



It takes a world
to end violence against children

A close-up photograph of a young girl with dark hair in two braids, wearing a black dress with white polka dots. She is looking upwards with a hopeful expression. The background is a blurred wall with blue and white patterns.

Fears and dreams:
turning hope into reality
for Syria's children

World Vision is a global Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

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Foreword

"A lot of countries experienced war and came out of it stronger. After war there is always peace, and we should work towards that peace."

Emad, age 17

The conflict in Syria and the humanitarian crisis it has created is this decade's most tragic hallmark.

Over 6 million Syrians are internally displaced within Syria and more than 5.6 million have been forced to seek refuge outside of Syria. In Syria alone, almost 12 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, 5 million of whom are children.¹

I can hardly bring myself to write that 2019 brings with it the eighth anniversary of the crisis.

Over these years, I've met too many Syrian children whose childhoods have passed in makeshift shelters outside Syria's borders - in Lebanon, in Jordan, in Turkey. I've met children with bright hopes for the future, but enormous barriers in the way. I've seen too much suffering, too much of which isn't going away.

We all have a responsibility to the children of Syria: to help rebuild their country and create a peaceful future; and to protect their rights – to an education, to a childhood – wherever they're living.

As this anniversary approaches, World Vision has been speaking to Syrian children living in Jordan and Lebanon about their hopes and dreams, where they feel safe, and what they think the world can do to help Syria. We've also spoken to these children's peers in over a dozen peaceful countries – places like the UK, Canada, Germany and Switzerland. Children everywhere hope to become teachers and doctors, and many worry about war or climate change or losing their parents. But for the Syrian children we've spoken to, their fears are much more imminent, and their dreams often seem much further away.

If we are serious about helping the children of Syria fulfil their very achievable ambitions, then the international community must step up its game. This report sets out the key ways in which the international community can provide hope and a future to the children affected by Syria's wars.

Syria's children deserve a future. We must not forget them. They deserve to have their voices heard. As the world marks the 8th anniversary of the conflict, it is my prayer that the world acts to help the 24 million children² who have been affected by this tragic war achieve their dreams.

Justin Byworth Global Humanitarian Director, World Vision

¹ OCHA, "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic," March 2019. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Syr_HNO_Full.pdf

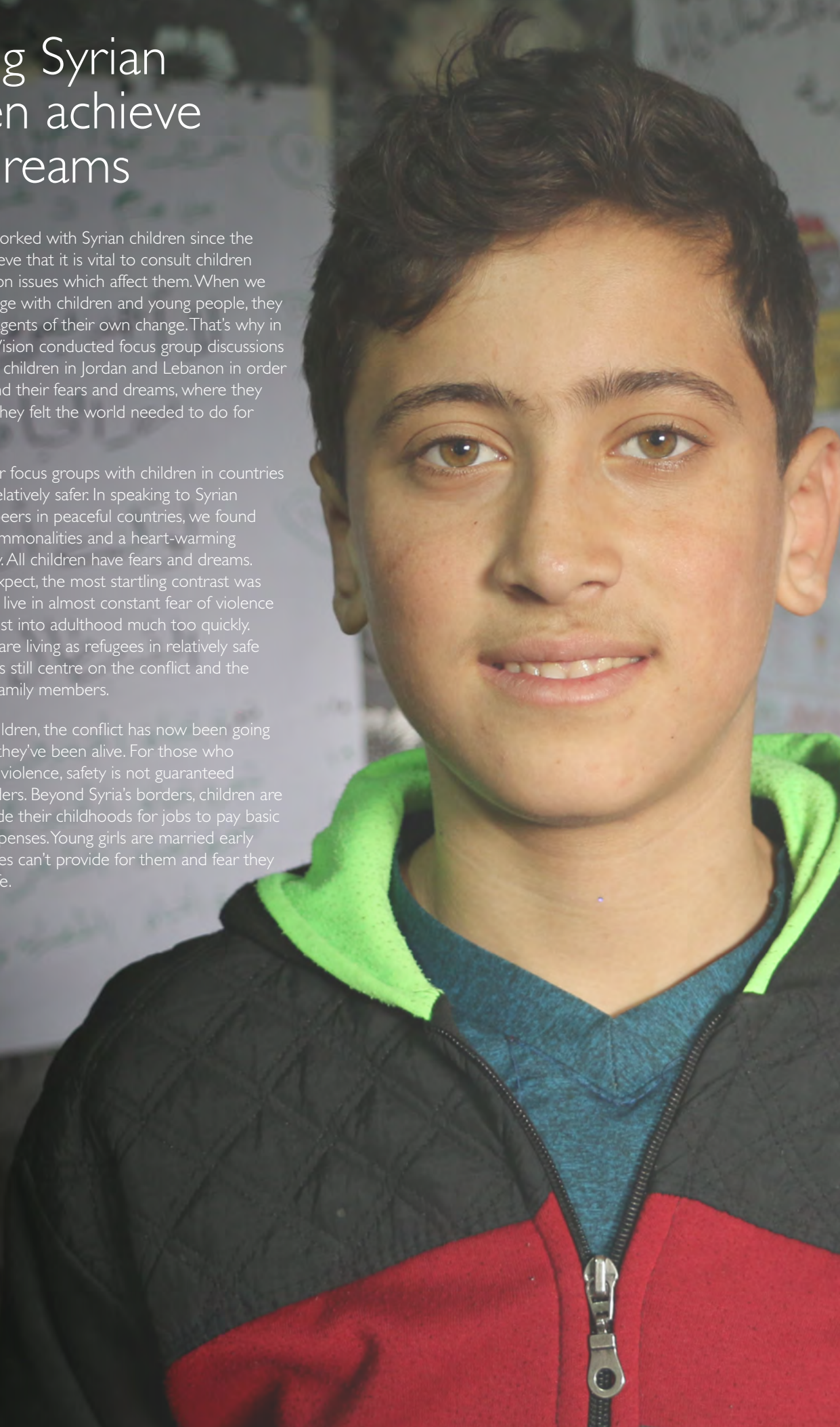
² UNICEF identified 24 million children as affected by the Syria crisis: 9.4 million children inside Syria; an additional 4 million children displaced inside Syria; 2.6 million Syrian refugee children; and 8 million children in the host population of refugee hosting countries. UNICEF RESPONSE TO THE SYRIA CRISIS 2018, https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/files/2018-04_-_UNICEF_response_to_the_Syria_Crisis.pdf

Helping Syrian children achieve their dreams

World Vision has worked with Syrian children since the war began. We believe that it is vital to consult children and young people on issues which affect them. When we empower and engage with children and young people, they become powerful agents of their own change. That's why in early 2019, World Vision conducted focus group discussions with Syrian refugee children in Jordan and Lebanon in order to better understand their fears and dreams, where they felt safe, and what they felt the world needed to do for Syria.

We also held similar focus groups with children in countries considered to be relatively safer. In speaking to Syrian children and their peers in peaceful countries, we found many childhood commonalities and a heart-warming amount of empathy. All children have fears and dreams. But as one might expect, the most startling contrast was that Syria's children live in almost constant fear of violence and have been thrust into adulthood much too quickly. Even though many are living as refugees in relatively safe countries, their fears still centre on the conflict and the prospect of losing family members.

For many Syrian children, the conflict has now been going on for longer than they've been alive. For those who manage to flee the violence, safety is not guaranteed beyond Syria's borders. Beyond Syria's borders, children are being forced to trade their childhoods for jobs to pay basic household living expenses. Young girls are married early because their families can't provide for them and fear they can't keep them safe.



Fears of war and violence



Protect children from grave violations and other forms of violence

When asked about their fears and worries, most children talked about the distress caused by the conflict and their flight from Syria. After eight years of conflict, it is not surprising that children and their communities have experienced irreversible harm and suffering. Many of the children who lived through bombings are still afraid of the sound of airplanes. Those who still have family and friends in Syria fear for their safety.

These fears subsume their other memories and associations with their home country. Many children left Syria at a young age, and they do not always share the fond memories their parents and grandparents have of more peaceful times.

"I feel safe here in Jordan; when we were in Syria we were moving a lot looking, trying to find a safe place."

Sanad, age 15

"I am afraid to go back to Syria and I do not want to go back. I lived there during the bombing. I was very aware and old enough to understand. People who are older say very nice things about Syria. Then I ask them what is nice about Syria; it's all war."

Shadia, age 13

Many regions of Syria are still not safe for children to return. The UN Secretary General's most recent *Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict* found that 2017 saw the highest number of verified grave violations against children ever recorded in Syria.³ Any further escalation of the conflict, particularly in Idlib which hosts large numbers of internally displaced persons, risks having a devastating impact on already vulnerable communities. Of particular concern is the fact that, in the past, international law and humanitarian principles have not been fully respected by parties to the conflict. The indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force in contravention of International Humanitarian Law has caused the unnecessary deaths of thousands of children and their families in Syria. Any further bloodshed and grave violations against children must be prevented.

³ Annual Report of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), 2018 <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/children-faced-with-unspeakable-violence-in-conflict-as-number-of-grave-violations-increased-in-2017/>

Worries and hopes for their own futures



Meet children's basic needs, especially educational and psychological needs

Although children feel safer from the war and violence living as refugees in host countries, they are still concerned about the impact of the conflict on their futures. When talking about both fears and dreams, Syrian children discussed their need for an education along with their desire to stop child labour and avoid child marriage. For many of these refugees, their futures are still deeply precarious as they attempt to survive and build new lives away from the conflict.

"My biggest dream is to learn and study to become a doctor — to treat and cure people. But because of the war that started in Syria, I couldn't achieve that dream. Now that I am in Jordan, I still want to pursue my dream of studying, but I was forced to go out to work to support my family. I couldn't continue studying."

Sara, age 15

The desire for proper education and its role in enabling children to achieve their dreams was prevalent in every focus group. This is unsurprising considering the dire need for formal education both in and out of Syria. Almost 3 million children⁴ are currently out of school due to the conflict, whether still in Syria or living in host countries. More than 70 per cent of refugee families in Jordan and Lebanon are living below the poverty line, which often means that children are forced to work in poor conditions for minimal pay to help their families survive.


Ahmad, age 15, loves school but spends his days working in the fields around Mafraq in Jordan. Like many other Syrian children around the region, he isn't able to go to school because his family depends on the income he earns through child labour.

Since the start of the conflict, enrolment rates for children across Syria have plummeted from 85 per cent in 2010 to 61 per cent in 2018.⁵ Enrolment rates for refugee children in host countries are even lower with fees for transportation, uniforms, and other materials constituting a significant barrier. Both in Syria and in host countries, the quality of education when children do manage to enrol also remains a concern. Education is a human right, and children who are not able to access quality education will face severely constricted opportunities for the rest of their lives. Ahmad, Sara, and other children like them will struggle to achieve their dreams of becoming doctors, dancers, pharmacists, bakers, engineers, and fashion designers. Support from the international community to receive an education is crucial to ensure these children do not become a lost generation.

In 2018, only slightly more than half of requested funds for education were received, and the number of Syrian children in host countries not enrolled in education increased by over 100,000. This must not be the same year after year. Donors and the international community must commit to increasing funding for programmes such as education and child protection which will allow these children to regain childhoods interrupted by conflict.

⁴ 2.1 million inside Syria and 700,000 in host countries according to UN OCHA & UNICEF, <https://hno-syria.org/>; https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/files/2018-04_-_UNICEF_response_to_the_Syria_Crisis.pdf

⁵ World Bank with UNHCR, "The Mobility of Displaced Syrians: An Economic and Social Analysis," 2019. Page 149- 150, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/9781464814013.pdf>



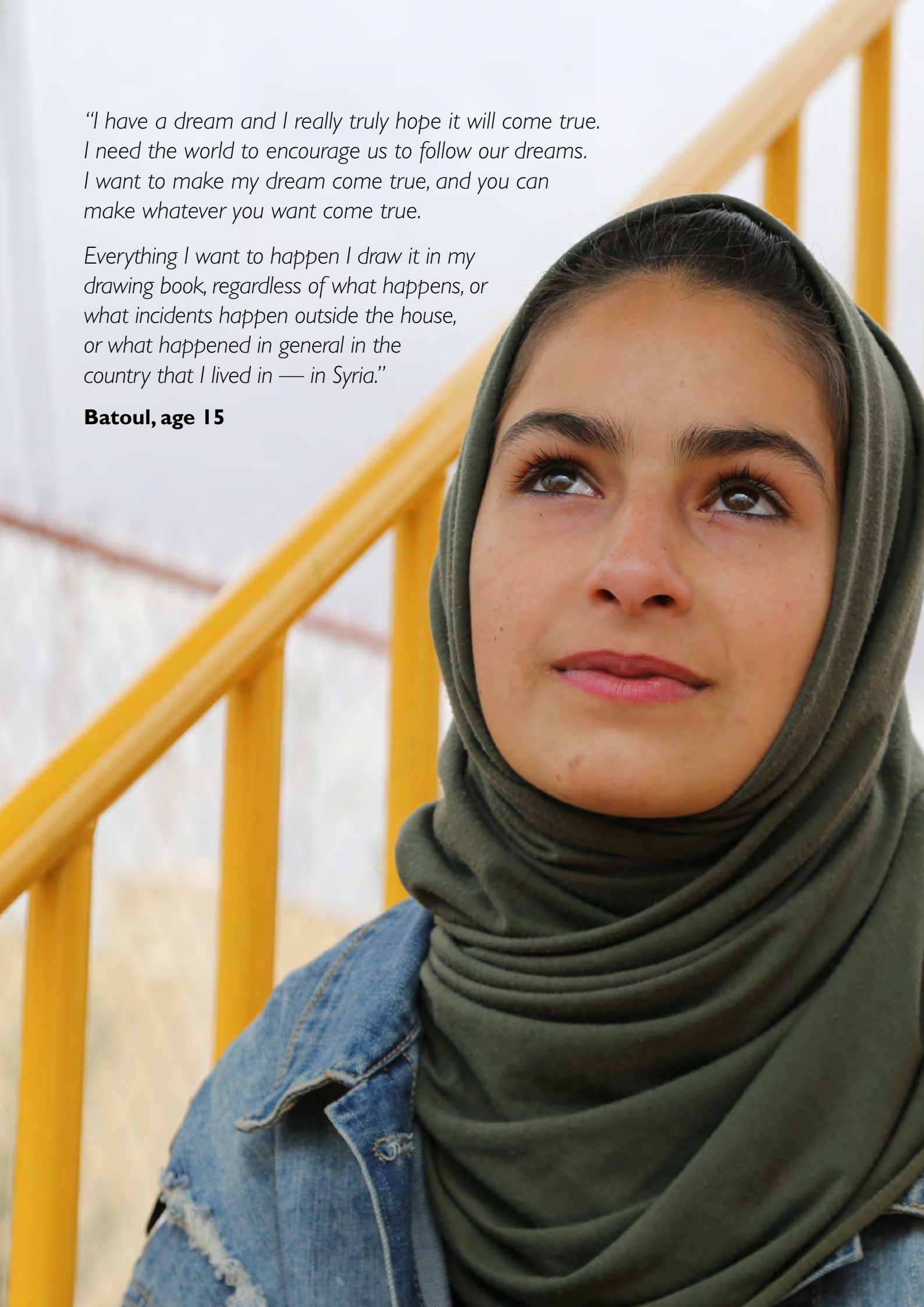
*“Syria in the
future has security
and safety and
is away from
devastation.”*

Abla, age 16

"I have a dream and I really truly hope it will come true. I need the world to encourage us to follow our dreams. I want to make my dream come true, and you can make whatever you want come true."

Everything I want to happen I draw it in my drawing book, regardless of what happens, or what incidents happen outside the house, or what happened in general in the country that I lived in — in Syria."

Batoul, age 15



Wanting to help rebuild Syria when the time is right



Protect refugee children and their families from forced returns

Stand ready to aid with reconstruction efforts when conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified returns are in place

Aside from their own futures, children are also hopeful for that of Syria. They dream that the conflict will end soon and that Syria will be peaceful and prosperous again. Many of the children World Vision spoke to told us about their hopes to play a part in building Syria's future. Once they have achieved their dreams of becoming doctors and teachers, many want to go back to a peaceful Syria as adults and help build the country they long to see. Children don't just want to fulfil their own potential, they want to fulfil the potential of the country their families come from.

However, having lived through the conflict, other children have understandable anxiety at the thought of going back in the near future or ever.

Ten-year-old Habiba, living in Lebanon, worries over a future where she and her family go back to Syria, and can't imagine one where they might be able to live there safely. Although just 10 years old, the struggle to keep her little brothers and sisters safe in such a scenario terrifies her.

"My dream for Syria is for my country to be as it was before."

Yaza, age 11

"I want to ask the world to try and stop the war in Syria."

Sanad, age 15

"I want to become a doctor to help those in need and my dream for Syria is a fair president, health centres, safe houses, education centres and everything we need."

Yara, age 13

"I left Syria because of the war. I am scared to go back to Syria, because what if a bomb fell on us? And what if my younger siblings, Hammoudi for example, went somewhere to play while I'm not paying attention, and a bomb hits him? God forbid."

Habiba, age 10

"I do not like Syria. I lived here (Jordan) all my life. We left when I was 3."

Reema, age 13

Children are aware of the conversations happening around them about returns, and many are fearful of what might happen if something that has seemed like a far-off possibility for much of their childhood suddenly becomes a reality. Although they wish for a peaceful and prosperous future for their country, they have trouble imagining this in the near future.

"The thing I fear the most is the war in Syria, and what I lived through there. Because I lived through that war and experienced fear a lot, every time I remember Syria I feel scared. That's why I don't want to return back to Syria."

I hope that Syria stays in a good condition, and becomes even better, but at the same time I am not thinking of going back there."

Sara, age 15

Over half of the 5.6 million refugees who have sought safety in Syria's neighbouring countries are children. Every child's experience of the war is different, and each child imagines a different relationship with Syria's future. According to UNHCR, the vast majority of Syrian refugees do not intend to return in the next 12 months, if at all, and concerns about safety and security are the most cited barrier to returns.⁶

Destruction of housing and critical infrastructure also create barriers to returns, and sustainable interventions that would support the resilience of affected populations and help to prepare the way for safe and dignified returns are underfunded. In 2018, the early recovery and livelihoods component of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Syria was funded at less than 30 per cent.⁷ Children are clear that the international community has a role to play in addressing these barriers. When asked about their wishes and how the international community can help Syria, Ahmad and other children speak of functioning hospitals, schools, and other essential services.

"Syria in the future has security and safety and is away from devastation."

Abla, 16

For some refugees, resettlement to a third country remains the only viable long-term solution, but resettlement opportunities continue to decline. In addition to avoiding forced returns, the international community must also accept that resettlements to third countries continue to be part of the solution in building a future for these children, and must increase the opportunities for children to build a future in peaceful countries.

"I'm afraid that I won't go to the US and that I will have to go back to Syria and see war planes. Once a grenade fell in the house and shattered the window where I was sleeping."

Ruba, age 11

The many different opinions about the possibility of returns, and the many barriers which make returning seem impossible to some, mean that children, their families and their communities must be allowed the space to make free and informed decisions about when to return to Syria, or whether or not to return to Syria at all. UNHCR assessments hold that the conditions for safe, voluntary, and dignified returns of refugees to Syria are not currently met. When these conditions are in place, the international community must stand ready to support principled and rights-based recovery efforts.

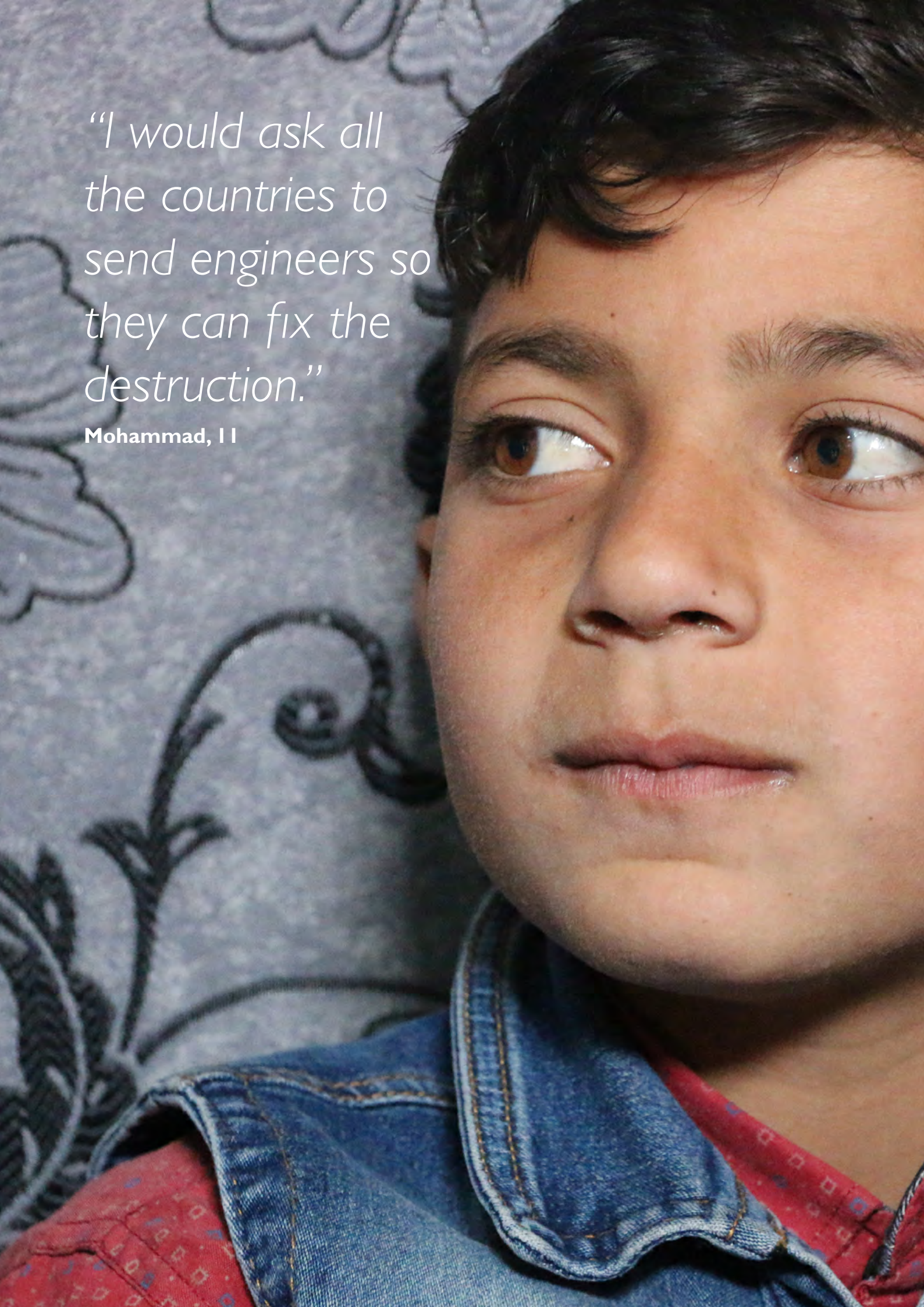
The children of Syria's dreams remain unmet year after year.⁸ Without the sustained support and engagement of the international community in Syria and in neighbouring host countries, many of these children's dreams will remain out of reach, and their fears of violence and forced return to Syria will be all too present. After over eight years of conflict in Syria, the international community must continue to act to help the 24 million children affected⁹ build a better future for themselves and their country.

⁶ UNCHR, 'Fourth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees, Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria,' July 2018

⁷ OCHA, 'Regional Funding Update Syria Crisis,' January 1, 2019

⁸ World Vision International, "Beyond Survival: Seven Years of War on Syria's Children," March 2018. https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Beyond%20Survival_7%20of%20of%20conflict%20in%20Syria_low%20res.pdf

⁹ UNICEF identified 24 million children as affected by the Syria crisis: 9.4 million children inside Syria; an additional 4 million children displaced inside Syria; 2.6 million Syrian refugee children; and 8 million children in the host population of refugee hosting countries. UNICEF RESPONSE TO THE SYRIA CRISIS 2018, https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/files/2018-04_-_UNICEF_response_to_the_Syria_Crisis.pdf



*"I would ask all
the countries to
send engineers so
they can fix the
destruction."*

Mohammad, 11

Appendix I:

Calls to the international community

Call 1:

Protect children from grave violations and other forms of violence

The international community must:

- Press for an immediate and peaceful resolution to the conflict, including an extension of the demilitarised buffer zone agreement in Idlib.
- Demand that all parties to the conflict fully comply with their obligations under International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law to protect children at all times.
- Pressure all parties to the conflict to develop strong, transparent mechanisms to monitor and report any harm caused to civilians, including children, and hold to account those found responsible for violations of international law.

Call 2:

Protect refugee children and their families from forced returns

The international community must:

- Work with governments in host countries to ensure that the rights of refugees are respected and that refugee children and their families are not forcibly or otherwise involuntarily returned to Syria where their safety and security may be at risk.
- Ensure that any returns to Syria that may occur are safe, dignified and voluntary, and that refugees have access to reliable information on which to base their decision about whether to return to Syria.
- Acknowledge that some refugees will choose not to return to Syria and increase opportunities for resettlement to third countries for the most vulnerable, ensuring that they receive adequate support throughout the resettlement process including in the country of resettlement.
- Acknowledge that early recovery is necessary to support the resilience of affected populations in Syria and is a prerequisite for large-scale returns that are safe, voluntary, and dignified.
- Ensure that funding for early recovery programming is allocated on the basis of need alone and that all programming is consistent with International Human Rights Law, International Humanitarian Law, and the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality.¹⁰



¹⁰ In January 2019, the HRP was only funded at 63.5 per cent. OCHA, "Funding Overview," January 2, 2019 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/hrp_weekly_funding_status_180102.pdf 3RP 2018 – 2019 Quarterly Update, November 2018. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67548.pdf>

Call 3:

Meet children's basic needs, especially educational and psychological needs

- Fund critical humanitarian needs through the 2019 HRP for Syria and the 3RP, with a special focus on child protection and other life-saving interventions that support the well-being of children and that actively engage children in their design and implementation.¹²
- Recognise that the evolving situation in Syria will require a renewed approach to working with the Government of Syria to ensure that children across Syria have access to quality education.
- Fulfil previous pledges to support education inside Syria and in host countries so that all children have access to accredited, quality, and safe education. This includes working with the government of Syria and governments in host countries to strengthen national education systems.
- Provide financial support to refugees in host countries so that financial barriers – such as the cost of transportation to school – do not prevent children from accessing education.
- Acknowledge that the right to education extends to children who have missed periods of school and ensure that opportunities for non-formal and remedial education are fully funded, including inside refugee camps.
- Affirm the importance of mental health and psychosocial support programming (MHPSS) for children and integrate it into schools, child-friendly spaces and health services by fully funding such activities under the 3RP and HRP.
- Prioritise funding of MHPSS interventions for the most vulnerable children in Syria and host communities, including children in refugee camps whose mobility is limited.
- Prioritise funding for early childhood development
- Advocate for host governments to establish formalised early childhood services that are inclusive and open to refugees.

Call 4:

Support principled humanitarian action inside Syria

The international community must:

- Fully fund all necessary training, capacity development, and staffing to equip humanitarian organisations to comply with donor requirements.
- Ensure that any suspensions of aid are made on a case-by-case basis on the grounds of specific, documented concerns.
- Protect the neutrality and independence of humanitarian organisations by not suspending aid in an area solely on the basis of which party to the conflict exercises control of the area.
- Guarantee that decisions about geographic targeting of assistance inside of Syria are made on the basis of vulnerability and needs, in full respect of humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity, regardless of which party to the conflict controls a geographic area where vulnerable children, families and communities are located.
- Demand that parties to the conflict provide unfettered and continuous humanitarian access to all areas of Syria for humanitarian organisations, including the demilitarised buffer zone in Northwest Syria.
- Continue to advocate with all parties to the conflict to guarantee the safety of humanitarian workers, including a guarantee that humanitarian workers will not be subject to reprisals in the short or long term for their humanitarian work.
- Require that all grants explicitly describe duty of care obligations to partners and staff inside of Syria and ensure that these obligations are fully met and funded.

¹² In January 2019, the HRP was only funded at 63.5 per cent. OCHA, "Funding Overview," January 2, 2019 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/hrp_weekly_funding_status_180102.pdf 3RP 2018 – 2019 Quarterly Update, November 2018. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67548.pdf>



Appendix 2:

Fears and Dreams: Full survey results


Please note, some children gave more than one answer to each question. To accurately capture their sentiments, we included all of their responses, meaning some survey results add up to more than 100 per cent. Approximately 100 children were surveyed in each country. The results for Syria in 2017 were gathered inside Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, and in 2019 in Jordan and Lebanon.

The United Kingdom, Spain, Austria, Switzerland, and Japan surveyed children in 2019; Canada, Ireland, Germany, Korea, Australia, and New Zealand surveyed children in 2017. Some data is from one source within a country, while others, such as Spain, are more representative and came from a range of different cities, backgrounds, and ages. However, it must be noted that the survey results are not purporting to accurately represent the range of hopes and dreams of children of all these nationalities, more to provide some overarching patterns and food for thought.

Dreams

In every country many children's dreams revolved around future professions, finding love and happiness, and achieving success. However, the degree to which they focussed on finding a good job, for example, ranged from 97 per cent in Korea in 2017, to just 20 per cent in Austria when polled in 2019. Children in Austria (27 per cent), Switzerland (56 per cent), Germany (30 per cent) and Ireland (44 per cent) were generally much more preoccupied with finding love and happiness than their peers in other countries. In Japan (17 per cent) and Ireland (14 per cent) children especially wanted to be able to do or bring good things to other people. Children in many, but not all, countries, also had general wishes that had to do with ending wars and violence, protecting the environment, and stopping climate change (24 per cent in Austria, 23 per cent in Switzerland, 29 per cent in Japan, 21 per cent in Ireland, and 30 per cent in New Zealand).

For Syrian children, their wishes predominantly focused on their education and the conflict in Syria, often in a way that was linked, for instance, to wanting to become a doctor to treat people in Syria, or wanting Syria to become peaceful and to go back and open a bakery. The same children were not spoken to over the two rounds in 2017 and 2019, so no overarching trends can be inferred from the data. But there was an interesting shift from 30 per cent of Syrian children in Syria and neighbouring countries in 2017 speaking about wanting the war to end, and 45 per cent of Syrian children spoken to in Jordan and Lebanon in 2019 who mentioned wanting a better future for Syria, whether or not they themselves wish to return to the country.

	United Kingdom	Spain	Austria	Switzerland	Japan	Syria	Canada	Ireland	Germany	Korea	Australia	New Zealand
 Good education	–	11%	27%	53%	3%	83%	1%	19%	28%	–	–	–
Health	–	8%	18%	12%	1%	–	2%	–	–	–	–	–
Love & happiness	8%	13%	27%	56%	5%	3%	4%	44%	30%	1%	19%	11%
Other	30%	29%	12%	5%	20%	63%	27%	16%	20%	2%	29%	13%
Profession	46%	38%	20%	14%	44%	–	67%	27%	31%	97%	44%	47%
Stop war & climate change	8%	5%	24%	23%	29%	3%	–	21%	14%	–	13%	30%
Travel	8%	5%	4%	2%	–	5%	–	14%	–	–	–	7%

Fears

Almost all of the Syrian children who mentioned fears in 2019 were concerned about losing family members (19 per cent) and war and violence (42 per cent). Their other fears could also be strongly associated with the conflict – things like airplanes flying overhead or the lights going out. What was interesting is that their peers in peaceful countries also worry about similar things, even though they have likely not experienced them. In the United Kingdom (13 per cent), Spain (20 per cent), Austria (31 per cent), Ireland (22 per cent), Germany (24 per cent) and Australia (22 per cent), children were also frightened of losing family or friends. In the United Kingdom (16 per cent), Austria (26 per cent), Switzerland (60 per cent), Japan (48 per cent), Ireland (54 per cent), Germany (46 per cent), Australia (36 per cent), and New Zealand (34 per cent) large percentages of children were worried about their safety, the threat of war, or violence.

In most countries, many children had typical childlike fears such as: animals (31 per cent in the United Kingdom, 16 per cent in Spain, 19 per cent in Austria, 16 per cent in Switzerland, 39 per cent in Canada and 21 per cent in New Zealand); darkness (16 per cent in Spain and 14 per cent Switzerland); heights (6 per cent in New Zealand); or being alone (8 per cent in Spain). There were some interesting country-specific fears – 15 per cent of Korean children were afraid of ghosts and 3 per cent of Spanish children were frightened about getting stuck in an elevator, while 4 per cent of British children worried about getting hit in the head with a soccer ball or placed in goal. In Japan (17 per cent) and Switzerland (33 per cent), children were also highly concerned about natural disasters and climate change.



	United Kingdom	Spain	Austria	Switzerland	Japan	Syria	Canada	Ireland	Germany	Korea	Australia	New Zealand
Animals	31%	16%	19%	16%	–	12%	39%	–	–	8%	–	21%
Childish fears	6%	13%	4%	5%	3%	15%	16%	12%	15%	35%	21%	8%
Darkness	8%	16%	7%	14%	2%	4%	8%	–	–	2%	–	4%
Death	21%	12%	11%	2%	13%	–	–	–	8%	–	–	–
Heights	5%	2%	2%	–	–	4%	3%	–	–	–	–	6%
Losing family	13%	20%	31%	7%	6%	19%	4%	22%	24%	10%	22%	4%
Others	12%	17%	8%	–	12%	4%	25%	20%	10%	23%	17%	3%
School	–	2%	7%	5%	–	4%	–	27%	12%	4%	16%	22%
War & violence	16%	9%	26%	60%	48%	42%	9%	54%	46%	9%	36%	34%
Natural disasters & climate change	–	3%	–	33%	17%	4%	–	–	–	–	–	1%



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to end violence against children