

THE PAST WAR IN THE PRESENT CHILDHOOD

A JOURNEY THROUGH
THE EYES OF SYRIAN CHILDREN
IN JORDAN, LEBANON, SYRIA

INTERS  S
HUMANITARIAN AID

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BACKGROUND

A recent UNICEF survey found that one in three Syrian adolescents aged 15 to 19 has been displaced at least twice, with the search for safety the most common reason for fleeing. INTERSOS has been responding to the Syrian crisis since its start in 2011, through delivering protection prevention and response programmes for adults and children affected by the conflict in Syria and neighbouring countries. Children are ultimately bearing the burden of the devastating consequences of the conflict. An entire new generation was born in displacement and isolation and many have grown up in unsafe environments, facing discrimination, fear, exclusion. INTERSOS responds to the protection needs of children through identifying and addressing their most urgent needs, strengthening their resilience, building a protective environment in which they can thrive, and upholding their **best interest** across all interventions.

INTRODUCTION

This explorative document is grounded on the IASC Mental Health and Psycho Social Support Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, a globally recognized guidance that drives humanitarian organisations in defining dimensions of wellbeing for those affected by crisis, and which INTERSOS has adopted to inform its MHPSS programming. Within this framework, social connectedness, a well-being indicator, is defined as **the quality and number of connections a person (child or adult) has with other people in their social circles of family, friends and acquaintances. Social connections may also go beyond one's immediate social circle and extend, for example, to other communities.**¹

It has long been recognised that there is a **fundamental human desire for a meaningful sense of connection, belonging and acceptance by others**. This is a phenomenon observed even in young infants and children. **Positive social connections are associated with 50% reduced early mortality**² and can also be

protective of mental health³. Among the benefits of social connections the following were identified: lower rates of anxiety and depression, higher self-esteem, greater empathy, and more trusting and cooperative relationships.⁴

The importance of social connectedness in children affected by conflict is even more critical. For many, war is a living experience that never ended.

Children account for 30% of the global population, yet on average account for roughly 40% of refugee populations and 49% of internally displaced people. There is a historic deterioration in the protection of children affected by war, and 2024 marked the worst year on record. **One in five children, around 520 million, now live near conflict.** Nearly 42,000 grave violations were verified, a 30% increase compared to the previous year. **Over the past decade, the number of children living in conflict areas has increased by 60%, while the number of children exposed to grave violations has increased by 370%.** The longer a conflict lasts, the more likely children are to be exposed to grave violations, and violence against children is increasingly used as a tactic of war. In addition, the international accountability system, including the

UN Children and Armed Conflict mechanism, is under significant strain. In terms of operational responses, child protection funding has been drastically reduced. As a result, there are fewer actors on the ground to document violations, fewer safe spaces for children, and less accountability for those who violate the rules of war. **Children are not only disproportionately affected by conflict; they are also being failed by a system that was meant to protect them.**⁵

1. IASC MHPSS M&E Framework

2. Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010

3. Jose et al., 2012; Viner et al., 201

4. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212657025000054>

5. Global Protection Forum report, November 2025, Global Protection Cluster

OBJECTIVES

With this project, INTERSOS wants to offer an opportunity to children affected by the Syrian crisis to share their living experience, and feelings associated with it, of their past, present and future sense of social connectedness. More specifically, this study aims at **placing children at the center** of the catastrophic consequences of more than a decade-long crisis, creating a space to reflect on the impact that conflict and displacement have on current and future generations.

This project aimed to put children who were into and grew up in the Syrian crisis at the forefront, voicing their opinions and sharing their thoughts on what and whom they felt connected to, the pillars of strength they turned to in a chaotic and uncertain world. The objective was to have children tell their stories through photos they took and express, without conditions and judgment, what their lived experiences were.

METHODOLOGY

The project used *Photovoice*, a participatory action research methodology that was coined by Caroline Wang in the 1990s. *Photovoice* is a methodology that enables people to identify, represent and enhance their community and life circumstances through photography. A picture speaks a thousand words - the choice of this methodology was to empower children to tell their own stories and lived experiences. All the children participating in the project were either born during the Syrian conflict or were toddlers when the conflict began, and most had to be displaced or flee their country due to the conflict. The facilitators in each country were trained on the photovoice methodology. The children who participated were trained on using cameras and oriented on the theme 'social connectedness'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While huge appreciation goes to INTERSOS facilitators from our Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria missions, and to Christina Nisha, former Head of Protection Unit INTERSOS, who has provided guidance and her technical expertise into this project, this photobook would not have been possible without the **children** and their profound engagement, commitment, and the extraordinary trust they placed in INTERSOS teams. By allowing us into their worlds, they offered us the privilege of holding their deepest feelings, complex fears, and often harrowing experiences. This is the very heart of this collection. We are profoundly grateful for the courage each child demonstrated in sharing their journey. We want to express our most sincere thanks to each one of them for their invaluable contribution to this project. Their names, representing the spirit and essence of this narrative, are listed below:

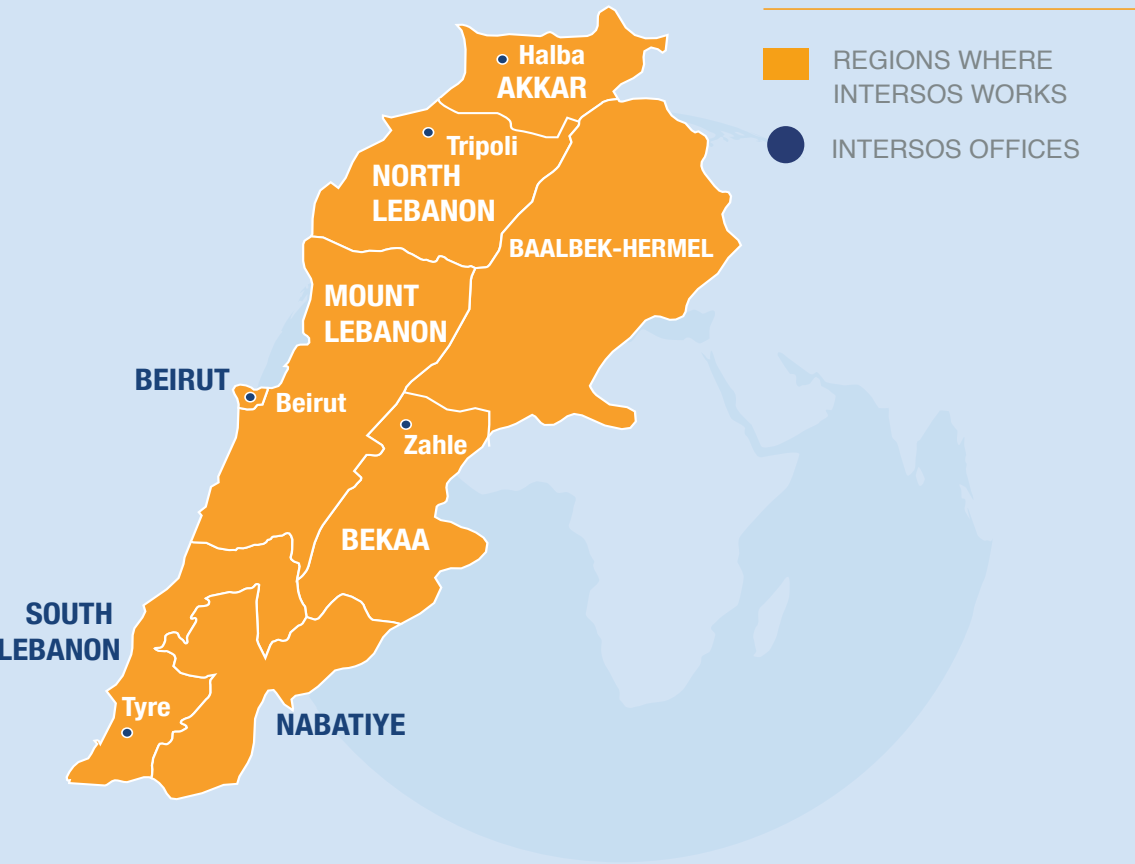
Jordan: Aysheh, Abed, Hamzeh, Yahya, Ayat, Abed, Nour, Mohamad, Abrar; **Syria:** Jana, Ahmad, Jana, Ali, Omar, Yaseer, Omar Mohamad, Saeed, Omar, Mohamad, Hamzeh, Mohamad, Omar; **Lebanon:** Aya, Sajida, Foutein, Fadia, Nadia, Maram, Riyam, Noussayba, Tayma, Riymas.

STORIES FROM LEBANON

PART ONE

LEBANON CONTEXT

Since 2019, Lebanon has faced a protracted humanitarian crisis triggered by the country’s worst economic and financial collapse. The situation has been further compounded by regional tensions and periodic yet frequent security escalations, deepening poverty and placing additional strain on already fragile public services and institutions. Today humanitarian needs amount to approximately 2.99 million people in Lebanon requiring humanitarian assistance, around 655,000 displaced Syrians, 95,000 Palestine Refugees in Lebanon, and over 11,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria, alongside vulnerable Lebanese communities and migrants. The cumulative impacts of economic decline, protracted displacement, and recurrent shocks continue to drive significant humanitarian and protection needs across the country.





STAIRWAY OF DREAMS

When I was young, I used to see people painting this staircase. There was a sense of connection and support on this staircase. Now, every time I walk past it, I am reminded of these beautiful memories.

The Stairway of Dreams is filled with bright, cheerful colours, and seeing it fills me with joy and reminds me of the wonderful times I had here.

My family came to Lebanon when my mother was pregnant with me, and for the last thirteen years of my life, this staircase has been a meeting place for me, my siblings and our friends. One day, I may leave this place, but I will always cherish the memories I have made here.

Aya Badr El Hasan, 13, Bayssour

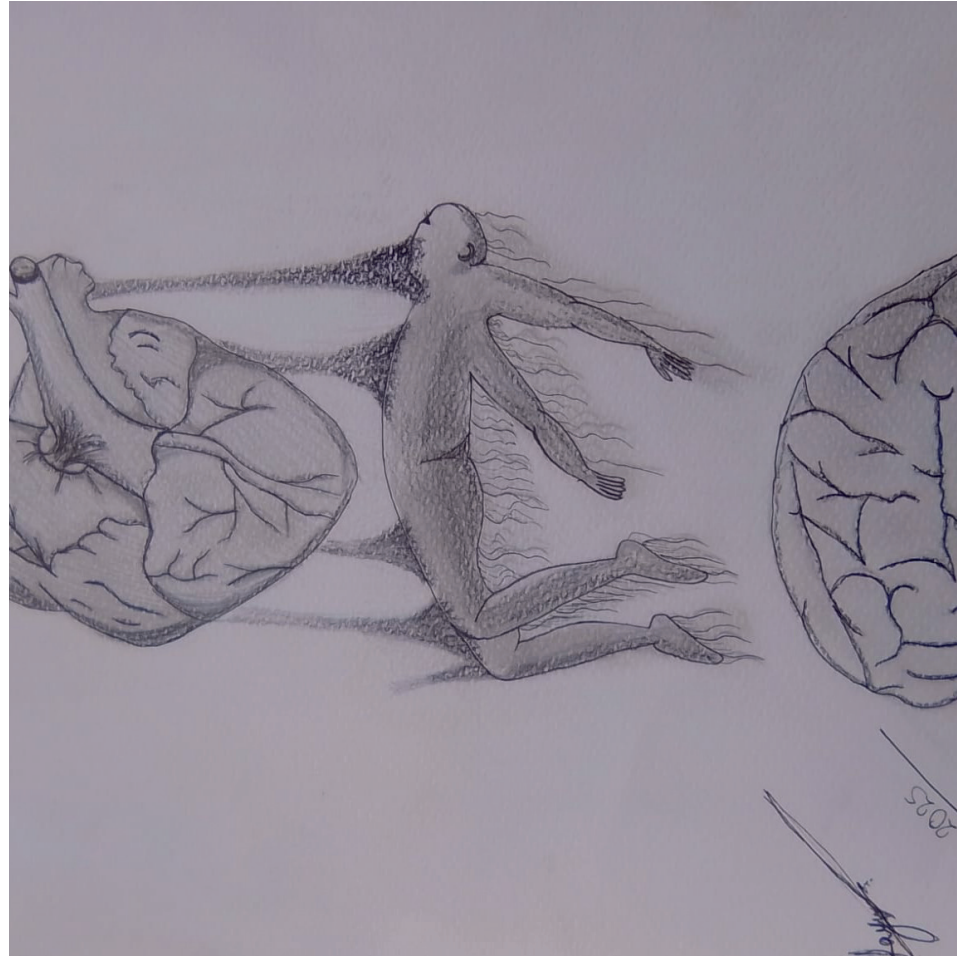


MY SECOND HOME

My school is my second home; it's the place where I feel most connected to my community. When I was three years old, I made the perilous journey from Syria with my mother and elder brother. We had to walk for a week to reach Bekka, where our father was waiting for us. Life is difficult for us, and the future is uncertain, but whenever I see my school, I always have happy memories of playing with my friends.

With every step I take in the school, I am reminded of those happy times and feel a sense of joy. I remember my friends, the teachers, the trees, the scent of flowers, the playground and the sound of birds and laughter. I am happy when I see every corner of the school and remember the wonderful times my friends and I had. Seeing myself as a child reminds me of how I used to be and how I have changed. Every corner of this place has witnessed a great transformation in my personality.

Sajida Mostafa Al Mostafa, 13, Bayssour



CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO FEELINGS

I came to Lebanon as a child, leaving our home, school and friends behind. When I first arrived, I found it difficult to adjust to the dialect. I was only able to study until grade 9, after which I had to drop out because we didn't have an official refugee card.

I feel like the person in the middle of the picture, caught between the brain and the heart and confused by their thoughts. The heart and the mind have different opinions and the person is forced to choose one. I relate this to my own life: there are times when we are forced to make rational choices. For me, it feels like choosing between two options that determine my destiny. These feelings of strength and anxiety exist to help us learn how to make the right choices. This struggle is eased by the support of family and friends.

Fouteim Mostafa Al Mostafa, 18, Bayssour



MY BEAUTIFUL MEMORIES

My family and I had to flee our hometown in Syria when it was attacked. We made an arduous 10-day journey to reach Lebanon. I know very little about my home country or my extended family today, as I was only two years old when we left. Although we found it difficult to adjust at first, I now love meeting my friends at this staircase and having fun. We used to sit and talk here, sharing beautiful memories.

I am happy whenever I see this place. Although the future is uncertain and makes me sad, I take comfort in this place and the memories it holds.

Fadia Abdel Karim, 14, Bayssour



MY SMALL NEIGHBOURHOOD

I came to Lebanon when I was one year old, after my family decided to flee our hometown when it was attacked. This is my world: my small neighbourhood, where I live and play with my friends. We have made many memories in this place.

Every spot in this neighbourhood holds a memory. Those were happy days before my friends and I went our separate ways, and now we are all in different places.

I feel anxious and sad when I walk through the neighbourhood and no longer see the people I shared memories with, because my friends have left. The beautiful memories of the times we had together give me strength and help me to forget my sadness.

Nadia Abdel Karim, 15, Bayssour



MY SCHOOL

I came to Lebanon with my mother and sister in 2017 due to the difficult situation in Syria. The journey was arduous and left us extremely exhausted. We walked for about a week. On the way, we got lost in the mountains in the dark and I could not find my family anymore. Fortunately, I found them again, but we were detained by the authorities. Life was very challenging when we arrived; I was unable to attend school because my family was in a difficult situation and we had no money. Even today, our situation is difficult. Our family is a very big one, and there is not enough money.

However, I am happy to have enrolled in the first grade of primary school at Al-Bunya School this year. This is a photo of my school. Our classrooms are safe and comfortable places, not just for learning, but for socialising too. I enjoy being with my classmates in the classroom. It is a very sweet feeling. I have learned how to read and write, and my life has changed.

I dream of continuing my education and becoming a paediatrician so that I can help and treat children in the future. Education makes dreams come true.

Noussayba Mohamad Al Youssef, 12, Bayssour



BEAUTIFUL MEMORIES

I came to Lebanon from Syria in 2016 because of the war. The journey was challenging. We walked with our mother for about a week from Manbij to Aleppo and then on to the Turkish border, all the while under shellings and in fear for our lives. After that, we travelled to Damascus and crossed into Lebanon.

I was only three years old.

Smugglers detained us along the way, leaving us extremely exhausted and afraid.

After many struggles, we settled in Lebanon, and this photo shows the neighbourhood where I live now. My friends and I used to have fun playing together, and we would quickly make up after arguing. This place reminds me of laughter.

I feel sad because my friends returned to Syria, but I am also happy when I remember them. I dream of becoming a doctor when I grow up.

Maram Ali Al Hussein, 12, Bayssour



A PLACE OF COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

This is the park where I used to play as a child. I used to visit it every week, and it was beautiful. But now everything has changed and it has become colourless.

This place reminds me of my friends and family, the people in our community, the beautiful colours of the flowers and trees, the birdsong, and the sounds of laughter and joy.

I am happy when I pass by and remember the wonderful times I had here, and I hope they will come back one day.

Seeing myself as a child and remembering who I was and who I have become makes me happy, and every corner of this place bears witness to a great transformation. This gives me comfort and reassurance, and hope for the future.

Riyam Ali Al Hussein, 13, Bayssour



MY SCHOOL

This is a photo of my school, a place that makes me feel comfortable, happy and safe, just like my family. I feel happy and safe with my friends, just like I do at home. I enjoy spending time with them when I am at school. We have been together for two years. When I was two and a half years old, I came to Lebanon with my father, mother and brother, fleeing the war in Syria. We spent two days on the road. Those days were very difficult and terrifying. Everything was new and unfamiliar to us.

I dream of finishing my education, of Syria returning to how it was before, and of one day going back home.

Tayma Al Hajjo, 12, Bayssour



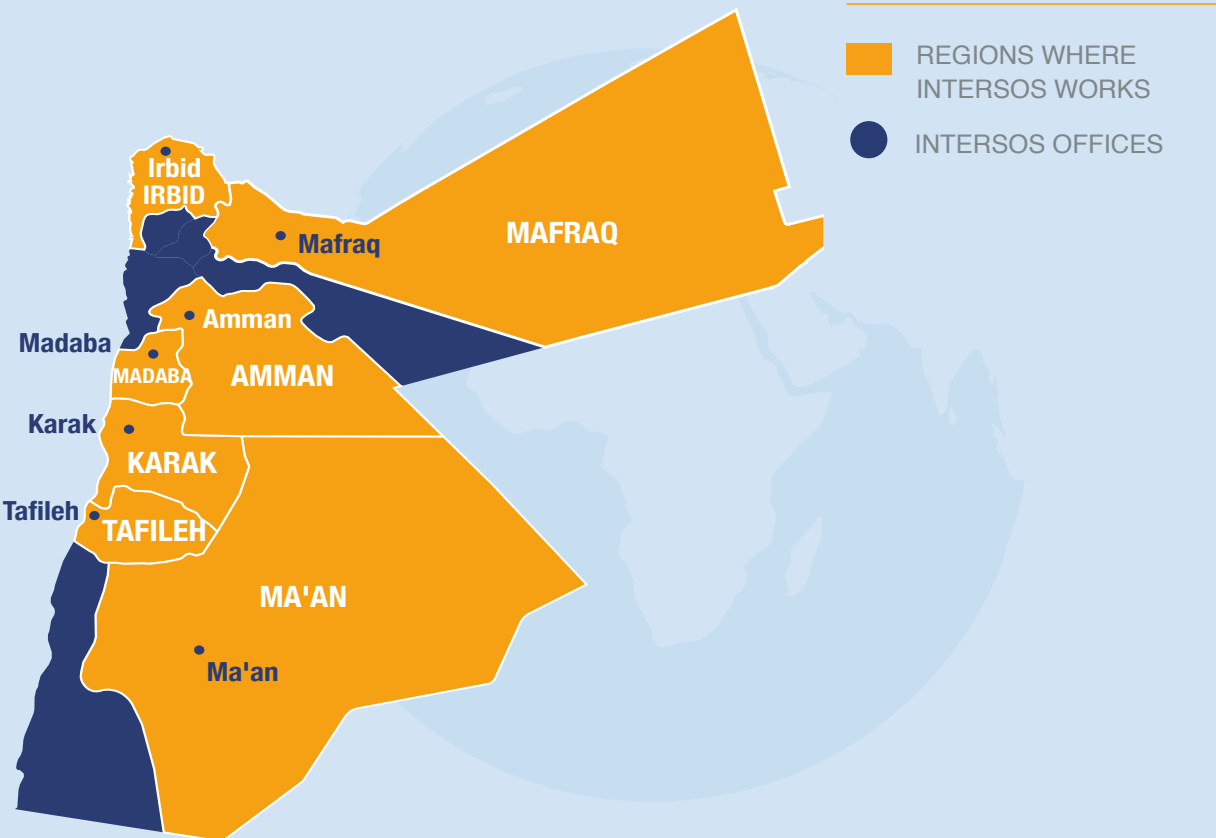
MY CHILDHOOD SCHOOL

This school in Lebanon is like a lighthouse, lighting my path and providing me with fond memories of my friends. My world revolved around my teachers and friends. It also reminds me of my friends who travelled to Syria. I remember the sweet days we spent together. It evokes a feeling of joy, reminding me of those beautiful days. When I'm feeling down, I go to the place where we used to meet as a group to remember the friends who have left. Staying in touch with friends makes distances smaller. Trying to remember the good times can make you feel closer to your friends, as if they were family.

Riymas Abdel Kafi Al Saleh, 14, Bayssour

STORIES FROM JORDAN

PART TWO



JORDAN CONTEXT

Jordan has been hosting Syrian refugees since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011. 67% of the Syrian refugees **outside the camps** live below the poverty line⁶. Most Syrian families are relying on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs. Since the fall of the Assad regime in Syria on 8 December 2024, nearly 173,000 refugees registered with UNHCR have returned from Jordan to Syria. **Jordan currently hosts 427,351⁷ Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR as of December 2025, in addition to 30,895 registered refugees from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia and over 18,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria.⁸** However, the total number of refugees/Asylum seekers, including those not-registered, is estimated at around 1.1 million⁹ of the total population.

6. UNHCR; World Bank. Poverty Measurement for Refugees in Jordan, VAF Welfare Study, 2023
7. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36>
8. UNHCR December 2025 report
9. ACAPS. Country Analysis – Jordan. available at <https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/jordan#>



MY BELOVED FATHER

This door was handmade by my father. Whenever I look at it, I feel a deep connection to our old home and the time when our family was still together. My father repaired and painted the walls, and he planted small flowers along the edges. It reminds me of the safety, warmth, and love I felt when he was with us. This place once echoed with our family's laughter and closeness, and I can see my father's presence in every detail. This photograph tells a heartbreaking story of change: we once walked into this home as happy children, but we left it feeling broken and anxious. When my father traveled to Syria, we lost our main source of support, which plunged us into financial hardship and ultimately forced us to leave our home. We had to move into a place that was unfit for living, and I even had to drop out of school for a period of time, facing bullying because of our situation. The fear comes from knowing that a father's absence can mean the loss of both emotional security and financial stability, especially when family support is limited. The strength in this photo lies in the proof that I once lived surrounded by love and warmth—and that memory gives me the strength to keep going rather than give up.

Aysheh Turki AL-Bakah, 14, AL-Karak



THE MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN

This memorial fountain is a place with which I feel a deep connection. It used to be a hangout for my friends, and whenever I miss them, I return to this spot to find calm and immerse myself in the warmth of cherished memories, which brings me happiness. The fountain features flowing water, is surrounded by trees, and boasts many beautiful flowers. However, it's more than just the scenery that holds value for me; it's the memories that come flooding back: the laughter shared with my friends and the feeling that this place understands me and holds a part of my story. The fountain symbolizes moments of living and togetherness. We would sit beside it, talk, and sometimes splash water at each other. We also gathered with family, played football in the park, strolled around, and celebrated holidays. It's a simple scene, yet it's full of life. This relates to my life because certain places become a 'safe corner' for our emotions. When my friends traveled far away, I began to miss them, so I returned to this fountain to remember them. It makes me feel positive, comfortable, and genuinely happy, wrapped in soft nostalgia. I do have some worries, though, as I fear that a photograph may not capture how special this place feels or that the park might change one day. Nonetheless, there is strength in knowing that the beauty of this spot restores my energy and reminds me that good memories can provide us with stability and hope.

Abed AL-Moamen Hiytham AL-Samoey, 16, AL-Karak



THE SILENT CASTLE (KARAK CASTLE)

This is a picture of me inside the Karak castle – it is a place that gives me stability and meaning. Every stone in Karak Castle carries a story of resilience, and I visit it whenever I miss the past and our heritage. Karak Castle awakens nostalgia and pride in me, as if the place recognises me. The details, the old stones, corridors, and windows evoke a quiet memory; there is a moment of calm reflection: the castle stands still, and I, as a visitor, look closely at the details and feel the silence holding many untold stories. It connects to my life because some places feel like people. I return when I need comfort or when I miss the past. Visiting the castle brings me joy, calmness, and a deep sense of belonging. I feel a sense of strength (and sometimes worry) because the castle remains steady while we change. Its silence pushes me to be its voice, to protect the meaning of the memories it carries.

Hamzeh Mohamad Reda AL-Mala, 16, AL-Karak



WATCHING MY DREAM

This photo was taken in Prince Faisal Stadium, which is like my second home; it is the place where I nurture my dream of becoming a great football player. Every visit brings back years of hope and effort and pushes me to keep going. This place renews my passion and reminds me not to give up.

This place feels familiar and safe, like it knows my story and my talent. In the photo, I am remembering the many times I came here: training, learning new techniques, and imagining myself playing professionally. The stadium brings my passion back to life. For me, football is more than a game; it is belonging and hope. When I am here, I feel excited, proud, and alive. I feel deeply connected to this place. The strength comes from how this stadium keeps motivating me. I fear my dream might stay only a memory as I get rejected by local clubs since I am a refugee. But I will not give up, I will keep training and improve my skills step by step, while also focusing on my studies and my faith.

Yahya Ahmad AL-Farwan, 15, AL-Karak



MY SCHOOL DREAM

This is my school. I took this photo to capture the moment when my dream of learning felt very close, but bullying and exclusion made me step away. The school represents both my hope and my pain, and it also reminds me of the people who still make me feel I belong: my mother, a supportive friend, and a caring math teacher. I see my school - the place that used to hold my dreams. I also see myself feeling alone outside it, but I remember the small moments of kindness from friends and teachers.

I faced bullying because I struggled with reading. Some students and a few teachers made me feel ashamed. After school, I would sit outside feeling sad. School is not only learning - it is belonging, confidence, and a future. The experience affected my self-esteem and made me fear returning, yet the support I received makes me feel I am not alone. It also happened in a community setting where I wanted to feel accepted. But the strength is in knowing that there are still caring people who believe in me.

Ayat Abed- Al-Jabar AL-Eze AL-Deen, 14, AL-Karak



THE WAY HOME (TRAWIHA)

I have been walking this road to and from school for about eight years. It is the route I share with my three close friends. When I'm happy, I walk faster, and when I'm sad, I walk slowly. Sometimes, I intentionally slow down to spend a little more time outside before going home because this road feels like my breathing space. The road, the school behind us, and my friends are the key elements of this experience. This road is a significant part of my daily life and my connection to the community. It's where I talk with my friends, think through decisions, and feel supported. I find comfort and a sense of belonging when we walk together, and the extra time outdoors helps me calm down before returning home. I do have some concerns; in winter, the road can be slippery, and I worry about falling. I also feel anxious about going home too quickly when I need a moment to breathe. However, I draw strength from the routine and the presence of my friends, which makes me feel safer and less alone.

Abed-AL-Qodoos Yousef AL-Fandi, 15, Irbid

**BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT — A PASSING ROAD**

This road has been an integral part of my everyday life. It was my pathway to school, the mosque, and my friends' homes—a place where I walked, played, and shared laughter. It carries memories tied to my family and community, including cherished moments with my younger sister, who passed away. Since her loss, the road has felt like a simple route rather than a meaningful part of my life, and I long to reconnect with it and restore its significance. While this road was once vibrant with life, it now feels quieter and more ordinary, even though it remains the same. It used to symbolize joy and belonging, but after losing my sister, many family moments changed. We stopped going on outings as we used to, and the road became just a means of transportation rather than a source of memory. I feel a mix of sadness and longing, yet I also sense a connection since I grew up here and the people around me know and care for me. I want to rebuild that connection. Grief can alter how we experience familiar places, turning them into triggers for heavy emotions. However, amidst the pain, there is strength because I am surrounded by supportive people. I am actively taking steps to reconnect with this road and create new, gentle memories along the way.

Nour AL-Huda Ismaeel AL-Betar, 16, Irbid



OUR HANGOUT

This pole is my daily meeting spot. I sit here with my friend Abu Al-Nour, leaning against the pole, and anyone who passes by is welcome to join us. This place is an essential part of my daily life. After work or running errands, I stop here to breathe and reset, especially after my four-hour shift bagging bread at the bakery before heading home. It makes me feel calm, supported, and connected. I often sit here with Abu Al-Nour and other friends. We chat, greet people who walk by, and take a break before returning home after work. When I feel stressed, sad, or even happy, sitting by the pole helps me calm down and feel less alone. Since my friends live in the house across the street, I also have a strong sense of community and belonging. Everyone needs a safe, familiar space outside the home to rest and feel supported. The friendship and closeness of our neighbors make this corner feel welcoming. It reminds me that support is built through good relationships, and that taking a pause can help me make better decisions.

Mohamad Louay Masalmeh, 17, Irbid



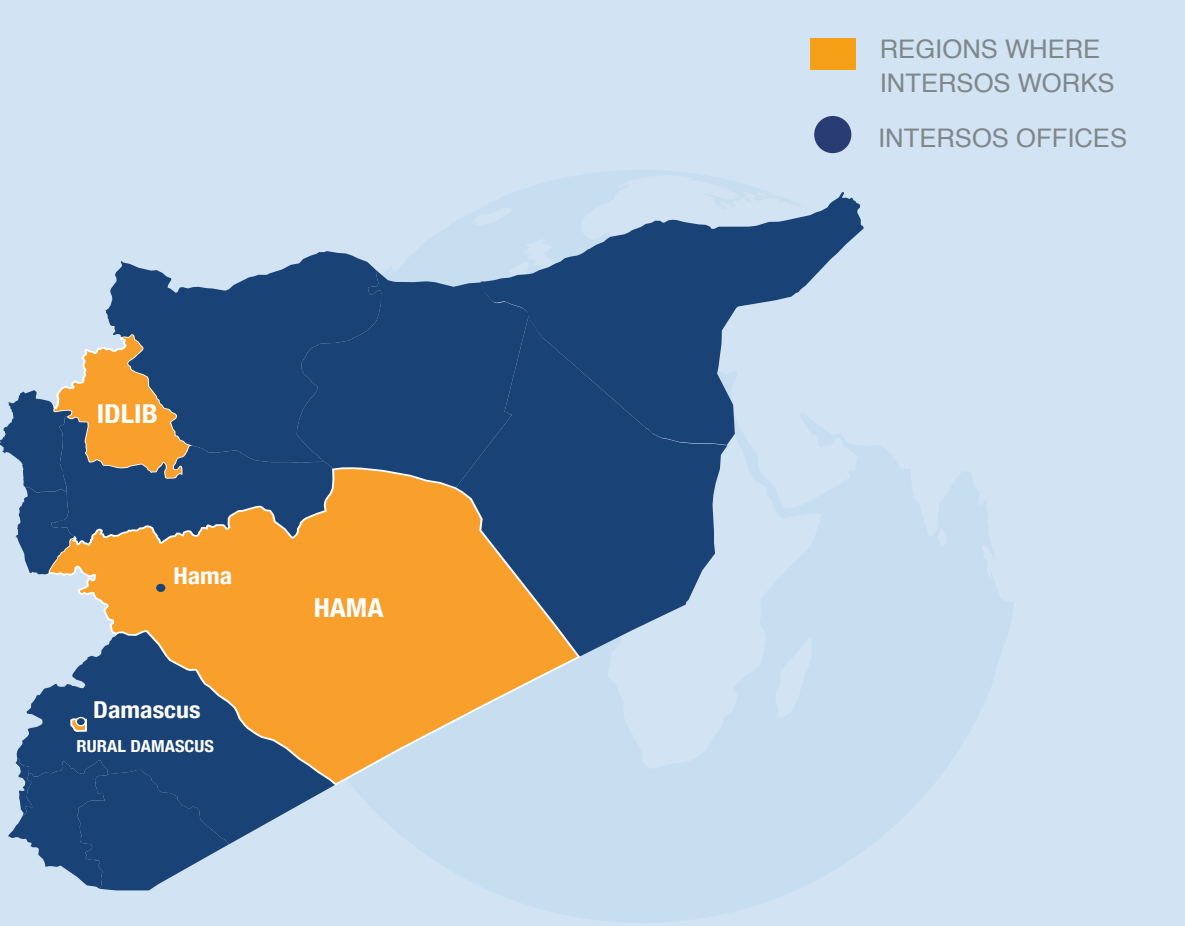
SOURCE OF STRENGTH MY SISTER AND MY DRAWING WORLD

I created a drawing of my sister and me standing close together, surrounded by nature—mountains, trees, and a park. The image conveys a sense of peace and protection. My sister has been my strongest support during my hardest moments. Whenever I feel overwhelmed or struggle to cope with hurtful words, she listens to me, calms me down, and helps me regain my strength. Drawing is also my safe haven; it provides me with calm, confidence, and a means of self-expression. The drawing symbolizes our closeness and support: my sister is right beside me, while the background reflects the serene places we love. It represents the times when I felt hurt, such as during bullying at school, and how my sister made me feel safe again. This relates to my life because her support gives me a sense of belonging and strength. Knowing that someone stands with me changes the way I face challenges. Drawing is also an essential part of my identity; it helps me manage fear, stabilize my emotions, and feel unique. Family support can be a vital source of emotional protection. When a person is listened to and respected, they can regain their confidence. My “drawing world” serves as a healthy escape: it transforms pain into meaning and gives me control over my emotions.

Abrar Maraf Masalmeh, 16, Irbid

STORIES FROM SYRIA

PART THREE



SYRIA CONTEXT

The Syrian people have been living with war since 2011, the year that marked the beginning of an internal conflict that has caused destruction and the flight of millions of people, as well as a high number of casualties, injuries, and displaced persons. Despite periods of apparent calm and attempts to achieve stability over the years, the country’s socio-economic and political situation remains highly complex, even after and despite the change of government in December 2024. The humanitarian figures show the extent of the problem: according to the latest analysis by OCHA (the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), **16.5 million people need aid, more than 1.9 million are internally displaced and more than 1.2 million Syrian refugees who returned to Syria from neighboring countries and beyond since the end of 2024.** Today, a large part of the population is homeless and without access to basic services such as medical care, drinking water, food, and education.



MY SAFE PLACE

This is a photo of the Intersos centre, where we gather to play games and take part in activities. For me, it's a place to relax with my friends and play games. We had to leave Syria eight years ago due to the war, but returned after two years. Life was difficult as we had no proper home and no infrastructure, but things are better now and I am going to school.

I feel comfortable and happy at the Intersos centre because there are supportive people around me, and we learn things that make us feel at ease. It's also a place where I can connect with friends and people from my community.

Jana Abdalla Allosh, 13, Tamanaa



MY FRIEND

This is a photo of me with my friend, Yasser. Not only is he a friend, he is also my neighbour and my lifelong companion. My family and I left Syria in 2018. We mostly lived in tents and had to move several times. Most of the time, we didn't have enough food and it was very cold. We returned in 2025 and now live in a small rented house. I am happy to be back and to be going to school. I am also happy to have a supportive friend like Yasser. We are always together at school, in our neighbourhood, and in the playground.

Ahmad Mohmmad Halwe, 13, Tamanaa



WARMTH

This photo shows my sister gathering firewood. She is my greatest source of strength. She is always there to help me and make me feel loved. Our family had to leave Syria in 2015 due to the war, and we lived in a refugee camp. There was no clean water or electricity. Some international organisations helped us by providing blankets and clothes. We returned to Syria in 2025, and I have started learning again. I feel safe to be back in my country.

Jana Alaa Albakri, 13, Tamanaa



STILLNESS – TRANQUILITY - LONGING

This is a picture of my hometown. We had to leave in 2015 because of the war and the lack of income opportunities. Our town was heavily attacked. My parents also lost their jobs. After living in a neighbouring country for 10 years, we returned in 2025. Life outside Syria was difficult; we did not know the language, so I could not go to school, and we had to depend on our relatives for support.

Looking at this photo of my hometown with the sunset in the background evokes feelings of stillness and tranquillity in me, as well as a sense of longing. I feel both joy and sorrow. Joy at returning to it, and sorrow at the destruction and displacement it suffered. I want to study hard and contribute to building a new Syria through knowledge.

Ali Abd Alghafoor Raslan, 15, Tamanaa



OUR IDENTITY

This photo shows pistachios growing in my hometown. Al-Tamanah is renowned for its pistachios. They are part of our identity. Unfortunately, we had to leave our beautiful hometown due to the war when I was just two years old. We returned with our family this year (2025). Life was very difficult when we first moved here, so I am happy to be back. I help with the planting and harvesting of pistachios. I feel excited when I see the harvest. I want to contribute preserving our traditions and farming, especially pistachios, for which Al-Tamanah is renowned.

Omar Mohmmad Albakri, 13, Tamanaa



MY SCHOOL

This is a picture of my school, where I study and learn. I left Syria with my family when I was a child and lived outside the country for ten years. When we left, we had to travel far to find somewhere safe to sleep. People helped us along the way, and a group of volunteers gave us medicines. Now we are back in Syria, and I have joined this school. I have made friends here and I enjoy playing football and learning with them.

Omar Abd Alghafoor Raslan, 15, Tamanaa



THREE STONE COOKING FIREPLACE

This is a picture of the three-stone stove that my mother uses for cooking. Seeing this image reminds me not only of the tasty food my mother prepares, but also of the tenderness and affection with which she cooks and serves us. Seeing my mother cook fills me with love for her. Life was very difficult for us. We had to leave Syria in 2019 because our place was under attack. We only had time to take one bag, as the roads were blocked and the journey was scary. Other families fleeing Syria helped us along the way. Life outside was very difficult, however, so I returned to Syria with my mother in 2021 and have been living here ever since. My mother is my greatest source of support because she always takes care of us..

Yaseer Adel Halwe, 13, Tamanaa



A MOMENT OF REFLECTION

This photo captures a moment of calm reflection as I stand in supplication and communion with the Creator after performing my daily prayers at the mosque. This calm moment helps me think and focus, and find solutions to my daily problems. I feel a sense of tranquillity, confidence and certainty when I engage with my faith. Additionally, spending time at the mosque helps me to relieve stress and discuss some of the problems we share with friends. This sense of belonging and support strengthens me.

Mohamad Sobhi Al-aghawani, 14, Rural Damascus - Beit Sawa



THE JOY OF EID

Eid is one of the happiest days of the year for me. This photo shows my siblings and me putting together flower bouquets to give to our relatives when we visit them. On the first day of Eid, it is customary to gather at my grandmother's house and then set out to complete the rest of the visits. My extended family is my source of strength and belonging. I feel overwhelming happiness on this special day because I can visit all my relatives and check on them, especially my aunts who live in neighbouring towns. Having my family gives me strength, and my extended family is a support system for me. Knowing that my relatives and uncles have my back—and that they're always there for me—gives me a sense of security and reassurance.

Saeed Ali Heshmeh, 14, Rural Damascus - Beit Sawa



GATHERING FOR PRAYER

Our faith requires us to perform five daily prayers, and this photo captures a moment when people from my community gather for prayer. These gatherings strengthen our faith and provide an opportunity to engage with people in the community. It helps build relationships with people of all ages in the town. Religion strengthens my moral values and sense of identity, and makes me part of discussions on certain topics in the town that are sometimes debated in the mosque.

Omar Khaldon AL-asfar, 15, Rural Damascus - Beit Sawa



COOPERATION WITHIN THE FAMILY

In this photo, my father, my younger brother and I are installing drip irrigation pipes. My father is teaching us a new method of distributing water across the whole land. Farming is a fundamental profession in our town, and my father is an agricultural expert. This gives us the opportunity to get to know all the farmers and landowners, which fosters social relationships. When I work with my father and siblings, I feel loved and secure, and I find happiness in accomplishing tasks together. Sometimes I also feel a sense of responsibility towards the quality of the work.

Mohamad Ismaeel Al-akhras, 15, Rural Damascus - Beit Sawa



STRENGTHENING FRIENDSHIPS DURING ACTIVITIES

The INTERSOS community centre brought me together with young people my own age. Due to the war, we had to move to different towns and live in cramped, uninhabitable places, which made life difficult. I had to change schools several times due to continuous displacement. I didn't have any friends to play with until I came to the INTERSOS centre. In this photo, I am taking part in an activity with my friends. As I was new to the area and didn't know many people in the community, I felt lonely. I met boys of my own age here and they eventually became my friends. We started by taking part in activities at the centre and meeting up for fun, and later we were brought together by other sessions and programmes. These friendships are my support system, keeping me connected to the community and giving me strength.

Hamzeh Mohamad AL-asfar, 15, Rural Damascus - Beit Sawa



A NEW HOPE

This is a picture of me planting an apricot tree sapling. There used to be an apricot tree in the same spot, but it was lost during the war. After years of displacement due to the war, we have only recently returned to this place. We are trying to rebuild our lives here and restore the farms we lost. In this photo, I am securing the sapling. I hope it will grow into a tree just like the one that was here before. Working on the land gives me the space I need to recharge my energy and focus when I feel the need for solitude and contemplation. Working on the land gives me a sense of accomplishment that motivates me to carry out my daily tasks. I also reminisce about the days I spent with my cousins on this land before the war. Sadly, they died as a result of the battles that took place in our area. Seeing this picture makes me anxious and excited because securing the sapling determines whether the planting process will be successful. At the same time, I am hopeful that it will grow into a fruitful tree, just as it was before the war. I am also proud that, in the future, I will be able to tell my children that I planted this land myself.

Mohamad Hasan Maziad, 15, Rural Damascus - Beit Sawa



FRIENDSHIP

This is a picture of me taking a penalty kick, one of the moments that can determine whether a match ends in victory or defeat. Football is one of the most popular sports in the town and beloved by young people. Despite our limited resources, playing football enables us to meet many young people in the town and build friendships. I feel a great sense of responsibility towards the trust that the team has placed in me to take the penalty kick, as well as anticipation about the outcome. Playing sports enables us to work together within defined rules and build friendships that extend to other social activities in the town or at school. The rules of football reflect the rules of daily life: adhering to the rules of the game with my teammates demonstrates my commitment to my role in society and my respect for its customs and traditions. I always feel joy and excitement when I play football and when we win.

Omar Abd Al-hade Heshmeh, 13, Rural Damascus - Beit Sawa

REFLECTIONS BY FACILITATORS

Listening to these stories as a facilitator was deeply moving and, at times, overwhelming. Each child's narrative carried layers of fear, loss, resilience, and hope, and hearing them articulated with such honesty reminded me of the weight children carry silently. What struck me most was the contrast between the hardship embedded in their memories and the visible excitement and joy they expressed while taking photographs. Through the photovoice activity, I witnessed how the tablet became more than a tool, it became a safe bridge between past and present, pain and belonging. As the children moved around with enthusiasm, carefully choosing what to capture, I could feel their strong sense of connectedness: to school, to friends, to neighborhoods, and to dreams that persist despite uncertainty. Their photos were not only images of places or objects, but quiet declarations of "this is where I belong" and

"this is what matters to me." Facilitating this process left me with a profound sense of responsibility and humility, reaffirming my belief in participatory, child-centered approaches that honor children not only as survivors of displacement, but as storytellers, dreamers, and active narrators of their own lives.

Ryma, facilitator Lebanon mission

Working with the adolescents on this project taught us many lessons about this new documentation technique. It was accompanied by enjoyment and enthusiasm. The discussion sessions also allowed me to share diverse and common emotions with the photographers through their stories. This had a direct personal impact on me, prompting me to revisit my old photos and assign titles to those stories immortalized in the moment they were captured.

Majd, Social Worker, Rural Damascus, Syria

CONCLUSIONS

felt the suffering they had endured and their need to discover their inner strengths. It was also important for them to recognize the people around them who form a safety net of comfort, protection, and belonging. This experience became a turning point, giving them the confidence to move forward and explore new ways of expressing themselves beyond spoken words. Through images, they found a powerful language that helped them share emotions and reclaim their voice.

Wajib, Social Worker, Idleb, Syria

By the end of the process, many participants could articulate practical actions, such as seeking support, safer routines, studying plans, positive peer networks, rather than only describing problems.

Enas, facilitator Jordan mission

These pictures tell the story of children forced to navigate their own emotions in times when those who are there to protect them had themselves very little to offer. Despite the suffering, these children were able to hang on to someone, something that continued to provide comfort throughout their journey, helping them heal. Social connectedness is not just a concept - it is a vital dimension of human life. Be it a friend, a soulmate, a school. It doesn't really matter. What matters is not to be left behind. INTERSOS, through its psychosocial support programmes, aims at bridging this gap. Child friendly spaces become of utmost importance. Positive parenting sessions provide child upbringing knowledge that improves the protective environment in which children grow. More of this is necessary, and further investment is needed to stop the vicious cycle of violence and uphold the right of children to a dignified life ahead. Children through this exercise were able to articulate what mattered to them, their hopes, fears and desires. We should continue to expand participatory approaches in our programmes that provide children with a safe space to tell their stories and their perspective to inform humanitarian programming and decision making.



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