

FRAGILE
Handle with care
Contains Dreams



THE BOOK
OF DREAMS



UNICEF has selected the stories in this book from children and youth who receive support from the European Union.

The testimonials are authentic and true to the memories of the children.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of UNICEF.

The views expressed in this book do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the European Union nor those of UNICEF.

FOREWORD

This storybook takes us on a journey through the past, present and towards the hope in a better future of a generation of Syrian children and youth that has seen their dreams interrupted, at best, by more than eight years of conflict.

Reading this 'Book of Dreams' I am moved by the difficult stories told. But these young girls and boys have incredible aspirations: wanting to become astronauts, journalists, work for children's rights, and rebuild their beloved Syria. They hold on to their dreams even as they must cope with distress and loss, seeking to find the 'silver lining' in an often dark and cloudy sky.

Supporting children and youth is a key priority for the European Union in our work to prevent a 'lost generation'. It is heartening to see the results of the joint efforts of the European Union and UNICEF and I take these testimonies as a demonstration, once again, of the resilience, strength and determination of the next generation. These characteristics represent the positive change we all seek and the hope we have for a peaceful future in Syria and in the region.

Johannes Hahn

European Commissioner for Neighbourhood
Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (2014-2019)

WHERE DO THESE STORIES TAKE PLACE AND WHAT HAPPENED?



SWEDEN

FINLAND

ESTONIA

LATVIA

LITHUANIA

DENMARK

IRELAND

NETHERLANDS

BELGIUM

LUXEMBOURG

GERMANY

POLAND

CZECH REPUBLIC

SLOVAKIA

AUSTRIA

HUNGARY

SLOVENIA

CROATIA

ROMANIA

BULGARIA

Black Sea

PORTUGAL

SPAIN

ITALY

GREECE

TURKEY

MALTA

Mediterranean Sea

REP. of CYPRUS

LEBANON

SYRIA

IRAQ

JORDAN

Black Sea

TURKEY

- Aleppo
- Idlib
- Hama
- Homs
- Damascus
- Ar-Raqqa
- Deir
- Ez-Zor

SYRIA

LEBANON

JORDAN

IRAQ

In December 2010, a series of protests began and then spread to several countries in the Middle East and North Africa. This became known as the "Arab Spring".

In Syria, people started to protest peacefully in 2011, demanding freedom, dignity and basic rights. The peaceful demonstrations were repressed which soon led to a full-fledged war.

The confrontations became increasingly violent. Entire cities were destroyed. Civilians have enormously suffered: we are talking about perhaps 500,000 deaths so far. Many Syrians fled their homes and then their country to escape this deadly conflict.

Six million people are still displaced inside Syria while millions of people escaped to Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and European countries.

Overall approximately 12 million Syrians are displaced.

Picture having to leave everything behind in a split second... your house, your friends, and sometimes even members of your family, and then having to continue your life in another country, not knowing anyone, sometimes not even knowing the language.

Yet for the majority of these people, this was the only way out.

Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and others, including European Union member states decided to host Syrian refugees.

The war continues to this day. The European Union and many countries, are helping Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq support Syrian refugees and local communities by offering them protection, education, healthcare and so forth.

International organisations such as UNICEF also work in these countries to help Syrian refugees and the population.

ONCE UPON A DREAM

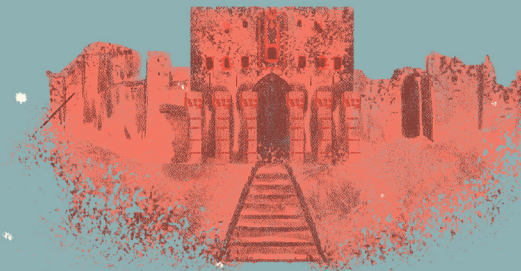
All children dream. For some of them who have experienced war, hunger and cold, dreaming is all they have left.

Forced to leave their city, their home, their family, many Syrian children carry with them their hope for a better future. At night, they imagine being able to return to their country one day and being reunited with their family and friends.

Thanks to their dreams, they fight back.

Thanks to their vision of the future, they still have faith in life.

Thanks to hope, anything is possible.





Chapter 1

A COUNTRY, A HOME

Syria and its people have endured for centuries. As a society, it forged its own identity so it could shine across the world.

It is a land of astounding beauty, where inhabitants have grown and nourished their culture and traditions over thousands of years, making this place a home to a rich and diverse society.

Syria is overflowing with archaeological treasures. Damascus and Aleppo are amongst the oldest cities in the world. For Syrians, preserving their architectural masterpieces has been an important part of their heritage for many years. For these men and women, now displaced, the simple memory of their country's grandeur takes them back there, to their home, to Syria.

What child does not dream of a home?

For the children who tell their stories in this chapter, it is sometimes nothing more than a distant memory. Yet, they continue to dream of a home, a home that would finally mean a better future could begin to take shape. A refuge where they could shelter from the violence, cold and pain that they deal with day in, day out.

These children have lost everything that we take for granted each night when we go to sleep. The only things that we could never take away from them, which they will never let go of, are their dreams and hope.

I DREAM OF OUR HOUSE

Enas, 11 years old. She is from Aleppo, Syria.

She now lives in Turkey.

I remember our house in Syria.

I remember every room.

I was only five when we left our country to come and live here, in Turkey.

But I remember our home in Aleppo perfectly.

One day, I'll go back.

My name is Enas, I am eleven years old and I have five sisters.

We left because our father was afraid for us, for our safety, but it's no better here.



I remember our house in Syria, with its big courtyard, four bedrooms, and the school just a few streets away.

One day, I'll go back.

I miss my auntie. I miss her a lot.

Just like I miss my bedroom and the swing dad built for us.

Here, I go to school but I don't enjoy it. I try, I study, but I don't enjoy it. This is not my home. This is not Aleppo. Syria is my country, it is where I was born.

One day, for sure, I'll go back.





I DREAM OF MY COUNTRY

Rasha, 12 years old. She is Syrian.

She now lives in Turkey.

People say that Syria used to be a magnificent country, but today everything has been destroyed and that makes me so sad. I know that if I go back, it will all be different.

We live here, in Turkey. We are trying to be happy. I go to school like the other children. Most of the time, us Syrian girls stick together. The Turkish girls don't really like mingling with us...

Sometimes, the teacher asks us questions about our home country. One day, he asked me what I missed most.

- Syria, I answered simply.

When we live in a country that isn't

ours, we never really feel at home.

I'll tell you what children want. They want rights! First, the right to go to school and to speak their own language. Then, the right to stay in their country. What is happening in Syria should never happen. Children have rights. They have the right to play, to study and to be happy. They should never be sad.

There are three things that I want more than anything else. First, for my parents and sisters to be safe and sound. Second, to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. And third, to see Syria again.

I'll go back one day, for sure...







Chapter 2

NOT ALL PATHS LEAD TO THE SAME PLACE

Every journey has its own story. From the first step, the traveller is no longer the same. The paths he takes reveal the choices he makes. However, for the children sharing their stories in this book, few of those choices are made freely.

At the heart of young Syrian people's dreams, there is an inexhaustible need for education. For this generation, whose everyday lives are peppered with injustices, their studies and their memories of happier times are the two reasons why they still nurture hope.

The first text illustrates this perfectly. All Yahya has left from when he went to school is a photo, which he treasures dearly.

Some have managed to save a few broken toys and damaged books from the rubble of their homes. Others have simply lost everything. The ones who tell us their stories here don't even celebrate their birthdays anymore.

Yet, at the centre of their difficult lives, a hope for better days endures. While surviving is their priority, studying also matters a lot to them. They know that it holds the possibility of returning to Syria one day to build a future for them and their family.

Education is the key to their future.

An illustration featuring a boy in a yellow shirt and blue shorts jumping over a large red pencil. The pencil is positioned horizontally across a thick red curved path. To the left, an open book with blank pages is shown. To the right, a spiral-bound notepad is visible. The background consists of large, textured, curved shapes in teal and orange.

A PHOTO OF ME

Yahya is 13 years old. He is from Syria.

He now lives in Jordan.

It's a photo of me that was taken during my enrolment in school. It is very important to me. I was in my first year, my very first week of classes, when I was forced to leave the country.

Of course, I have a few memories. Some good, some not so good. For example, I remember my school, which was so beautiful to me, the friends I made and

our football matches in the playground.

I also remember the war, the bombings and the journey we had to make to get here. Those are bad memories that I'd rather forget...

We left Syria in the middle of the night. It was so dark that we could hardly see the road in front of us. We crossed valleys, walking through thorny bramble bushes. People left everything they had behind, so



they wouldn't be weighed down on their journey. As for me, I had to leave behind my schoolbooks, my pens and crayons. Mum said we would be back home soon enough, but we have been here for six years now.

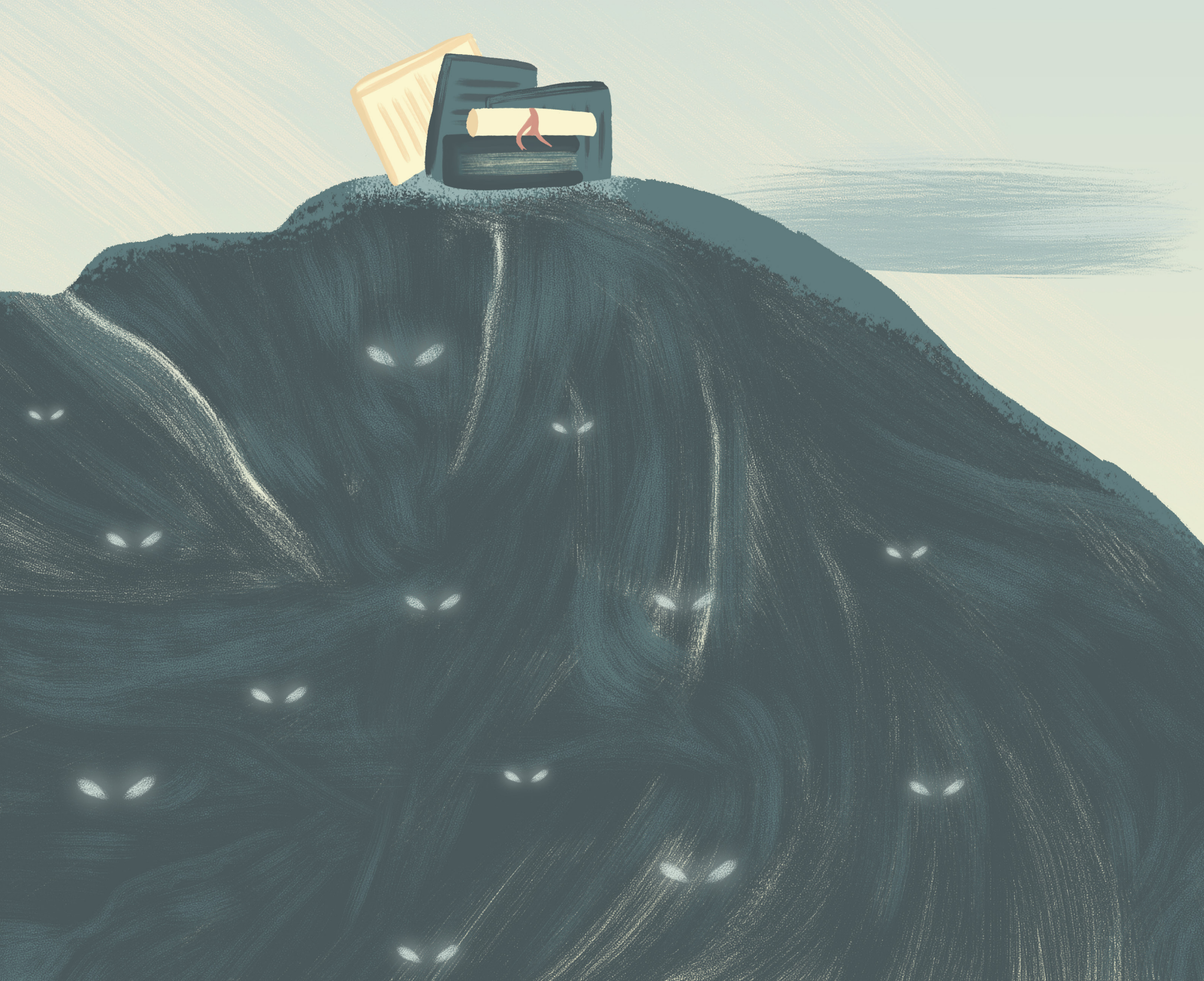
I treasure this photo dearly because it is a part of my childhood. When I look at

it, it makes me smile, it reminds me of how happy I was when I was little. I was barely six years old.

Now, what I want most of all, is to return to Syria, to see my house and my school again.

I hope with all my heart that Syria will be safe again one day.







BEING A GIRL

Hameda, 17 years old. She is from Syria.

She now lives in Jordan.

My name is Hameda. My family and I left Syria because of the war. Now, we live in a temporary camp in Jordan.

My days pass by and blur into one another. We wake up early, my father brings us water while my mother goes to receive treatment.

I leave the house around midday to go to class. After that, I spend some time with my friends. Then everyone goes back to their own houses.

Some girls can't go out because of the guys hanging around the streets who harass them. It drives me crazy that nobody does anything to stop them!

My friends and I only want one thing: to be able to keep studying.

I know that the situation is complicated but my dream would be to finish my studies and have a chance of a better future...

GETTING MARRIED IS NOT A DUTY

Selma, 24 years old. She is from Syria.

She now lives in Jordan.

My name is Selma. I am twenty-four years old, but as a mother, widow and divorcee, I sometimes feel like I'm forty or fifty...

Many years ago, when I was just a child, I went to school with the goal of one day becoming a pharmacist. My parents supported me at the time. But when I turned fourteen, they decided it was time for me to find a husband. For over a year, I begged them not to force me to get married. I even considered marrying a nice boy from the village to escape it all.

I fell pregnant just before the war began and I lost my husband shortly after. Feeling I was carrying part of his soul inside me during those dark, bleak times was a very strange sensation. At seven months pregnant, my parents decided to leave Syria to go to Jordan. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to stay in Syria, where my husband was buried, but after much insistence, my parents managed to convince me to go to

Jordan with them.

The birth of my son was a wonderful moment for me, full of hope. I enjoyed the most beautiful eighteen months with him by my side, but then one day, my parents decided it was time for me to get married again.

My new husband was forty-two years old, I was only twenty. The eight months we spent together were torturous. I ended up divorcing him and returning to my parents' house.

Life here is not easy. In my culture, being a divorced woman is a punishment. We are not allowed to go out, wear nice clothes or even work.

I dream of a world where women have the same rights as men. The right to make our own decisions and to achieve our own goals.

After all, no one should be forced to get married...





SAFA'S THREE WISHES

Safa, 10 years old. She is from Aleppo, Syria.

She now lives in Jordan.

My name is Safa and I'm from Aleppo. I am ten years old and I have spent more than half of my life as a refugee.

When the war broke out, my family and I took refuge in the countryside. We thought that we would be safe there.

One day, when I was playing outside, a shell fell near me and I was seriously injured. Despite all their efforts, the doctors were unable to save my leg. Three months later, we left for Jordan.

In the refugee camp, they gave me a wheelchair. We didn't stay for very long. We went back to Amman, the capital of Jordan, so that dad could find work. But life in the city was far too expensive, so we had to leave Amman to go to the Azraq refugee camp.

I get up at 7 every morning. School doesn't start until 8, but because of my prosthetic leg, I need a lot more time to

get there.

If I had a magic lamp, I would make three wishes:

First, I would ask for a real bed because my mattress isn't comfortable at all.

My next wish would be to be able to ride a bike.

Lastly, I would ask for a new prosthetic leg, one that is prettier, more comfortable, and in better condition than mine.

P.S. After hearing my three wishes, some youngsters from the camp built a real bed for me. They are taking a professional training course run by UNICEF and funded by the European Union.







Chapter 3

CLINGING TO YOUR DREAMS


We may believe that Syrian children no longer dream. Their everyday lives are constantly affected by suffering and inequality. We may believe that their dreams have vanished because of this existence imposed upon them. In reality, it is the complete opposite. When most of a child's life has been torn away from them, hope is all that remains for him or her to have faith in better days.

These children make sure that their dreams remain very much alive, even if they are afraid that they may never come true.

Those who tell their stories here have the immense courage to never give up. They could have thrown in the towel many, many times. You require great strength and character to continue to hope when everything is falling apart around you.

As you will notice when reading these texts, it sometimes takes very little for these children to feel they can cling to their dreams. A word, a piece of clothing, a song...





THE GIRL IN THE HAT

Maha, 13 years old. She is from Western Al Ghariyah in Syria.

She now lives in Jordan.

I love hats.

I have two, the one I'm wearing today and another one. My mother prefers the other one because it protects me better from the sun.

Something I love almost as much as hats

is doing other people's hair. Later in life, I would like to work in a hairdressing salon. I often practise on my sister, when she lets me.

We left a lot of things behind us when we left Syria, but I held onto my love for music and singing.

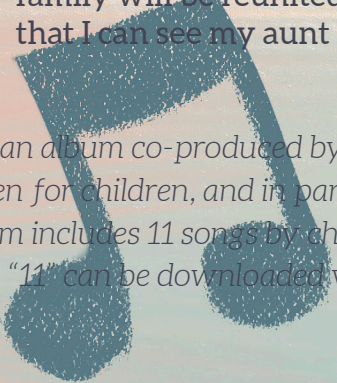
We had the opportunity to take part in music workshops. First, everyone

sang a song they knew and then we got up on stage and sang the same song all together. It was amazing. A stage filled with girls like me, girls who had lost everything they had and the people they loved, but who shared a love for music.

Music is essential. It makes me feel calm when I am angry. We are so far from home... I hope that one day, our family will be reunited once more and that I can see my aunt and uncle again.



The music workshops were part of "11", an album co-produced by UNICEF and the European Union, and sung by children for children, and in partnership with Jad Rahbani, a Lebanese composer. The album includes 11 songs by children in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The album "11" can be downloaded via the following link: www.unicef.org/mena/11Album



REDISCOVERING AN IDENTITY THROUGH ONE'S MOTHER TONGUE

Qassim, 30 years old. He is from Deir Ez-Zor, Syria.

He now lives in Turkey.

I arrived in Turkey three years ago. Now, I am a volunteer at the "Farah Centre" where I work with refugees. I am in charge of providing psychological support to children and organising activities for them to distract them a little.

The majority of the children I meet here have lived most of their lives far from their country of birth. As a result, some of them have real difficulty speaking their own native language. Those who





were born here, in the camp, don't even know how to speak Arabic. What will happen to them when they are able to return to their country?

The language we speak is an essential part of our identity. This is why we decided to organise Arabic conversation groups with the children.

At the beginning, of course, they had a lot of trouble learning the language. To them, it was like a foreign language. But slowly, as they gradually progressed, they began to enjoy it. In the end, their parents could hardly believe how well they were speaking Arabic.

When the time comes for them to return to their country, they should find a society ready to welcome them.

THE SYRIA OF MY DREAMS

Hiba, 12 years old. She is from Homs, Syria.

She now lives in Jordan.

I have lived in Jordan for four years. I don't have a lot of memories of Syria, but my parents always tell me that it was a magnificent country. I would love to go back there to see it for myself. They also say that they had a very beautiful house, but I don't remember it.

I am lucky to be here, in Jordan. I can go to school every day and I love school! My classmates and I think it is great to have the chance to learn. One of my dreams would be to become a teacher later in life and be able to help children like me.

Another thing we really enjoy is singing! Sometimes, we take part in singing workshops. My favourite song is called "Shetti Shetti" ("Rain Rain"). Do you know why? Because my favourite season is winter.

I really hope that my dream of becoming a teacher comes true one day. If I had a magic wand, I would make sure that everyone was happy and had the best life possible.



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WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE...

Khadija, 12 years old. She is from Idlib, Syria.

She now lives in Lebanon.

I left Syria in 2012. When we arrived in Beirut, in Lebanon, my parents had trouble finding a place for me in a school. The only places left were in schools that were too expensive for us.

During my first year in Lebanon, I was stuck at home with my mum. I helped her with the household chores. Neither of us were happy. She was afraid that I would be too far behind the other children and that I wouldn't be able to keep up with classes.

Fortunately, one day, a place became available and I could finally go to school.

I know that I am lucky to be able to study. I have a neighbour whose parents



refuse to let her go out. They are afraid something will happen to her. It makes me sad, I don't think it's fair on her. Her father and mother should know that no place is safer than a school.

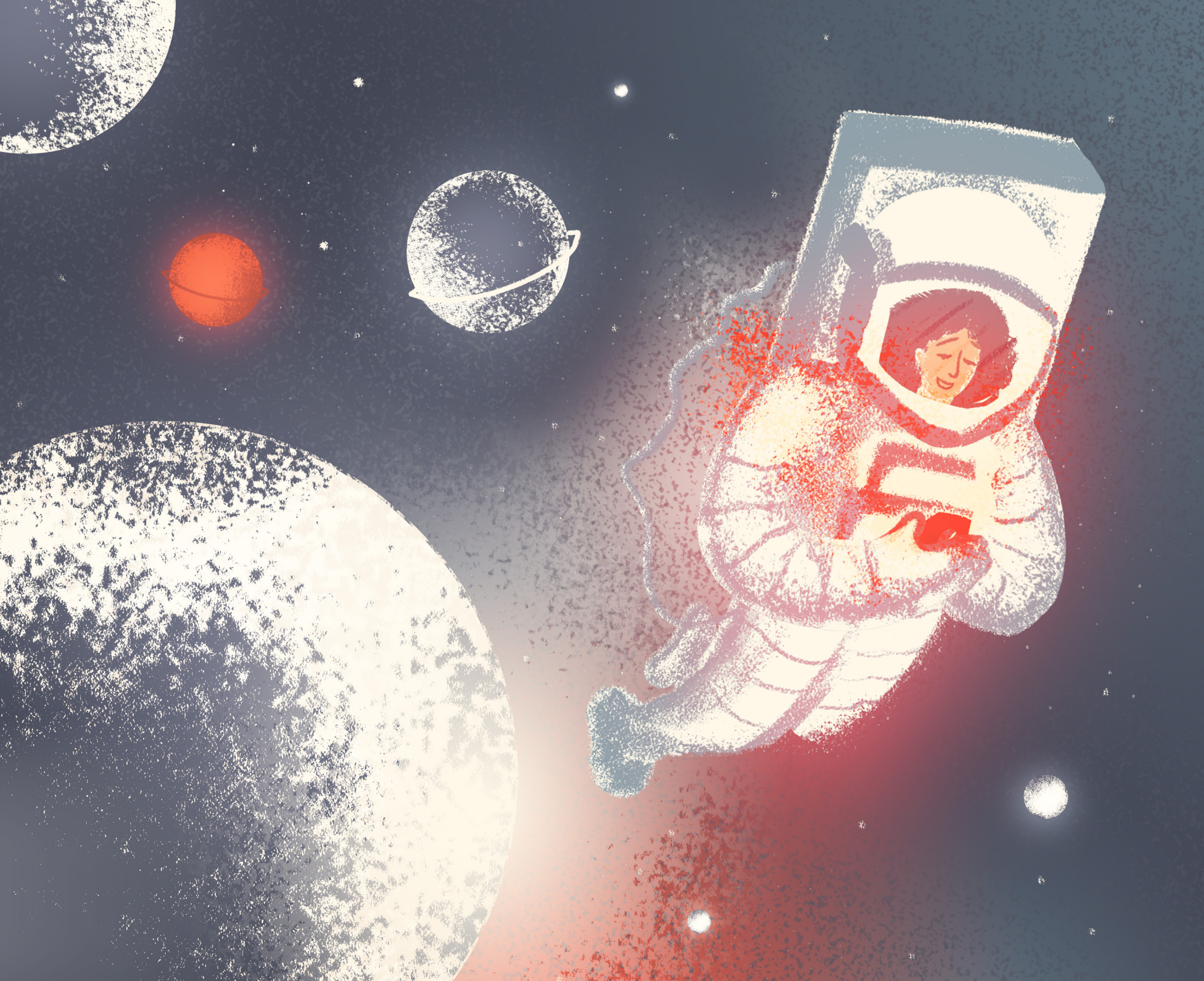
As for me, I want to be able to study to become a doctor in Idlib. As long as I'm allowed to keep going to school here, I

know that my dream can come true one day.

When I'm older and have children, I won't let them miss a single day of school.

I will tell them that school is the place where dreams come true.





I DREAM OF SPACE

Bodoor, 17 years old. She is from Syria.

She now lives in Jordan.

When I arrived at Azraq camp with my two sisters and my three brothers, I sat on the steps of our caravan and looked up at the sky. For the first time in my life, I saw the stars shining in the night. There were so many stars that I felt like I was looking at the whole galaxy! It was so beautiful that I decided to learn everything I could about constellations and the Milky Way and become an astronomer when I'm older.

The stars make me happy and calm, they chase away the sadness that I sometimes feel inside. When I look up at the starry night sky, it is as if I am escaping from Earth.

The problem for girls my age is that our parents want to marry us off before we can finish our studies. Some people think that girls don't need to study. That all they are good for is staying at home and looking after their husband. Obviously, these people are wrong. The more educated we are, the more useful we will

be to society!

Perhaps one day, when I am an astronomer or astronaut, I will discover more planets and even more galaxies. My name means "full moon", so I will be the first Syrian woman to set foot on the moon. I will look over at Earth from afar.

If I am lucky enough to have my dreams come true, I will study hard so that I can work for NASA one day. They say that nothing is impossible if we believe it in enough. But I also know that I will need help if I don't want my dreams to become locked away forever in this camp.



SHARING THE TRUTH

Reham, 18 years old. She is from Damascus, Syria.

She now lives in Lebanon.

I will never forget the day when my life was turned upside down.

I was twelve, I lived happily with my parents and my brothers. I had my own bedroom and I spent most of my time doing school-work. Writing was my passion. I even hoped to become a journalist.

When the war began, we left our house in a hurry to reach the border. We arrived in Lebanon, initially saying that it would only be for a few months, but now, years on, we are still here. We live in two rooms. It is more like a tent than a house... But it is our home. This is where

I can dream.

Even if life is difficult, I don't spend my time poring over everything I have lost. I prefer to think about what could make my own and my family's lives better.

Since we left, I have never been back to school. At eighteen years old, I am well aware that I will never return. So, I seize every opportunity I can to learn more and gain experience. I know how to use a camera and a computer. I even know how to cut hair! These kinds of things will help me find my place within my community.

Despite all this, the dream of becoming a

journalist remains etched on my heart. I don't have the time to write, a notebook and pen would be considered luxuries here, but in the evenings when I am going to sleep, I make mental notes of my day's events.

As I said, my life is complicated. It is permeated by chaos, sadness and pain. Yet I continue to believe that everything will get better and I still hold a small flame of hope inside.

One day, I will hold a pen in my hand again and I will have so many stories to tell!





Chapter 4

THE DREAMCATCHER

The most precious dreams belong to those who dream of a better future, for themselves and for their fellow human beings.

Some children nurture dreams like these. Children who, thanks to their education, fight for their rights and stay hopeful through thick and thin.

Reading these texts, you will realise just how strong and brave the children sharing their stories here are.

When the Syrian conflict began, a large part of the world took action, including the European Union and UNICEF, who were among the first.

They tackled the task of responding to Syrian children's needs. Year after year, they helped to preserve the determination, dignity and strength of the Syrian people.



I HAVE THE RIGHT TO STUDY

Marah, 14 years old. She is from Syria.

She now lives in Lebanon.

When I arrived in Lebanon just after leaving Syria, I wasn't able to enrol in a school right away. I missed an entire year, which was really annoying, because I love studying! In the end, everything worked out - I was able to go back to school - and I finally found my smile again.

All girls should know how important it is to go to school. When I was able to go back to my studies, my life changed.

In the beginning, my father thought

that a thirteen-year-old girl's place was in the home. Of course, I didn't agree at all. Every day, I saw my friends going to school while I stayed at home. I felt increasingly sad and desperate, so my mother explained to my father that it really was vital for me to be able to attend classes. She managed to convince him and I was finally able to enrol in a school. My mother sleeps much better knowing that I have the possibility to pursue my studies.

Now, I am happy to have the opportunity to study and, one day, who knows, to be able to achieve my dreams.



THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN PEACE

Turkish and Syrian children took part in workshops organised by UNICEF and the European Union. These workshops aim to educate them about children's rights and give them the opportunity to express their point of view on the subject.

Veziye, 17 years old. He is from Mardin, Turkey:

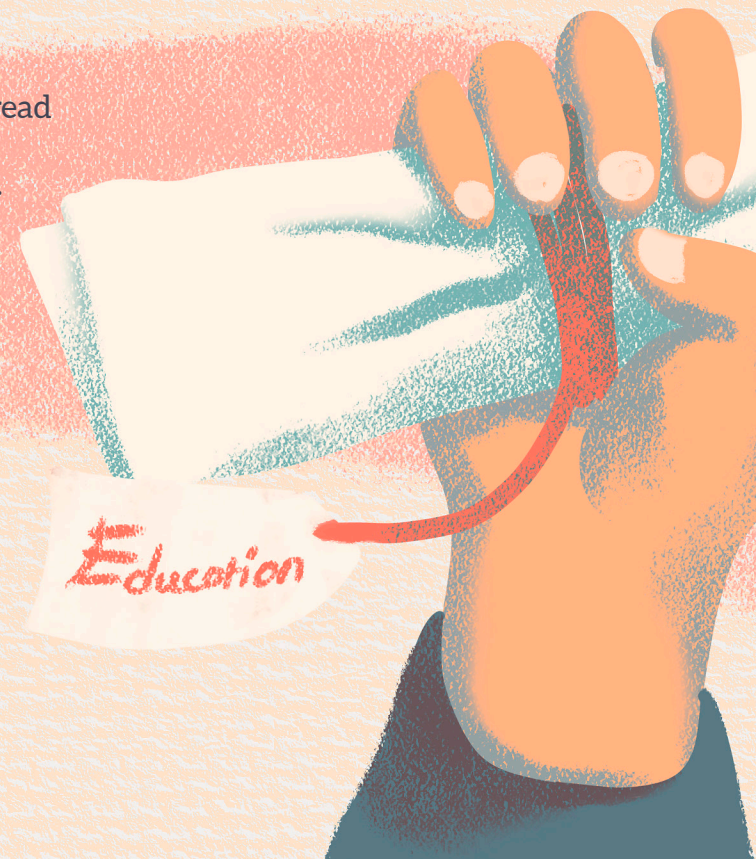
I have nine brothers and sisters, so I know how important children's rights are. Starting with the children in my own family... Today was the first time in my life that I was able to say what I thought in front of an audience. Maybe I spoke a little too much, but I am happy to have had the chance to say everything that was on my mind. We children have power and we should all know our own rights.

Mohamed, 15 years old. He is from Ar-Raqqa, Syria:

To me, the most important children's right is the right to live in peace. The world is big enough and beautiful enough for us all to be able to live together without fighting. I do not know who benefits from war, but I am sure that peace benefits everyone.

Sahed, 11 years old, he is from Ankara, Turkey:

The most valuable children's right is the right to go to school. If we know how to read and write, we can understand the world around us and guarantee our own safety.





Peace

Safety

THE DAY I UNDERSTOOD MY RIGHTS

Rahaf, 15 years old. She is from Syria.

She now lives in Lebanon.

When leaving Syria, I had to abandon my education. When I arrived in Lebanon, as a girl and a refugee, I did not think that continuing my studies was a priority. What I didn't know before that was that I have rights! I had the opportunity to enrol in a programme run by the European Union and UNICEF related to gender-based violence. Once I graduated, I wanted to share my experience and knowledge with Lebanese and Syrian children.

Within at-risk communities, where children frequently experience violence, protecting youngsters is of the utmost important. Through this programme, the most vulnerable people find a place

where they can feel safe. They understand that they have the right to dignity and they learn how to protect themselves and find safety when faced with a dangerous situation.

Adolescence is not an easy time. It is when we begin understanding who we are and what we want. By being given the chance to take part in this programme and then share what we have learned, the fight against gender-based violence can continue in the long term.

By the end of the training programme, all the children are more independent thanks to the knowledge and skills they have acquired.





MOVING FORWARD THANKS TO HOPE

Abdulaziz, 20 years old. He is from Syria.

He now lives in Jordan.

When I was younger, my only thought was to make the most of life. Then, at nineteen years of age, my parents forced me to get married, just so there could be someone else to help with the household chores. They don't realise the destructive impact this had on my life.

I decided to go to Turkey to find work and send money to my parents, my wife and my baby. Unfortunately, I did not manage to cross the border. I now live in a refugee camp in Jordan.

Despite the tragedies I have experienced, I continue to dream of being able to return to my country one day so that my family can be reunited once more.





STARTING OVER

Samira, 18 years old. She is from Syria.

She now lives in Lebanon.

Before the start of the conflict, I was a completely normal teenager. I liked to go out and see people, but the war turned me into another person. I lost my house, I lost my friends. I became shy, I no longer had any self-confidence. I did everything I could to avoid being in contact with other people.

My mother encouraged me to join the programme that UNICEF was offering for young women who had experienced the tragedy of war. I liked the idea a lot, as well as the programme content. After the first session, I already felt myself changing.

I began by making a few friends there. Then, little by little, I began talking to my neighbours. I quickly felt the need to know more about the people living

around me and those I met.

We all made progress, step by step, at our own pace. In the beginning, we were too shy to take part, but after a few sessions, we were able to open up to one another.

This programme has completely changed my life. I use the tips I have learned everywhere I go. Before, I used to think that my life no longer had any meaning, but thanks to the sessions I took part in, I have changed the way I see things. I have now set myself several goals and one of them is to look after others the way I myself was looked after.

I hope that all the girls I help will become strong and capable of tackling the society they live in.





MUSIC HEALS HEARTS

Dunya, 13 years old. She is from Syria.

She now lives in Turkey.

We left Syria when I was eight. It had become too dangerous and we began to run out of food.

I try my best to be happy here in Turkey. I go to school so that I can become an engineer when I return to my country.

Music was one of the things I missed most. So when I heard about this project that was teaching Syrian, Lebanese and Turkish children traditional songs from their country, I was really happy to be able to take part.

My parents also thought it was an amazing idea. I even learned a song they used to sing as children in Syria! It is called "Fee I'na Shajra" (We have a tree). We love singing it all together.

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I REMEMBER WHERE I CAME FROM

Assia, 8 years old. She is from Aleppo, Syria.

She now lives in Turkey.

Turkey has become my new home country. I feel comfortable here. I have my family and friends around me. Only my grand-parents stayed behind in Syria. I miss them a lot.

I often see that some people living here forget who they are and where they come from. My cousin, for example. She speaks Turkish all the time. It is as if she has forgotten Arabic.

So we don't forget, we sing old songs, sometimes in Arabic, sometimes in Turkish. My dad loves it! My mum is a fan of Fairuz, a Lebanese singer. Mum says that her songs are full of emotion.

I really like going to the centre, a sort of school set up by UNICEF and the European Union. I really enjoy myself there.

When I go there, I forget my worries; I imagine I am somewhere else.

If I had a magic wand, I would go back to Syria to see my grandparents again.







Chapter 5

GOING HOME

Few people know the real value of a home until they are forced to leave it.

When we leave our home behind, it is often a choice and we know that we can go back at any time.

The children who tell their stories in this book have had to leave without turning back. Families have been broken, communities destroyed and societies, often centuries old, have been wiped off the map overnight.

All Syrian children dream of going home one day.

What will they find there? Over time, cities can be rebuilt, roads repaved and communities reformed.

The last stage in their journey, the one that will lead them to peace, may require the most strength. The young people of Syria are preparing for this journey with courage and conviction.

These children's biggest hopes and most powerful dreams are focused on the same goal: to return to a country at peace, where their rights will finally be respected.

AYMAN'S DREAM

Ayman, 10 years old. He is from Aleppo, Syria.

He now lives in Jordan.

As I arrived in Jordan when I was seven, I no longer have many memories of my house, of the town or country I lived in before. My dad and mum sometimes talk to me about Syria. They tell me that it is a magnificent place with rivers and farms everywhere you look. When I listen to them, I think it must be a beautiful place.

Although I hardly remember anything, I still miss my country deep down.

My greatest dream would be to return to Syria, to rebuild everything and live happily, like before.







STRONGER THAN THE UNKNOWN

Laila is from Syria.

She now lives in Jordan.

Do you know who I am? I am a girl who was forced to leave her country at thirteen years of age. I didn't know what the future had in store for me, but I doubted that it would be anything nice...

When my mum talked to me about going to school, I refused. I was too afraid. Afraid of the unknown. Afraid of not succeeding. And then, I finally agreed to go.

At first, I hated it. My mum encouraged me a lot and after a while I made friends and began to enjoy myself. But it didn't last long...I had to change schools and that was horrible!

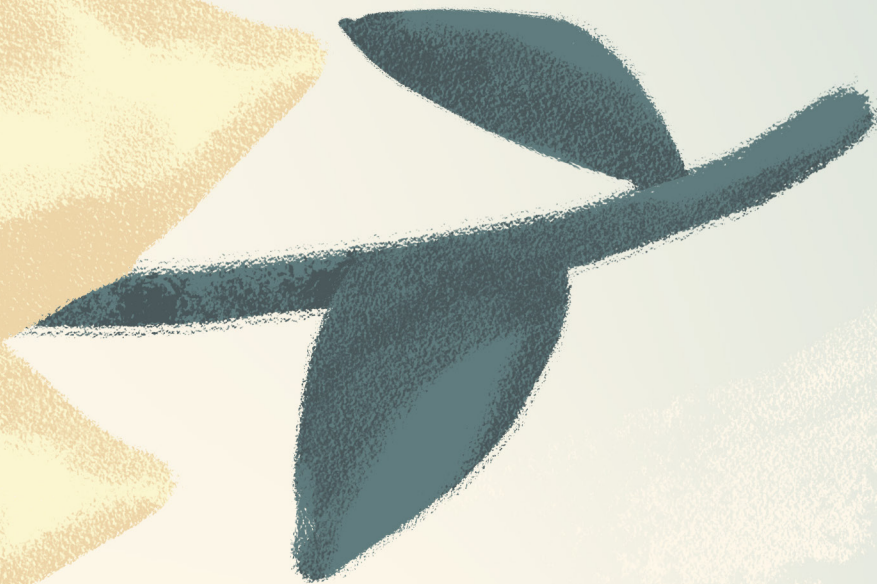
The turning point in my life was when I met a Syrian teacher. Thanks to him, I understood that I had to go to school not only to get a degree, but also to build a future. That was also when I started attending workshops about the

importance of education for girls.

I bet that you are wondering why I haven't mentioned my father. Don't start thinking he doesn't support me or believe in me. The reason I haven't mentioned him is because the war took him from me before he could help me build my own future.

I stayed at school but I did not pass my final exam. But don't think I'll give up. That would be underestimating me. Even when things haven't gone our way, it doesn't mean we should give up. To build a better future, we need strong and independent young people, young people who are driven, young people who think for themselves.

I will never give up. One day, I will return to my country and I will rebuild it.



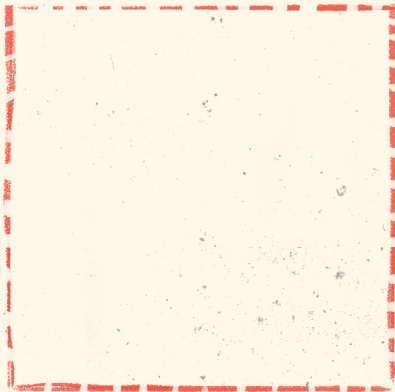
LASTLY...

We all hope that, one day, Syrian children will feel at home once again.

In Syria or elsewhere, those who have shared their stories in this book will relentlessly pursue their dreams, because it is the young people of today who carry the promise of a better future and a world at peace.

At night, we look up at the sky – each star holds the dream of a child, the dream of finally being able to live happily and in safety.

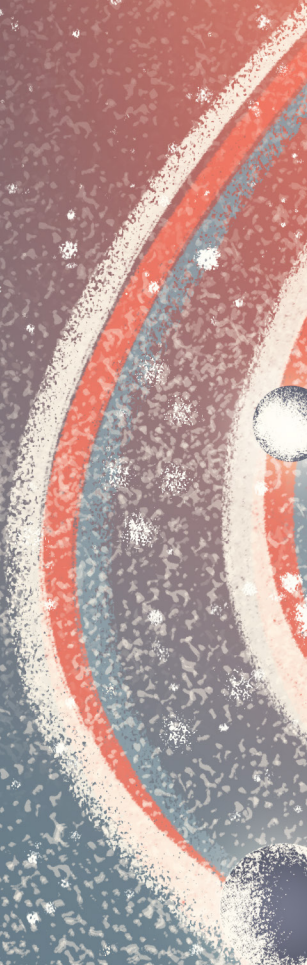


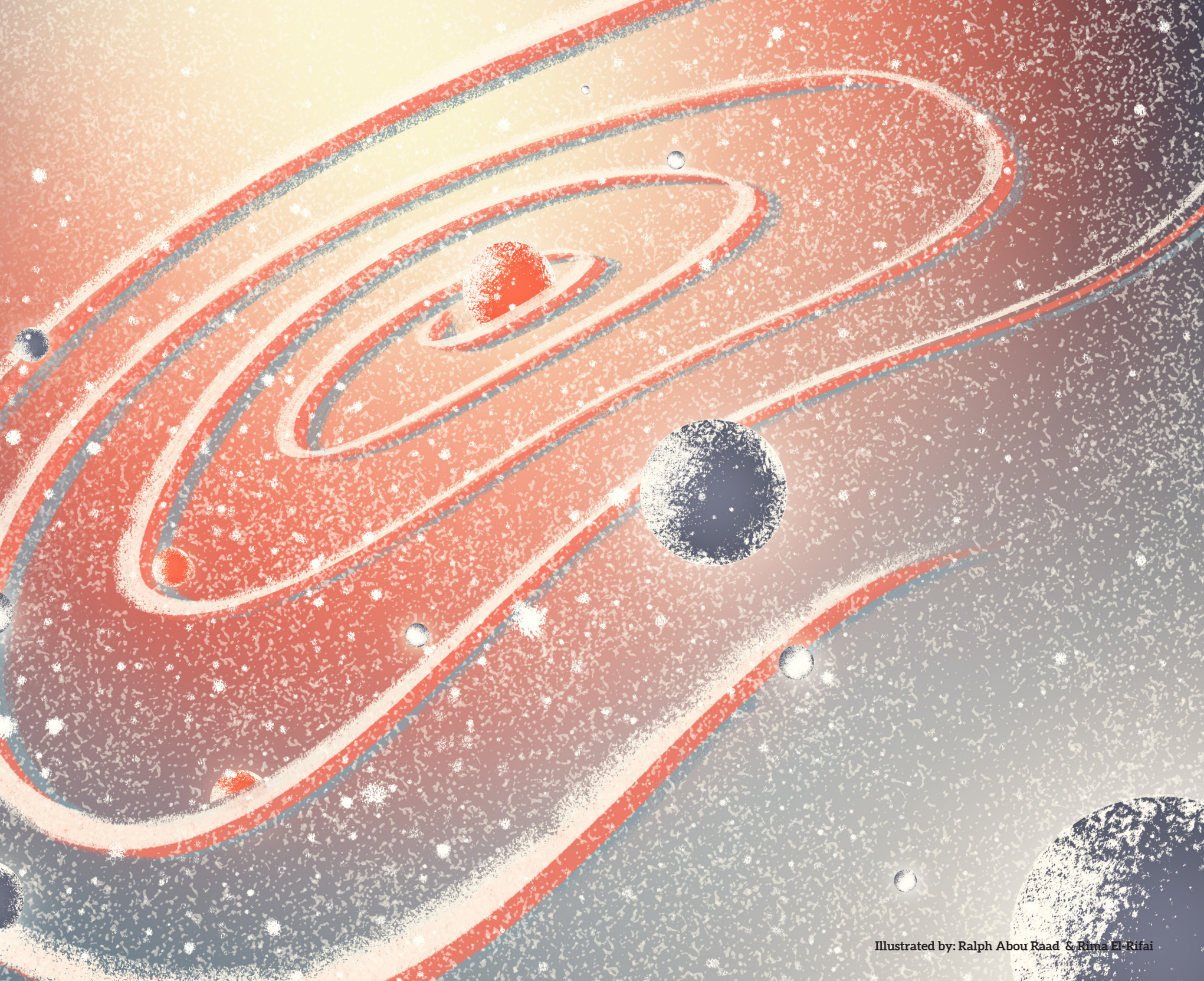


Name: _____

Age: _____

WHAT IS YOUR
DREAM?





As you, dear reader, have been going through the pages of this book, you were taken into a journey filled with hope, dreams but also fear and uncertainty. A mosaic of drawings and words that creatively depict the reality of Syrian children: innocent and forced to leave their homes without knowing when or if they would ever go back. Yet, their messages are of peace and resilience, as they try to pave together the future of Syria.

However, reality is much harsher than this colourful book shows. Syria remains one of the most dangerous places for a child to grow up. *The children of Syria have lived horrors that no human being should experience. They have lost their homes, family, friends and schools. They will carry their invisible wounds with them... under attack... and on the move.* These scars will go with them through their childhoods and beyond – and yet, despite everything, their optimism remains untouched.

Unique partnerships, such as the partnership between UNICEF and the European Union's Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, make it possible to reach the most vulnerable children of Syria especially those on the move in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The partnership has been fundamental for children to continue their learning, receive psychosocial support and education.

Since UNICEF's partnership with the European Union's Trust Fund started in 2015, it brought children back to school. This was done through local education initiatives encouraging families to send their children to school, provide transportation services, investment in infrastructure to expand the learning space, increase the number of teachers, give out books and learning material, and establish centres for children to be able to learn, play and simply be children again.

For the future generation of Syria to find peace, we should listen to the voices of children and young people. They have incredible abilities and strong wills to contribute to creative solutions and social cohesion, critical to building back Syria.

The children of Syria have seen the worst of humanity and life, yet they continue to dream of a brighter future. *It is our responsibility to work together and with them to make some of these dreams come true. Every child deserves a childhood and a fair chance in life.*

Henrietta H Fore
Executive Director

Thank you for taking the time to read the stories in this book. Behind these stories are real children.

The following section features a series of photos of children from Syria and the neighbouring countries who have benefited from the funding of the European Union.

This section is a tribute to these children and millions of others for their courage, determination, ability to be positive against all odds and most of all to dream! Together and with them, we can help make these dreams come true.



Voda, 9 from Hama, Syria, is one of the 5.6 million Syrian refugees across the Middle East. The outbreak of the war has forced her family to flee from Syria to come and live in a tented community in the Mafraq District, Jordan. Children compare leaving their country to leaving their souls behind. These children and youth affected by the conflict should be protected and provided with equitable access to services in safety and with dignity.



Bayan, 11 at a Makani centre in Jordan.
"We don't want to go back to Syria our home is here now in Jordan all our friends are hear and we love the Makani centre."




Mohammed, 5 a Syrian refugee at 'My Life Centre' in Buyukyol Sanliurfa, Turkey regained his smile. Now, he can safely attend school after fleeing from Syria one year ago. For many children in Syria going to school has, at times, become a matter of life and death, because of persistent violence and attacks.



Watheg Hosain, 21 (left), with his brother **Hazar Hosain, 18 (right)**, from Homs, Syria, are members of a youth drama group at the 'Makani Centre' in Jordan. Makani Centres provide recreational activities and training for children and youth as a response to violence, exploitation, and neglect.



More than just a refugee! The centre 'Terres des Hommes' in Byblos, Lebanon gives children many opportunities to process the psychological burden of fleeing the worst refugee crisis in recent history through therapeutic activities as arts, crafts, and professional mental support by counsellors. Local communities may also choose to access these services.



Sidra, 5 from Derizzor, Syria, has only known war and displacement. She is at 'Buyukyol - My Life' Safe place for Girls in Sanliurfa, Turkey. She is too young to worry about the future but the majority of Syrian adolescents fear that they are left and forgotten in camps, and, thus, will never return back home to Syria. They deserve assurance for the future.




Al Farah Centre Gaziantep Turkey. This project is funded by the European Union and UNICEF. The Child support centre is established with the aim of providing a comprehensive set of services that respond to the variety of children's needs in order for them to reach their full potential.


In this image a Psychosocial Support session to improve the children's cognitive and emotional well-being.



Children are desperately looking for ways to cope with their new realities. Through the EU Regional Trust Fund, UNICEF continues to provide psychosocial support and protection services to children in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. These interventions encourage cross cultural and intergenerational interactions amongst children. Allowing a platform for the voices, dreams and aspirations of children to develop.



Sedra, 14 from Homs, Syria, at the Makani Centre in Mafraq, Jordan, says, "I will never forget Syria, it is my heart, my very breath." She has many hopes and aspirations for herself and her country. Adolescents and youth should have access to civic and social engagement, such as networking opportunities to become social activists and contribute to changes within their communities and country.



Salam 14 from Dara in Syria, sister of Keram, at the Makani Centre in Mafraq run by IMC and supported by UNICEF and the European Union. "It is so much fun here, I want to be a pilot when I grow up"



Na'ama, 8 fled Syria four years ago with her family and has been living in the Jordan Valley for the past four years. Families fleeing the war in Syria have often lost their homes, livelihoods and depleted their savings. They are struggling to make ends meet, and are in need of support for basic services, including education. Na'ama, her sister and her brother are now attending a nearby Makani Learning Centre amongst other vulnerable children of the local Jordanian community.



UNICEF is working in cooperation with the European Union, through the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syria Crisis to provide education, learning and protection to hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugee children, youth and vulnerable peers in neighbouring countries. As of April 2019, the European Union had contributed 17 billion Euros in response to the Syria crisis, leading the international donor response.

The European Union in partnership with UNICEF, is helping children and youth overcome the impact of war in Syria. UNICEF is working to reach all children in need and equip them with skills to become the next generation of Syrian teachers, doctors, craftspeople, lawyers, engineers, artists and scientists to be able to live in dignity, provide for their needs and rebuild their country when sustainable peace, eventually, returns.

This book tells stories and paints intimate portraits of the courage, hope and dreams of some of the millions of children and youth impacted by the Syria crisis now living in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. All are collectively supported through the European Union-UNICEF partnership and by host communities in Syria's neighbouring countries.

This storybook is a small tribute to the children of Syria. It is a reminder of our humanity and the shared responsibility in working together to protect the rights of every child.

Manuscript completed in November 2019. Map on page 4 updated in 2020 following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union.

Illustrations: Ralph Abou Raad & Rima El-Rifai

All photos: Unicef



Funded by the European Union

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