIGHTING BACK TEARS... CLINGING TO DREAMS



Syrian women in their own words



*Strength in adversity of
women living through
the Syrian crisis*



FOREWORD

As a coordinator on UNFPA's regional response team, I have been fortunate to spend time with many Syrian women and girls affected by the crisis. I have been regularly moved by the women's courage, selflessness and unwavering hope. Many appeared to possess limitless reserves of strength, which kept them moving forward in their lives despite fresh hardships.

When writing advocacy accounts of women in the crisis, there is a temptation to focus solely on the 'bad news' stories and to present women as helpless victims, caught in circumstances beyond their control.

However, by letting the women share their experiences in their own words, a different picture emerges. Yes, there is great suffering and grief. But there are also heartening stories of devotion, initiative, togetherness and even joy. This publication therefore aims to amplify their voices and add new texture to the portrait of the modern Syrian woman.

I met mothers who have witnessed atrocities and endured personal tragedy, yet they find the energy and compassion every day to help others. I heard genuine excitement for the future among young people who had seen their education go up in smoke. They refuse to let the crisis steal their dreams.

As one told me:
"We have lost everything, but we are discovering ourselves".

Few of the refugees leaving Syria took many possessions, but Syrian women carried a deep love of their home in their hearts. They yearn to return to their homeland. But until they can, they are determined to keep their traditions alive wherever they go. These women take pride in their customs, their appearance, their family and their makeshift dwellings. Wherever there is space for some chairs and a coffee pot, the spirit of community soon bubbles up.

While they all hope the war will end tomorrow, I met women who are making the best of an unfortunate situation. Grandmothers, who have spent most of their lives indoors, are joining the UNFPA women's centres to learn new skills and make new friends. As one told me: "We have lost everything, but we are discovering ourselves".

Single women with entrepreneurial ambitions are finding opportunities to show abilities that they would not have known at home. Through the work of our centres, women are becoming social workers and helping others to make choices – on issues such as contraception and young marriage – that dramatically change their quality of life. These women ask only for simple rights: good healthcare and protection for their families.

My own admiration for these survivors, trapped in such challenging circumstances, is hard to express. It is far better that they speak for themselves.

Daniel Baker, UNFPA Syria Regional Humanitarian Coordinator





Alone amid the crowds

FARAH

AGE: 28

LOCATION/COUNTRY: TRIPOLI, LEBANON

While her husband guards the family home from possible looting, Farah lives in Tripoli, Lebanon, with her seven children and two teenage nephews. The UNFPA-supported centre helps her adjust to the independence she never wanted.

"We all share a tent with my brother's family, so our home is crammed with 29 people. It's terribly overcrowded and loud, with non-stop tension and arguments. We all try our best to get along, but life is hard in Lebanon, and sometimes that gets to us and we lose our patience.

I couldn't bear the conflict in Syria, but at the same time I didn't want to leave my home either. I miss my husband so much and sometimes I feel very lonely. I need him beside me. I cannot take all this responsibility alone. I contribute to the household by looking after all the children while the other adults are out working or looking for work. I don't receive any support. Every day, I wish that the war would end so we can return home and be together again.

Moving from one adversity to another is hurting me. I can't

tolerate the hardship. My main concern is my daughter. She is so beautiful and many men

"I've improved my sewing skills, and can now fix clothes or make blankets. It saves us money. Our tent burned down last winter, but I was able to repair it with my brother."

harass her if she steps out of the tent. There is no privacy or hygiene here. All the families in the settlement share the same smelly, awkward bathroom with no roof. You can imagine what that's like. Just terrible! Waiting in line, standing in the rain, walking in the dark, escorting your daughter in

each and every time. I can't even send her alone to the bathroom. It is too dangerous.

A social worker from the women's centre visited me. I was extremely pale and weak. She took a blood test and discovered that my body was full of worms that consumed all my energy. She said I was very ill, both mentally and physically, and required urgent treatment. She encouraged me to come to the centre to meet friends and learn new skills.

My life has now improved. I'm either attending a class or I'm socialising with other women. I've learnt a lot. I've improved my sewing skills, and can now fix clothes or make blankets. It saves us money. Our tent burned down last winter, but I was able to repair it with my brother."

1 IN 3



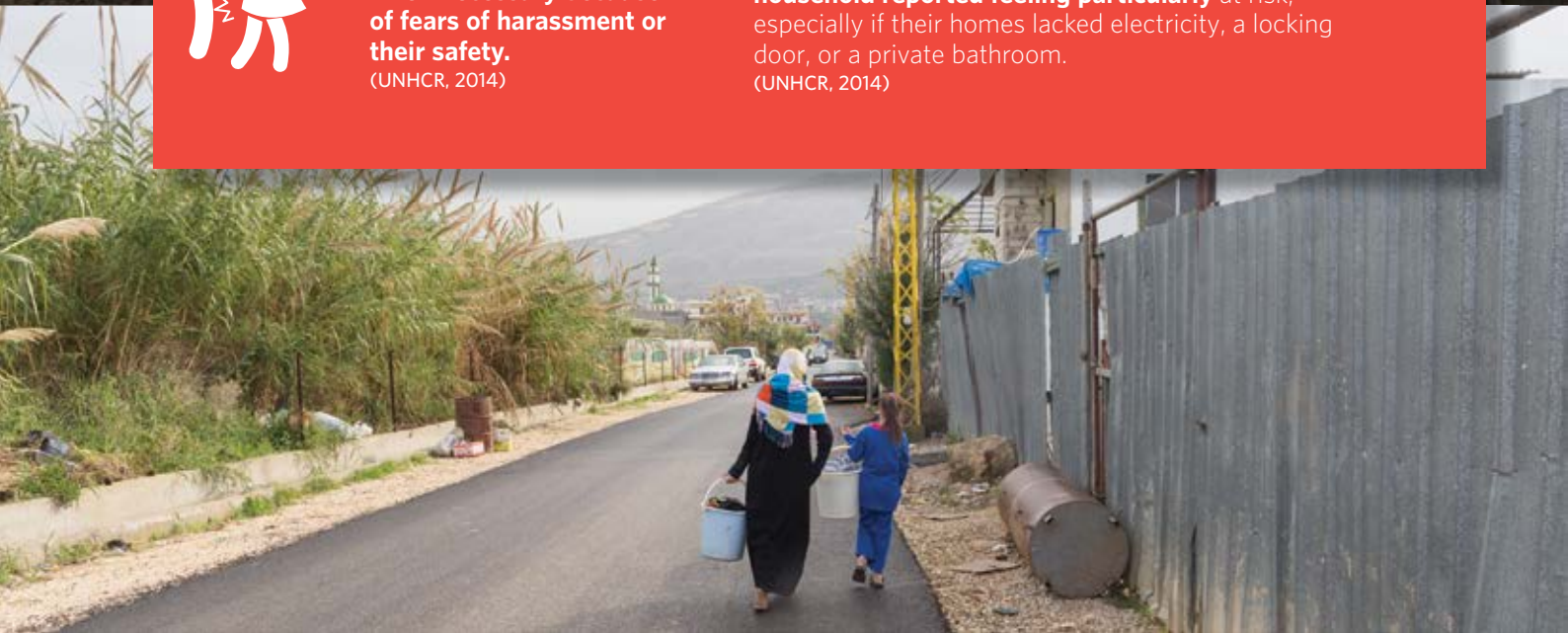
of Syrian female-headed households left the house never, rarely and only when necessary because of fears of harassment or their safety.

(UNHCR, 2014)

WOMEN HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

A lack of money can force refugees to live in unsafe overcrowded environments, without basic amenities or security. **Women living without a male head of household reported feeling particularly** at risk, especially if their homes lacked electricity, a locking door, or a private bathroom.

(UNHCR, 2014)





**True love
transcends
borders**

MAHMOUD & EMAN

AGE: BOTH 35

LOCATION/COUNTRY: AKRE CAMP, KURDISTAN REGION IN IRAQ

This war has forced many marriages apart and stopped others from marrying whom they want. For husband and wife Mahmoud and Eman, however, the crisis has added another chapter to their love story.



Eman: "You could say we're a very typical young couple in love. Our fifteenth wedding anniversary was earlier this year, and we carried those happy memories from Syria to Iraq. We are blessed with eight children - four boys, four girls - and I am currently eight months pregnant with our ninth. Unfortunately, two of our sons and one daughter have a mental disability. But we are both excited to be parents again soon."

Alongside 240 other families who fled the militias in Syria, our home is now the Akre Syrian Refugee camp in Iraqi Kurdistan. It's said 'The Castle' was one of Saddam Hussain's most feared prisons, but for us the dingy cells provide a safe haven. Our existence here is simple, but it is calm and we are together. Besides, a group of youngsters have painted the narrow corridors and walls in bright colours, so this is a happy place."

Mahmoud: "We receive a bit of money every month from the United Nations. And we are also getting allowances for food. Living in the camp, we don't have to pay rent or for electricity. Now that we are registered as refugees with UNHCR, we have applied for a US visa. If we do get a visa, my three disabled children may receive the treatments and support they need to fulfill their potential. Here there is nothing that can be done for them."

Back home in Syria, life was hard, especially for the children. I've never been able to find a steady job. And providing for my family has always been a struggle. But my wife is a great support to me. She always helps me see the world through her beautiful eyes.

"I inherited the real meaning of love and family from my parents. On cold winter days, we all sat in one corner of the main room, each warming the other, drinking cinnamon tea, laughing and singing. Moments like that are worth a million dollars."

I found it hard to provide for my family before the war, but I wasn't able to find any job at all once the war started. And there have been far too many days where there was almost no food for the children in the house, never mind for my wife and me. It's hard on a parent to see your children go hungry. So we decided to leave Syria. Now we are refugees. It's not easy but it's the best decision I've ever made for my family.

I inherited the real meaning of love and family from my parents. On cold winter days, we all sat in one corner of the main room, each warming the other, drinking cinnamon tea, laughing and singing. Moments like that are worth a million dollars. We would like to have more children. I really love children. And all my children make me happy but unfortunately this one coming might be our

last. It seems that my wife has contracted a vaginal infection and if not treated well she may not be able to have any more kids. As yet, they haven't been able to treat the infection at the medical centre."

Eman: "It's true, but I could never complain about the quality of care I have received from the primary healthcare centre close to the camp, and the follow-up support I receive from the health worker. She comes on a weekly basis to check on me and measure my diabetes and

blood pressure level. I have never received such treatment before. The nurse there is extremely kind. She will even respond to our calls at midnight, if needed.

My husband teases me that if he could only get some more money, he would marry again. He says he will take another wife in America, if we get our visas. But I know he never would."

ONLY 42%

of non-pregnant married Syrian women were using contraception in Lebanon

(Benage, Greenough, 2015)



The main building at Akre Syrian Refugee camp in Iraq.

14 going on 40



SABREEN

AGE: 14

LOCATION/COUNTRY: DOMIZ CAMP, KURDISTAN REGION IN IRAQ

Flight from Da'esh, child marriage, domestic and emotional violence, attempted suicide, divorce and daily trauma. Sabreen has experienced all of these before her fifteenth birthday.

"Soon after we arrived at the camp, I got married. My mother was always against my marriage. I don't think she liked the man I was engaged to, but the sister of my future husband was very persuasive. She convinced me that everything was going to work out and that her brother was really a good guy who would take good care of me.

He was a 19-year-old man and he wasn't bad looking. But the night of our wedding, he wasn't very kind to me. I thought it was due to the excitement of the wedding. I asked him to be gentler but he didn't listen. Our relationship went from bad to worse very quickly. Within weeks of our wedding he started to hit me badly; he forced himself on me several times. He was like an animal. It hurt so much that I was bleeding but he didn't care and he laughed at me.

He didn't allow me to leave the house. And those few times I was able to go out, I was forced to wear a burka. My mother wasn't allowed to come and visit me, even though we didn't live very far away from her. I think she knew what was happening to me. I'm not the only bride to go through such an ordeal. Far too many girls are experiencing the same thing but no one is doing anything about it, sometimes not even their own families. A girl is often seen as a burden in this part of the world.

My marriage only lasted three months but during that time I was abused every day, sometimes even five times a day. I just couldn't take it anymore. I felt that I needed to do something. One night, I excused myself saying I was going

to the toilet but I ran away to my mother and my family. I never went back to my husband and I was able to get divorced with the support of my family. But he spread terrible rumours about me and my family. My divorce brought shame on my family. My dad and my brothers are very ashamed of me. They don't care about what happened to me. They only care about the honour and reputation of the family.

Because of everything that happened to me, and because my own family were ashamed of me, I tried to kill myself. Tried to set

"I advise girls of my age not to get involved with boys you don't know. Marriage is not a white dress. It is not a love story or fairy tale. It's not like a Disney movie. It's more real and serious than that."

myself alight with heating fuel but my mother was quick to respond and she saved my life. I spent a lot of time at home. I didn't even want to leave the house anymore.

People gossiped about me so I preferred to stay invisible. I no longer wanted to continue my education or learn any skills.

Then my mother approached the women centre, asking them to support me. She could see my situation was deteriorating every day. A social worker visited my family and I now

attend counselling sessions on a regular basis. I've even started participating in hairdressing classes at the centre.

Now, I'm trying to help others learn from my experiences. I advise girls of my age not to get involved with boys you don't know. Marriage is not a white dress. It is not a love story or fairy tale. It's not like a Disney movie. It's more real and serious than that. I tell them it is not the right thing to do at our age. True happiness is making a dress for my doll, or combing her hair. Not marriage."

Child marriage and labour are common symptoms of risks and of families' worsening economic situations. High unemployment, growing frustration and over-crowding due to destruction and displacement are exacerbating these risks.

One of the consequences of child marriage is early pregnancy: more than 24% of facility-based deliveries were to girls under the age of eighteen inside Syria in the first quarter of 2016.

As the conflict drags on, violence at the level of households and communities increases. Harmful coping strategies are evident throughout the country. Fear and acceptance of sexual and domestic violence impair the ability of women and girls to access work, education and services. In many cases movement is limited to their homes."



67%

of women in Syria reported having received "punishment" from their husbands. (ICR, 2015)

87%

of which was physical violence. (IRC, 2014)



1 in 4

registered marriages are of a girl under the age of 18 in Jordan. (UNICEF, 2014)

LIGHT at the dark end of a tunnel

"My name is Aisha and I am married with no children. We left Idlib in Syria three years ago. At first we were taken to one shelter, but we only stayed for just over a week. Life there was really bad. The services were bad. There were a lot of stray dogs and a lot of rats. At night we used to hear the rats scrabbling inside the tent. In the mornings we'd find the droppings. It was unbearable.

My husband and I decided to move out. We bought items using our savings, and began renting a room in a house, which we still share with four other families. It's a very crowded and often volatile environment. There's an argument among the families at least once or twice a week, and they almost always spiral out of control. But it's no surprise because we're living on top of each other and the facilities in the apartment are basic. We all need to share one toilet and a small kitchen. The rats and stray dogs have gone, but we suffer a

different type of stress by living in this crowded house.

"We're not just socialising at the centre - I'm attending classes to improve my literacy skills. I've started learning Turkish, and I'm also taking cooking classes and learning how to use a sewing machine."

I got pregnant some time ago, but unfortunately I lost the baby. That was the worst thing that has ever happened to me. To lose my baby was even worse than the war. I experienced problems in the first trimester. I felt something was wrong. Then came the bleeding

and pain. My husband wasn't at home at the time - he was out trying to find work. So I had to go to the hospital alone. I waited such a long time before I could see a midwife, but when I did, I struggled to explain my symptoms because I don't speak Turkish or English.

During the consultation, it became clear there was a serious complication with my baby. Mine was an ectopic pregnancy, so I needed an emergency operation to stay alive. I contacted my husband immediately, who came with someone who could translate. I went into surgery directly and the operation saved my life. Although I survived, my baby did not and I will always carry that loss with me as I did on my walk home from the hospital because we didn't have enough money to take a taxi.



AISHA

AGE: 29

LOCATION/COUNTRY: SANLIURFA, TURKEY

Like so many women caught in the crisis, Aisha's has put her happiness on hold. The fact she sees a brighter path ahead is testament to her resilience.



My husband gets very upset that we lost the baby. He blames me for going alone to hospital, taunting me that the operation will make it difficult for me to get pregnant again. I'm so afraid of another ectopic pregnancy that I cannot get close to my husband. We would like to have a baby, but I'm just so scared because of my last experience.

The Syrian woman who accompanied my husband to the hospital then introduced me to the women's centre. The people there have been very good to me and helped me through a difficult time. We're not just socialising at the centre - I'm attending classes to improve my literacy skills. I've started learning Turkish, and I'm also taking cooking classes and learning how to use a sewing machine. A social worker now accompanies me to the hospital for medical check ups. I can communicate with the nurses too. For the first time since leaving Syria, I'm looking forward with a sense of optimism."



Maternal health is an important part of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Worldwide, one woman dies every 90 seconds in pregnancy or childbirth - more than 350,000 women each year. The vast majority of these deaths are preventable. Lack of education about pregnancy or access to trained caregivers for ante-natal care and assisted delivery can be driven by gender-based discrimination.



**1 IN EVERY
90 SECONDS**

a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth - more than 350,000 women each year.

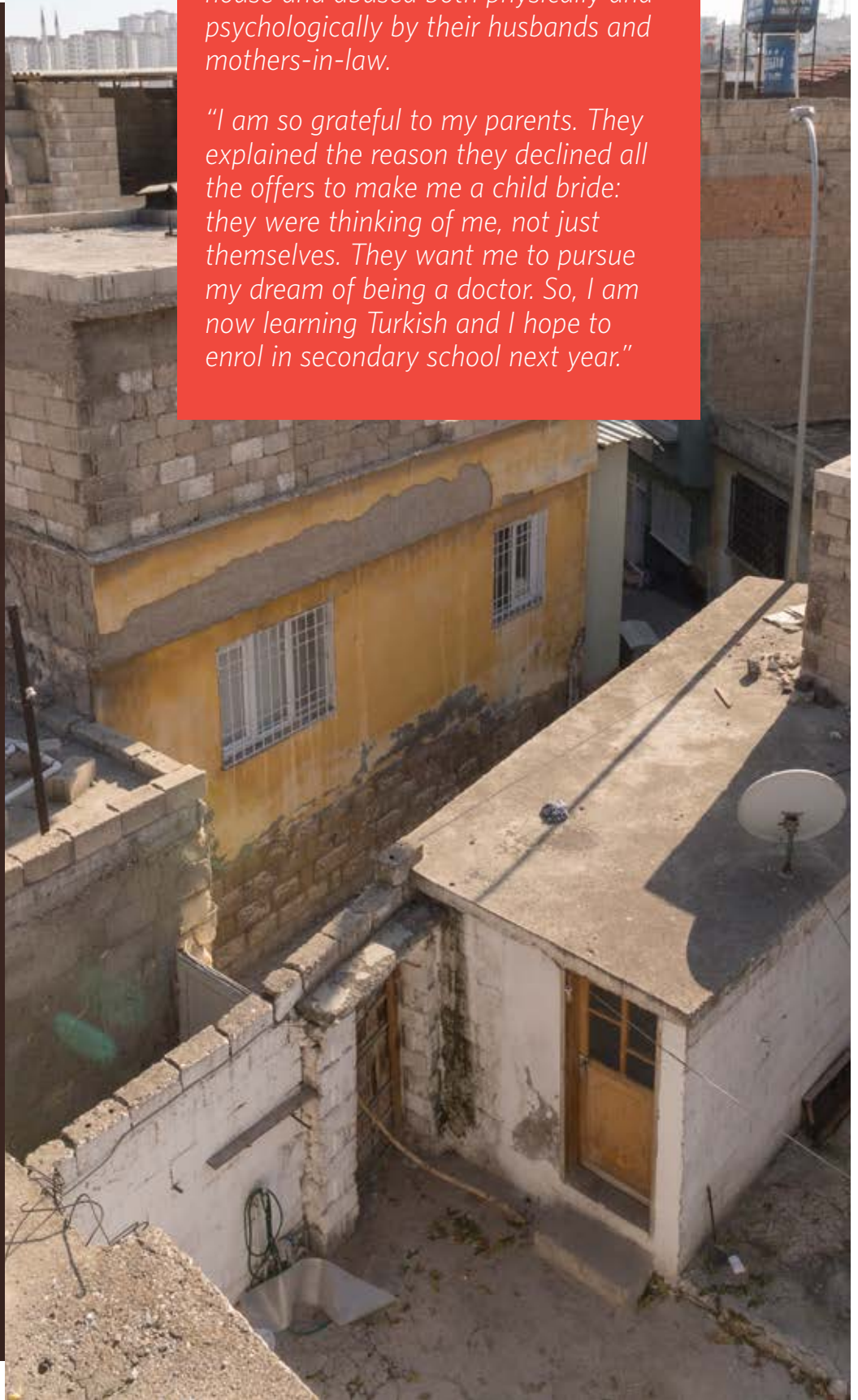
HIBA

The future happiness of girls like Hiba sits in the hands of their parents. They have the power to protect them from child marriages, allowing them to fulfill themselves as adolescents and stay in school.



"I know there are many girls of my age back home in Syria who are getting married early. They are given away by their fathers for a handsome dowry. Some are even sold for a herd of goats. I've heard that they suffer terrible hardships. They are trapped in their house and abused both physically and psychologically by their husbands and mothers-in-law.

"I am so grateful to my parents. They explained the reason they declined all the offers to make me a child bride: they were thinking of me, not just themselves. They want me to pursue my dream of being a doctor. So, I am now learning Turkish and I hope to enrol in secondary school next year."





"My son Mohammed was born here in the camp. This is the only home he has ever known. He will never remember his father, who left us this summer. He will never know his sister Farah (3) or his brother Hamed (4), who were both killed in a carbon monoxide accident. No child should ever enter the world this way.

His father wasn't a good father or husband. He was cruel to me: often disrespectful and abusive. He publicly humiliated me several times. Things got worse before he left us.

Back home in Damascus I'd always suspected of him of having affairs with other women. But when we moved here to Domiz camp in Iraq, he became even more vicious. The public affairs weren't enough - he often tormented me about them. He insulted me every day, saying the most hurtful things and he never gave money to buy food for the family.

Finding confidence

FIDA

AGE: 30

LOCATION/COUNTRY: DOMIZ CAMP, KURDISTAN REGION IN IRAQ

after
*gender-based
violence*



He sold the few things of value that we still had to keep up his playboy lifestyle. He even tried to sell the plot of land where we pitched our tent, but thankfully the police got involved at the last moment and they were able to stop the sale. Otherwise, we would have no shelter.

Being a divorced woman makes life very difficult here in the camp. My husband's brother blames me for the rumours and disrespect that is shown towards their family. He always insists that I should have accepted my situation, rather than seek a divorce. Now he has moved in with us, and tries to take advantage of me.

My poor little Mohammed! Both his siblings suffocated this summer with carbon monoxide poisoning from an electric heater as they slept. He almost died too. The people of the camp did their best to resuscitate my children but unfortunately they passed away. They were taken to the local hospital but died a few days later. I feel so wretched. Farah used to play with Mohammed and she always looked out for him. She clearly loved her little brother so much. Hamed was also really kind to

"For the first time in years, I feel less anxious. I need to live for my little boy now. He needs me to find peace, because a mother's love is bliss for a child."

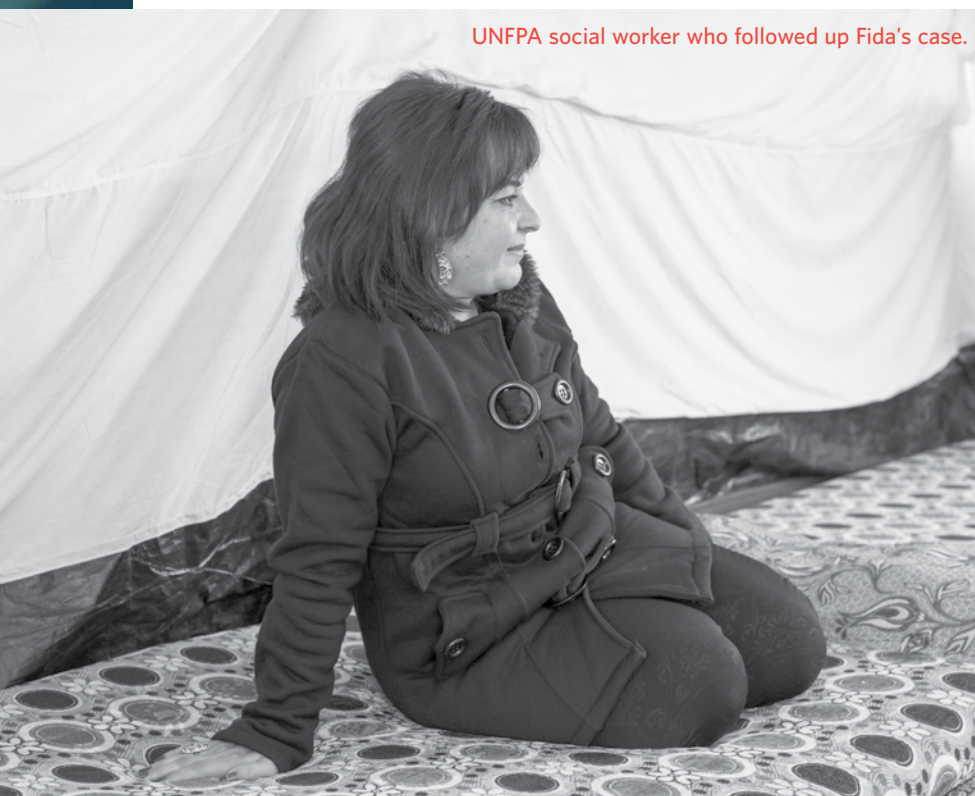
Mohammed, unlike his father, who didn't care about any of the children, even before he left us. He knew about the accident, but he still didn't care. We were so poor that I had no money to pay for the funeral. Our neighbours in the camp collected donations to pay for a proper burial.

This summer, the police arrested my husband and he

is in jail now. He was trying to escape with a married woman back to Syria. The woman's family informed the police and they locked him up, and then deported the woman back to Syria.

My sister began working in the women's centre. She has started helping me take decisions and get my life back on track. Slowly, I sense myself becoming stronger and more confident. For the first time in years, I feel less anxious. I need to live for my little boy now. He needs me to find peace, because a mother's love is bliss for a child. It's an immeasurable blessing. If I lose my smile, then that beauty will be lost in his life."

UNFPA social worker who followed up Fida's case.



Facts on law and regulation related in gender-based violence the countries

There are several areas of controversial legislation in countries affected by the Syrian refugee crisis:

For example, a rapist in some countries can escape punishment by marrying his victim, and marital rape is not criminalized in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Syria criminalize non-penetrative sexual contact, sometimes called 'indecent assault.' Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon have a specific law against domestic violence. Provisions around physical assault exist in the other countries, and whilst they do not refer specifically to issues around GBV, they can sometimes be used to prosecute cases of domestic violence.

However, in Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, the penalties for physical violence are determined in accordance with the number of days of hospitalisation faced by the victim. In Jordan, for example, if the victim requires less than 10 days of hospitalization, the judge has the authority to dismiss the case at his own discretion as a 'minor offence.' Mandatory prosecution is only required when the survivor is hospitalised for more than 20 days.

Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq have legislative provisions providing reduced sentences for a man who kills his wife if she is caught in the act of adultery, or who kills a female relative for 'illicit' sexual conduct – so-called 'honour crimes.' However, in recent years, both Syria and Jordan have increased the required sentence around so-called 'honour crimes.' In Egypt and Iraqi Kurdistan, where female genital mutilation (FGM) still exists, laws have recently been passed to criminalise the practice.

Like a
breath of
fresh air. Like
escaping
prison
every day

"Home is the one place where you should be safe from harm. That was my sincere belief. It's not true though in Syria. Last year, my family was forced to flee the Da'esh soldiers in Raqqa. I now live in the Zaatari camp in Jordan with my two sisters and my father.

My father is a proud and traditional man. His dream was always to build his own kingdom, where all his sons and daughters could live all together in peace.

His dream had become reality. We were five families living in a big house on a farm. When we gathered at lunchtime, there were 40 family members on two big tables, one for men and then later one for the women. We used to start cooking early in the morning, and spend time together into the evening. His dream vanished the moment we heard that the city had fallen under the control of Da'esh.



ISRA'A

AGE: 29

LOCATION/COUNTRY: ZAATARI CAMP, JORDAN

For traditional families, the need to leave their homes behind and become a refugee brings deep-set complications. Awaking from the nightmare relies on tolerance and understanding.

One of my brothers was immediately assassinated and the other arrested. The green trees, blue sky, flowers and birds, the smell of fresh baked bread and sweet jam: they disappeared that day. Everything became gloomy and dark. The bombardment was haphazard - it could strike any place at any time. The shelling quickly became unbearable, especially for the children. I saw children's dead bodies covered with sand in the streets of my town. We were all so scared.

We decided to split up, leave the house and move into a shelter. There was no water or electricity - always pitch black. We were exhausted, thirsty and hungry. I heard that the house where my mother used to live (she is divorced and was living with my brother's family) was attacked. My mother lost her legs. My brother

“When we reached the camp, my father saw a man pulling his wife's hair and kicking her in front of a crowd. He was yelling at her for not cooking his dinner that day. My father couldn't stand quietly by, so intervened.”

escaped, but his wife and her two young children (3- and 4-years-old) were arrested.

Four months later, I too was arrested with my other sisters and sent to prison. I knew that they were trying to get at my brothers. I felt that my life was over, but then I saw my mother (in a wheel chair) and sister in-law, nephew and niece in the same prison. It was a bittersweet moment. While we were subjected to numerous types of violence, none were sexual. They also provided medication to my mother. Later, we were all released.

My father decided to move us immediately to the Zaatari camp in Jordan. My mother and two in-laws with their siblings are living in a different corner in the camp.

I don't know where the rest of my family are now. They are scattered everywhere.

My father forbade us from going outside the house, not even to collect water or visit my sick mother. In his mind, we were at risk, because the culture in Raqqa is different from Daraa, where most of the refugees in Zaatari come from. He believes we are more conservative, so we shouldn't go out and mix with strangers.

I too was worried about my younger sisters. They want to continue their education, but my father refused, as it would mean walking alone through the camp to school.

Fortunately, he is against child marriage, for two reasons. Firstly, according to our family tradition, girls should not marry a person from a different family. Then, when we reached the camp, my father saw a man pulling his wife's hair and kicking her in front of a crowd. He was yelling at her for not cooking his dinner that day. My father couldn't stand quietly by, so he intervened. But he was stopped by neighbours, as they considered him

a stranger interfering in another family's business. He always tells us that marriages made in the camp never last.

Being locked indoors was terrible. But then we had an unlikely change in fortune. It turned out that one of my sisters was having an irregular menstrual period, so I insisted on taking her to the reproductive health clinic in the camp. My father agreed. In the waiting room, I heard one of the social workers talking to a woman who had sat beside her, inviting her to participate in a counselling session. I immediately realised that this was what our

family needed - someone to speak to who would understand our situation. So, I asked for help, explaining to the social worker that my sister's illness was the only possible excuse for us to leave the house. She was treated, and then the doctor gave her a follow-up appointment in a month's time. We were so happy, because it meant we would be allowed out of the house again.

One day, there was a knock at the door, for the first time since we had arrived at the camp. The social worker had come to call.

I started shaking. I didn't want my father to know that I had approached the women's centre. The social worker asked my father for a drink of water, pretending she had never met me. Then she asked to speak to him for five minutes. She explained the services the women's centre provides and asked that he send his daughters there. My father refused politely, explaining the reasons he has. But then the social worker began visiting our house almost every day. She wanted to break the ice and build a relationship. She gained my father's confidence, and finally he accepted that we should visit the centre once a week.

It was like a breath of fresh air. For us, it was like getting out of jail. We now had the opportunity to visit my mother too. I am so grateful to Heba.

I began my counselling sessions, and my sisters started participating in the handicraft classes. Months later, I became a volunteer in the centre. I was able to convince my father to send my sisters to the school. I am truly a different person now. My dream was once to get married. But now I have a bigger dream to help other women and be influential in my community, whether Zaatari or Raqqa. Women have the power to change and build their community! That is my sincere belief. I didn't have the chance to go to school, but now I am learning every day. It is an adventure. I didn't want this situation to happen, but I am proud of the way I am coping with it!"



"I am a different person now. My dream was once to get married. But now I have a bigger dream to help other women and be influential in my community. I didn't have the chance to go to school, but now I am learning every day."

"I fear that Syria will wither away because of all this inhumanity. I worry that the people will never recover and the pain will never stop. By becoming a volunteer at the centre, I am distracted from problems that fade in comparison to what others have lived through. That helps me put everything into perspective. Volunteering also gives me purpose. I enjoy helping others. It's very rewarding to see women who have been very closed off and timid at first, then open up and gain a fresh enthusiasm for life."



**In Jordan, around
50% OF SURVIVORS**

accessing gender-based violence services suffered some form of domestic violence. (UNFPA, 2013)

Women and girls

FACE NEW RULES & RESTRICTIONS

that impact their daily life in areas controlled by United Nations-designated terrorist groups, including dress code and movement restrictions in Syria. (UNFPA, 2015)



Giving my *daughter* the *chance* I never had



"It's like I'm reborn! That's the only way to express it. My life was hell before: a divorced 16-year-old single mum with no prospects. Now, I can see a future for both my little daughter and myself. I owe it all to Dr. Amal from the UNFPA-Syria supported clinic. If you met me three years ago,

"I am gradually starting to enjoy an ordinary life again. The tears still come, but there many more smiles too."

you'd have said I was like any other girl in Syria. I've always been bright for my age and determined to succeed in school. But then the war started. My

family was displaced from our home city in Homs. I was made to marry my cousin when I turned fourteen. Overnight, any dreams of continuing my studies vanished in the gun smoke. Without the crisis, I would be in a school right now, not a divorced mother with a two-year-old girl.

My life has been put on hold since the divorce. My family comes from a conservative background where daughters don't get the same privileges or rights as sons. I couldn't cope with the backstabbing and recrimination. The cruel whispering hurt too much. I hid myself away. I felt myself withering. But this nightmare ended when I began visiting the UNFPA-supported clinic in our neighbourhood.

Talking to a social worker was life changing. Immediately, I found strength and power. I'd say that I'm more courageous now. I also found the health services I needed for my baby. My regular psychosocial therapy is helping me to overcome the hardship and stigma that I endured because of my divorce. I know my rights now, and I understand that I wasn't at fault.

Nowadays, I work at a sewing workshop in Damascus and I earn a living for myself. I am gradually starting to enjoy an ordinary life again. The tears still come, but there many more smiles too. My only wish is to give my daughter the happy, stable life that was stolen from me."

RANIM

AGE: 16

LOCATION: DAMASCUS COUNTRYSIDE

Like many girls in Syria, Ranim's hopes for the future were shot down in the crisis. Yet, she is determined that her little girl will achieve the happiness that her own misfortune stole away.

"Moving from Damascus to the Kawergosk Camp in Iraq hasn't stifled my ambitions as a clothes designer. If anything, it has helped to make my dreams come true, as I have established my own tailor shop here. Every day, I can create new ideas and produce designs by hand. I stay up to date with the latest fashion for fabrics, colours and styles, while liaising closely with sales vendors to get a fair mark-up and the best value for my customers.

I've even started receiving orders from different parts of the Kurdistan region in Iraq. Now, I am famous!

Being a single young woman is not easy. I faced a lot of challenges at the beginning. But this small workshop has given me status and confidence. I gained a kind of respect from the men, who helped me build and roof the shop. Yes, we built it together.

I had a normal life before the war. I used to work for an Adidas retailer in Damascus. I enjoyed working there. I like working with people and I love fashion, so it was a good job, and it paid well. That now seems like such a long time ago: like a different life. I was looking forward to my future and the life

I pictured that I would have. I thought I'd get married within a few years and have a family of my own. I don't think this is going to happen anytime soon now. My life is very different now.

"Here in the Kawergosk camp he can get treatment because healthcare is available and free. Coming here and leaving home saved my brother's life. So I'm glad we came."

Until the last day in Damascus, I didn't want to leave home. Despite everything that's been going on – the war, the fighting, the sieges, the bombings, the abductions, the lack of food and electricity – it was still home. Despite everything we've lost, our home was the last thing that was still ours. It's where we belong. But now our whole family has dispersed across the region.

Dreams of a glittering future in fashion

MUNA

AGE: 30 YEARS OLD

LOCATION/COUNTRY: KAWERGOSK CAMP, KURDISTAN REGION
IN IRAQ

By opening a workshop in the Kawergosk refugee camp, Mona has grown her love for fashion design and gained respect as a single young woman. Volunteering in the centre keeps her busy and optimistic.



I left because my brother needed urgent medical care. He suffers from kidney failure and there were no medical facilities left in Damascus. Hospitals had been bombed and many medics have left because it was too dangerous to practice, or they've seen too many colleagues die while helping civilians. But my brother's condition worsened and we needed to leave before

he grew too ill to travel. Here in the Kawergosk camp he can get treatment because healthcare is available and free. Coming here and leaving home saved my brother's life. So I'm glad we came.

Until we can go back home again, I intend to keep myself busy. I work with the centre as a volunteer social worker, because I like working with people and helping

others. It's one way of giving back and making myself useful. Volunteering gives me purpose while I'm here and I'm now looking more confidently towards the future. I'm also helping out in the tailoring classes that the centre runs.

Hopefully the war won't last much longer. When we do get back, I'm dreaming of expanding my business and opening a successful shop in Damascus."

When necessity leads to *creativity*



SAMAH

AGE: 32

LOCATION/COUNTRY: TRIPOLI, LEBANON

Samah is fiercely protective of her children's future happiness. But she says that with the difficult living conditions she faces, delaying her next child is the right decision.



"My name is Samah. I am married with six children. They are my life. I would do anything to keep them safe. We left Syria because it wasn't safe. No child should experience the inhumanity of war. They shouldn't be woken up by shells and bombing at night. They should go to school and they should be able to play outside. This wasn't possible in Syria anymore.

I couldn't bear that my children were growing up like this and that their own home couldn't provide the safety they needed. My youngest children don't even remember a time before the war and the fighting. It's scary to think that they believe this is what a normal life looks like.

So, we left Syria. We had to leave for my children. Of course, I don't want to be here. I don't want to be a refugee, asking for help every step of the way. But we have no choice. I want my children to have at least the chance of a normal life. Here they can go to school and regain some of their innocence. It's not an ideal situation, because life as a refugee is never easy. There isn't a lot of work available for the men. They haven't got much to do. But we manage.

The centre has helped me a lot. When we arrived at the camp, life was especially difficult because we'd just lost everything. We were in a completely different environment, where we were dependent on the help of others. I didn't know any of my neighbours. But when I found the centre, things started to change. Here I found a sense of community.

I like the centre so much that I have even started to volunteer as a health educator myself. At

"When we arrived at the camp, life was especially difficult because we'd just lost everything. I didn't know any of my neighbours. But when I found the centre, things started to change. Here I found a sense of community."

first, I hid my new work from my husband, because in Syria I didn't work. I was a stay-at-home mother. But he supports me now. I earn a little money and it helps support the family, and we can make sure we get all the necessities for the children.

Speaking of which, my husband and I have often talked about having another one. We both love our children, and would gladly add to our family, but we agree this isn't the time to welcome another baby into the world. So, thanks to the healthcare provided by the centre, I currently use contraception. Maybe when we're home in Syria, we will discuss it again and make a different decision.

For now, we live in a disused shop. With the little money I gain from the centre I am able to pay the rent. It was an unfinished garage with no door, but together with my husband and a handful of decorations, we've turned it into a cosy double floor house. Necessity leads to creativity, doesn't it? It can get a little crowded, but at least we are together. It's our family home."



Sarah and her family live here. They managed recently to put a door and divide the garage to look like a house.

Music sets me free from *pain*



RANIA

AGE: 15

LOCATION/COUNTRY: SANLIURFA, TURKEY

Rania shares her memories of the shelling in Syria, then recounts how music and togetherness in the women's community centre is helping her and her mother to look forward again.

"Together, we sing and make music. After all we've been through, this shared experience makes me feel whole again."



"We left Syria because there is so much shelling, so much war, so much unnecessary violence. It's too much. I was so scared. I was most frightened when shells fell close to our home. When they fall they are so loud. It's deafening and the impact goes right through you. You feel it in your bones. Once I was asleep and I woke up because I heard the shells fall next to our house. I was so scared that I simply froze. I couldn't even talk. We then started sleeping outside of the village at night because we were worried that shells would destroy our house.

One day, after we'd had a silly argument, my cousin's house was hit by a shell. I regret so much that she died feeling upset. That's when I begged my parents to leave. My cousin and her family had died, and we didn't even sleep in our own house anymore. What was the point of staying?

Music is such a big part of Syrian culture, and so important to our family. We would wake up to my mother singing hits by Fairuz as she scrambled eggs, with the sweet smell of jasmine flowers wafting in from the garden. She has always encouraged me to sing and play music. She is the one who encouraged me to go to the centre.

My music teacher had also moved to Turkey, and he started organising music sessions at the women's centre. He approached all the students he used to teach back in Syria and encouraged them to attend his music class. He believes passionately in the power of music to heal trauma. He is determined to organise concerts that will bring back the old days of love and music. Playing the buzuq fills me with a deep sense of contentment, because the music helps me remember my happiest times back home in Syria.

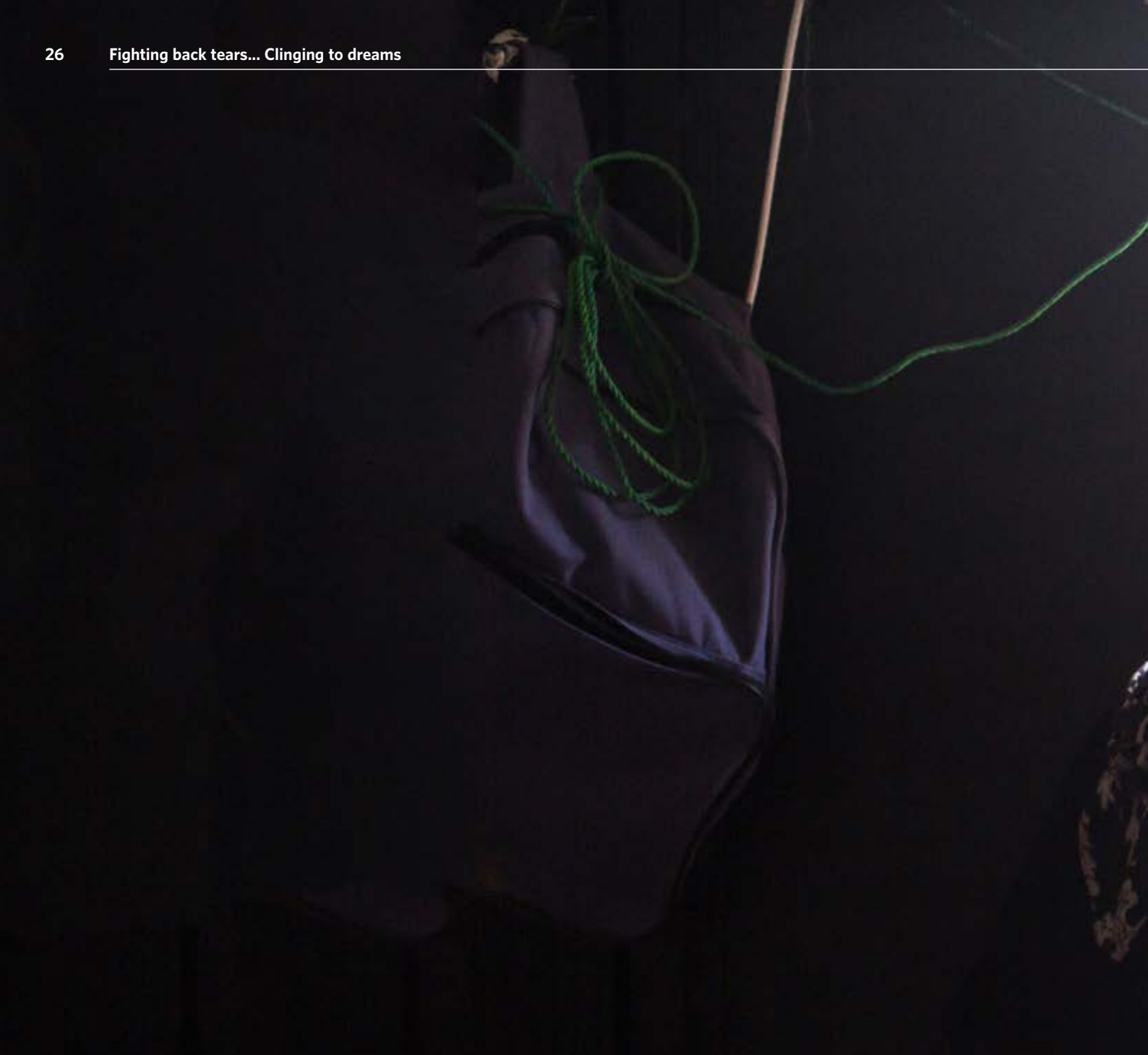
I found many old friends in the centre. Together, we sing and make music. After all we've been through, this shared experience makes me feel whole again. I feel like a different person when I make music. I feel free. Free from painful memories of friends and family I've lost, and the loss of Syria.

The centre is helping me in many ways. I have music back in my life, but I can also talk with a social worker. Slowly, I am remembering my cousin as the beautiful person she was, and not just in the horrible way she had to die. The centre helps me focus on my future, and I have encouraged my mother to visit too. There are a lot of women her age at the centre: they spend all their time together and have quickly become great friends. Yes, they bond over shared experiences. But they also enjoy learning new skills and crafts together. I think we are both much happier and balanced since we started coming to the centre."

TOTAL NUMBER OF SYRIAN YOUTH (15-24 YEARS OLD)

(source: UNHCR, UNFPA, March 2016)

COUNTRY	SYRIA	TURKEY	EGYPT	IRAQ	JORDAN	LEBANON
Total	2.5 million	400,000	25,000	50,000	110,000	190,000



"My husband is a difficult person and he refused to let me see a doctor. But with the support of a health worker in the centre, I was able to get the treatment I so desperately needed. Once I am cured, I hope to have a second child."

LAVAN

Lavan struggled for four years in pain and silence, afraid to tell her husband about a vaginal infection that stopped her from becoming pregnant.



"Don't get me wrong, I wish every day that this crisis would end. But I've never been someone who complains about what has happened. I prefer to act in the present. Crying about the past leaves you living in the past.

I grew up in Damascus. As an 18-year-old, starting at university, I had clear dreams for the future, like most girls my age. But when the war started, those dreams faded. Of course, I wasn't alone. The crisis has impacted every Syrian's life, and not just those adults in work. Many young people also had their futures - and current lives - turned upside down by the danger and uncertainty.

I dropped out of university during my first year, as the situation grew worse. My mum only wanted to protect me, but it was terrible spending a whole year locked away in our house, afraid to leave, not even to buy groceries from across the street.

Twelve long months later, I decided to break the chain of fear and get back to life. I found a job and started attending local conferences and workshops to expand my professional network. Being involved with the local community and engaging with many events allowed me to regain my confidence.



**As one
door closes,
another
opens
wider**

SALAM

AGE: 22

LOCATION: DAMASCUS

Salam, through her own determination and optimism, is doing what she can to help women and young people find hope in Syria. This wasn't the life she envisaged, but it's one she embraces every day.

I soon gathered enough experience to co-host weeklong intensive workshops to support 30 young entrepreneurs aged between 15 and 18 years old in my community. I also became a TEDxYouth organiser in Damascus, where I can help present ideas worth spreading to people of different backgrounds, from business and technology to social and global issues.

Despite the circumstances and the financial barriers, our team in Damascus managed to host a series of TEDxYouth clinics for almost 100 beneficiaries aged between 12 and 24 years old. The TEDx is a global programme

designed to help communities, organizations and individuals to spark conversation and connection. We helped young people gather together to discuss, brainstorm and develop innovative ideas, and activate their roles in society as change agents. In that time, I also grew passionate about writing on social justice.

In 2015, I participated as an event manager in the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-

Based Violence" campaign, run by UNFPA – Syria, which aims to raise awareness of and tackle human rights violations against women. I also participated in an international workshop around Global Citizenship Education (GCED), organised by UNESCO, to discuss global issues and young people's role in solving them.

I found a kindred spirit in UNFPA, as I likewise believe that society must invest in young people's skills and ambitions.

Joining their local team as a volunteer was a life-changing experience. I've never felt the same excitement as I did working with their Syrian and international staff. The environment was so enriching on both a personal and professional level. For an ordinary girl like me to work in such extraordinary circumstances was a privilege.

"Syria has so many innovative, smart and skilled young people. I'm just one of many others who are determined to create something from nothing."



When I look back at the last few years, I am a different person to that 18-year-old. But I have no regrets. You can't control what happens to you, but you can control how you react. At first, I thought the crisis would prove the end of the world. Now, I realise that the start of the crisis marked the beginning of my new world.

I truly believe that hard work earns its rewards. But when you have passion in a cause, backed by hard work, then you can achieve all your goals in life. That's when you can change society around you for the better.

Syria has so many innovative, smart and skilled young people. I'm just one of many others who are determined to create something from nothing. Unfortunately, many of my peers never discover the right platform to share their voice. If we could only find ways reach out to more young people, then they could help reshape our country's future."



DANA

As the wife of community leader, and a prominent figure in her own right, Dana takes her duties seriously as a role model to other women in the settlement. She takes pleasure in sharing information, encouraging them towards healthier lifestyle and helping them solve their problems. Dana is determined to set the right example.

"This child would have only known life as a refugee. He wouldn't have had a home. Not even memories of a home and of a carefree childhood like my other children. It's not the time to bring more children into this world. Not if you're a refugee."

"I have four children whom I love very much. They're my world. I keep going for them. Since leaving Syria, my husband and I have used contraception. I have chosen not to have a child. It was a difficult decision because I believe each child is a blessing. But what life would this child have had? This child would have only known life as a refugee. He wouldn't have had a home. Not even memories of a home and of a carefree childhood like my other children. It's not the time to bring more children into this world. Not if you're a refugee. Contraception is a taboo in our society that nobody talks about. But we cannot afford another child. I've used contraceptives that I get free of charge from the centre following consultations."



A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a light green t-shirt and grey jeans, is sitting on a patterned rug on the floor. He is looking out a window with black metal bars. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from the window. The window shows a view of a building with a stone facade and a balcony with a white railing. The man's expression is thoughtful and somewhat somber.

The long **road** **back** from **despair**

Sami in his room telling how he managed to support his mother when they arrived to Turkey.

YASMEEN, SAMI & IBRAHIM

AGE: 40, 19 & 22

LOCATION/COUNTRY: SANLIURFA, TURKEY

To survive, when so many members of her family were killed, felt like punishment to Yasmeen. Finding the will to carry on relied on the support of her sons, a sewing machine and new friends at the women's centre.

Yasmeen: "After the war started, we spent endless nights in a shelter. I was always so afraid. Then, one morning, a bomb hit our house directly. Everyone who was inside at the time died. My husband. My two daughters. Two of my sons. Our family as I knew it was gone. I miss them so much. They were my life. Every night I asked God to take me away. To take me to them. I was already dead inside anyway. I wished I were strong enough to do it myself."

After that, I fled Syria together with my three remaining sons and other relatives. I lived with them when we first arrived in Turkey. But I was a burden. Not just because I was an extra mouth to feed when none of us were working, but also because I was in a deep depression. I couldn't help out much. I didn't leave the house, and I didn't talk for months."

Sami: "There isn't much to do here. Even if we find a job, we'll get minimum wages, along with resentment that we are taking the jobs and opportunities away from local people. We left Syria because we had to. I would have never left if it weren't for the war."

"I've started making lots of new friends, and participating in a literacy class. Now I can't skip a day without visiting my friends there. I am new person. I dedicated my life to my children, and now they have given me hope to live again."

Ibrahim: "We Syrians are educated people. I am an engineer. We could contribute. We don't want hand outs - we just want to take care of our families. I can't wait to go back to Syria. I'll be the first to go once the war is over. My other brother is in Ankara - he is working and he sends us money on a monthly basis."

Yasmeen: "Being a widow brought more than loneliness. I felt so useless and guilty that I couldn't do anything for my sons. I didn't know how. My husband used to do everything. Syrian woman in my town simply don't go shopping or to work. My sons helped me to overcome this sense of frustration and isolation."

Sami: "We couldn't watch my mother struggle like she was. We love her too much. She is everything in our lives. We know that losing my father, her children and her house was terribly hard, but we were determined to help raise her spirits if we possibly could. That's when we found the community centre. We registered her in one of the sewing classes. She quickly developed a huge passion for sewing, and was one of the first to class every day. With my brothers, we raised the money for a sewing machine and she now tailors clothes for us. She has gained a real sense of purpose."

Yasmeen: "I started seeing a therapist too. She helps me to cope with the loss of my family in a healthier way. I can mourn them properly. I've started making lots of new friends, and participating in a literacy class. Now I can't skip a day without visiting my friends there. I am new person. I dedicated my life to my children, and now they have given me hope to live again."



FATMA

Fatma is 45-year-old mother of three sons. Her two older boys (26 and 20) were badly injured in conflict, and now suffer from disabilities, which leave them housebound. Fatma, an excellent cook, earns as much as she can to cover the cost of food, medicine, rent and essentials. But the ends rarely meet.

"Taking care of my sons on my own has not been easy but I'm very proud of my work. I'm proud that I saved my sons and I've kept us together. I've struggled with the responsibility of the entire household, balancing my cooking which is our sole source of income and giving my sons the attention that they need and deserve. Luckily, I have also had support from the centre, which has helped me cope with the stress of our financial situation and find activities for my sons. Yes, we all share one mattress and one blanket. But we are safe."





MARYAM

When this picture was taken, Maryam had only recently given birth to her son Ziad, who arrived several weeks premature. Although grateful for her son, Maryam is now in debt because of the hospital bills and she cannot afford to pay for formula.

"Through the centre, I found postnatal care and breastfeeding support. I also worked with a social worker to prevent postnatal depression. Talking about what I've been through has helped hugely. And for that, I am grateful."



A mother's joy in precious life

"For the past five years, I have been struggling with gynaecological issues. Before reaching the Domiz camp, I had approached many doctors in Syria for help. My gynaecologist at the Domiz camp monitored my case from day one, checking my blood pressure and diabetes level daily especially when I became pregnant. I felt completely cared for by the nurses and my doctor who helped me through my C-section. I hear that many women travel from afar to go to the clinic because of the quality of patient care.

UNFPA-supported facilities in northern Iraq serve both Syrians and Kurds who seek out the widely-reputable clinics. These facilities are some of the only ones in the region that are equipped to handle high risk cases such as ectopic pregnancies. Reports of successful management of ectopic pregnancies have also increased the reputation of UNFPA-supported facilities."

Number of facility-based vaginal deliveries and C-Sections per month in UNFPA-supported facilities

DAMASCUS HUB



3,476

Average # of Vaginal Deliveries/Month

2,415

Average # of C-Sections/Month

DEENA

AGE: 29

LOCATION/COUNTRY: DOMIZ CAMP, KURDISTAN REGION IN IRAQ

Deena and her husband fled their home in rural Aleppo, where armed groups took control of the area around Al Bab. They now live in the Domiz camp in Iraq, where they have found a silver lining amid the war clouds.

Number of facility-based vaginal deliveries and C-Sections per month in UNFPA-supported facilities through cross-border operations

JORDAN HUB



1,128

Average # of Vaginal Deliveries/Month

607

Average # of C-Sections/Month

Number of facility-based vaginal deliveries and C-Sections per month in UNFPA supported facilities through cross-border operations

TURKEY HUB



1,135

Average # of Vaginal Deliveries/Month

358

Average # of C-Sections/Month



"I felt completely cared for by the nurses and my doctor."

ASMA

AGE: 42

LOCATION/COUNTRY: DOMIZ CAMP, KURDISTAN REGION IN IRAQ

"Despite the difficult conditions and challenges, I still thank God for having a roof over my head and children. It's better than living in continuous terror under bombings."





United Nations Population Fund

UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund: Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential fulfilled.

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