

Voices of Syria's Youth:

What it's like to be a refugee

Child Refugees living in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon



Photo: Cassandra Nelson/Mercy Corps

More than one million Syrian children have been forced to flee their country. Of these young refugees, one in every three is between the ages of 12 and 18.

This is the generation that will be tasked with rebuilding Syria. And yet, they are consistently missing out on critical life milestones like building social skills, developing confidence and getting an education.

According to UNICEF, 68 percent of young refugees are not able to attend school due to social, legal or economic barriers. At least 60,000 of them currently work in order to help their families survive. Without access to education, social activities or basic services, many refugee youth struggle to imagine a future for themselves, let alone their country.

In the following pages Syrian refugees describe their thoughts through their photographs, drawings and words.

LOSS

Forced to leave their homes, belongings and loved ones behind, many young Syrians feel they've lost their childhoods and the futures they dreamt for themselves.



"I took several pictures. One is of a boy selling stuff on the streets. None of the passing pedestrians are even looking at him as he works to provide a living for his family."



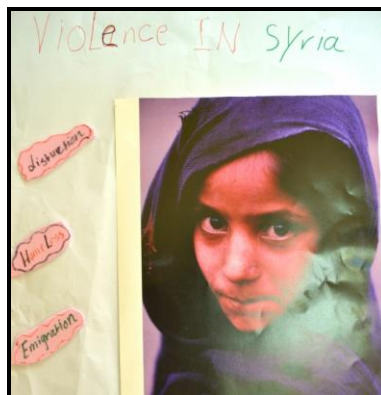
"This picture is of a destroyed building reminds me of what I will have to deal with when I go back to Syria."



"My photo of a graveyard reminds me of the people killed in Syria. I am very sad and unhappy. I wish I had a football club in Jordan where I could play 24 hours and not think of anything else."

HOMESICKNESS

Many young refugees feel like they are starting over in their host communities. Faced with loneliness, insecurity and an uncertain future, they have a strong desire to return to their homes, friends and favorite activities in Syria.



"My project is a collage of sad girl with the words homeless, emigration and destruction. The main headline is "Stop violence in Syria" because the situation in Syria has affected a lot of people in the Middle East."



"This is a picture of a chain; it symbolizes the blockades that forbid me from crossing the borders. I want to break free and go back."



"This flower reminds me of my house back in Syria. We had the same kind of flowers planted in our garden there."

It makes me feel bad because I believe that Aleppo is totally damaged, and it will never be back as it was, and in a year from now, I may have to travel to another place."



"I wish I could go back to my house and the place I lived in, so I drew a mountain, trees and a house."



"I have liked football since I was very young, and I like the sun because it reminds me of summer. I don't like the winter because it reminds me of cold nights in the war time. I wish I could be a member of a football team here."

ISOLATION

Growing social tensions and a lack of opportunities for education and community involvement prevent Syrian youth from making new friends, engaging in productive activities and reaching their full potential in their host communities. Nearly 30 percent of young refugees report leaving their homes only one time — or even less — per week.



"This is a Jordanian flag with Syrian colors. I like Jordan but since I came here I have felt a big division between Jordanians and Syrians, and I feel sad that I am not in my homeland. I am scared and want to go home."



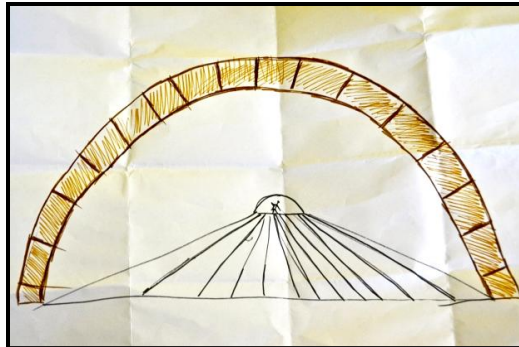
"A flower is like a person, affected by their environment, so you have to strengthen yourself, even if you as a person feel abandoned."

DETERMINATION



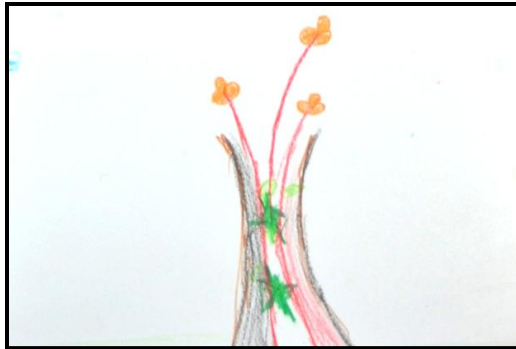
"My picture is of five of us with our fingers put together in a star. Together, we are like a star, and this picture is for me to always remember them, and how my love has grown for them.

These girls have become more valuable to me than sisters."



"The closer side of this tunnel represents the present, and the far side represents my goal which I want to reach. However, I haven't decided what that goal is.

I just want to become a good citizen."



"I drew the Syrian flag as a vase and three roses in it, because I have hope in the rise of Syria again."



"This is a small drawing but it has a big meaning. This tree represents me. The wind, the lines to the right of the tree, represent the things that keep me from who I want to become in life.

While this wind can blow the leaves from my branches, you see them here falling to the ground, it cannot knock me over. The soil and the roots of the tree keep me from being knocked over."