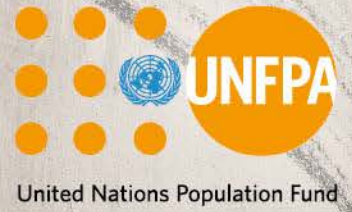
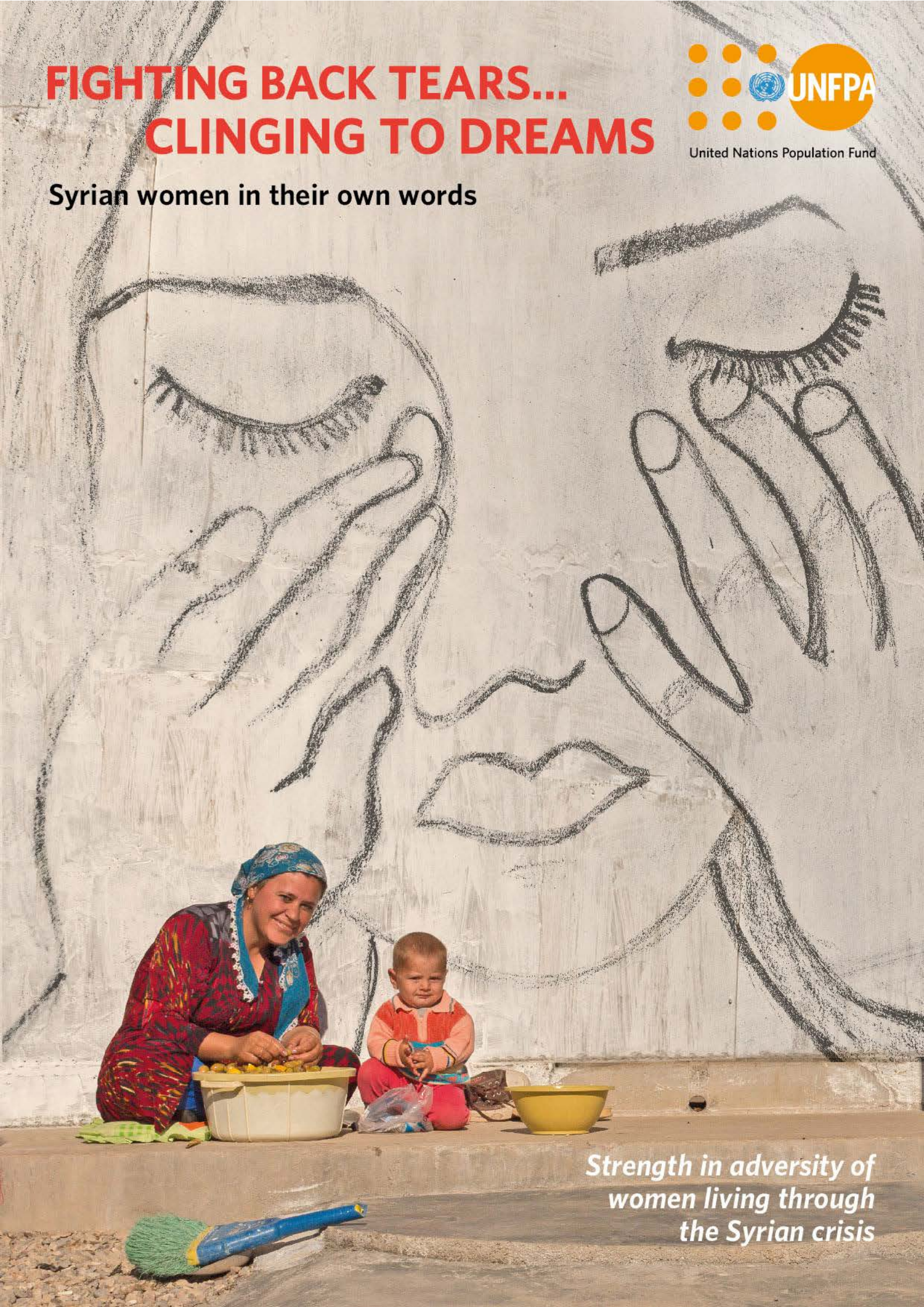


# FIGHTING BACK TEARS... CLINGING TO DREAMS



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



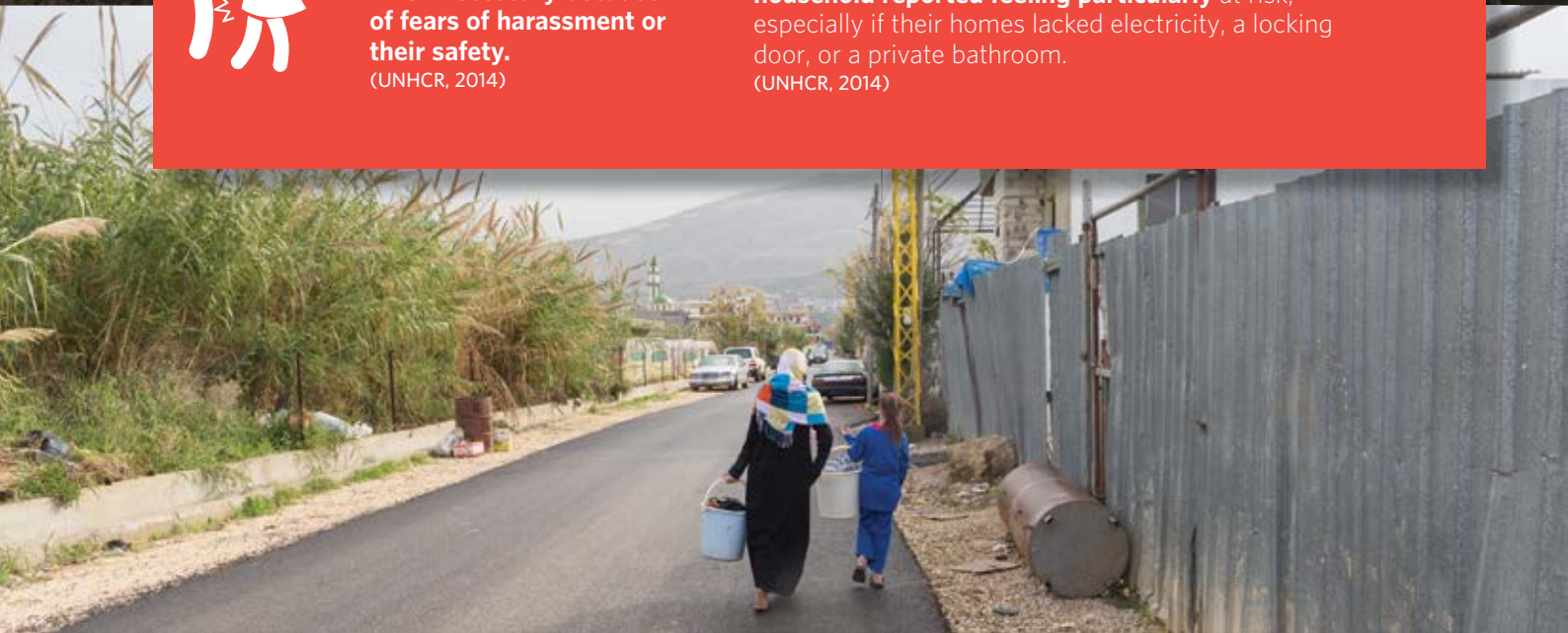
**of Syrian female-headed households left the house never, rarely and only when necessary because of fears of harassment or their safety.**

(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



预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

[https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5\\_20258](https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_20258)

