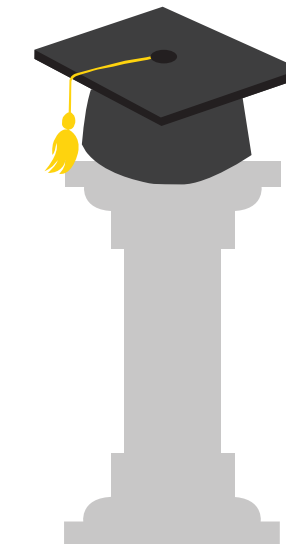


# Rebuilding: Syrian refugee girls pursue education

The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 displaced 13 million from their homes, with floods of refugees uprooting their lives to neighboring countries. Through their own experiences of relinquishing all sense of home, Syrian refugee girls voice their journeys with displacement and pursuit of an education.



Grace Hamilton / Editor-in-Chief

Fatima Alloush fled her home in Syria when she was nine. “Unbearable” describes the 350-mile journey. “When we came to Jordan, the road was so difficult, we went from house to house, car to car until we were finally able to reach Za’atari Camp,” Alloush said. “We stayed there for only two days because it was intolerable. Then, we left to live somewhere else.”

Just south of the Syrian border, the Za’atari refugee camp hosts over 80,000 refugees, rendering it the largest Syrian refugee camp in the world. Beyond the security gates, Za’atari is where “hope goes to die” – CARE Country Director Ammar Abu Zayyad’s words.

Abu Zayyad said an average of seven refugees live in each five-meter tent. Twenty-seven share one bathroom. Electricity is provided for less than half of the day.

Alloush is one of 13 million forced to flee their country after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. An eruption of pro-democracy protests in the wake of the Arab Spring incentivized the Syrian government to suppress demonstrations with violence, according to Britannica.

### Educational pursuits

Alloush belongs to the 27% of refugee girls enrolled in secondary education. Recalling her childhood, Alloush vividly remembers her fascination with geography, conceived in one of her first school lessons after fleeing to Jordan.

“I was always amazed by the skies, seas, oceans, mountains,” Alloush said. “I never knew I could learn about them in geography lessons. My education al-

lowed me to deeply consider the world around me.”

Now, Alloush studies interior design at Philadelphia University in Jordan. Each morning, she wakes up early, boards a shuttle and commutes an hour to campus. In receiving an education, she dreams of founding an interior design company.

Ranem Issam Abu Zeid, who fled Syria alongside her six siblings, similarly pursued an education in Jordan. Back home in Syria, Abu Zeid recalls playing in her neighborhood daily, where her community was perceptibly “happy and full of joy.”

“Thankfully, my whole family managed to come to Jordan and we live near each other, but things aren’t the same anymore,” Abu Zeid said.

For Abu Zeid, education changed the way in which she “perceives her future.”

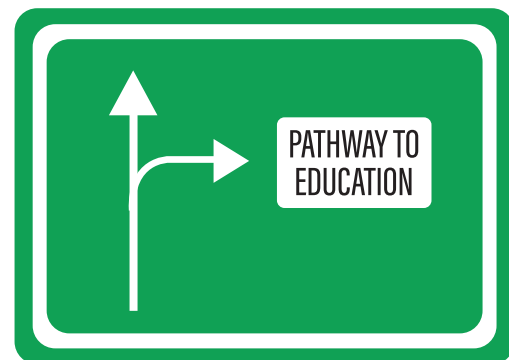
“Before going to school, there were times where I felt really lonely, sometimes empty and depressed,” Abu Zeid said. “Now, I feel like I’ve found myself.”

Joury Mohammad Khair AlAboud said she echoes the notion that education transformed her self-perception.

“I never used to do anything for myself,” AlAboud said. “I used to work, but that wasn’t for my own sake. Going to school is specifically for me. This is why studying is my priority at the moment.”

The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War placed AlAboud’s education on hiatus. In Jordan, she enrolled in secondary school before dropping out as it was a 45-minute walk from her village to the school. After re-enrolling, her mother’s back injury forced her to withdraw again.

“She just couldn’t do it all herself,” AlAboud said. “I worked at the hair salon



Ranem Issam Abu Zeid – Grade 9



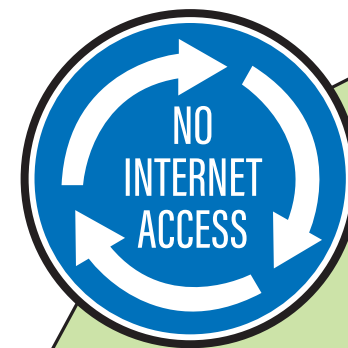
Nada Ahmad Saleh – Grade 11



Joury Mohammad Khair AlAboud – Graduated secondary school



Fatima Alloush – Freshman in university



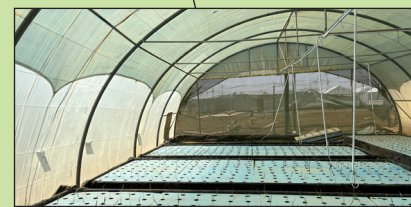
Fatima Alloush and Grace Hamilton (‘23) meet at the CARE Center in Amman, Jordan Feb. 25.



Employees at the CARE Center created a “Wall of Hope” where guests can write messages to the refugees to encourage hope.



Houses at the Azraq refugee camp, north of the Syrian border, are each five-meters wide and shared by an average of seven refugees.



Centers at the Azraq refugee camp grow cabbage and other produce in crop tents.

right under my house, and the lady there would sometimes call me to help her. I made coffee and tea, and she taught me how to do other tasks so I could help my mom.”

### COVID-19

During the pandemic, keeping up with online lessons and exams proved to be a challenge for Abu Zeid, exacerbated by a lack of internet access.

Nada Ahmad Saleh said COVID-19 hurled a “huge curveball” in her educational journey.

Before the pandemic, a refugee was two times more likely to be out of school than a non-refugee, according to the UNHCR. Post-pandemic, this figure is predicted to increase, with thousands of refugees unable to resume their studies given families’ collective economic suffering.

For Abu Zeid, each day she persists enables her to inch just a little bit “closer to her future.”

“I am more confident and stronger than I ever was,” Abu Zeid said. “There are so many times when I wanted to give up, but I didn’t, and now I’ve made it farther than I ever thought I would.”

When she first arrived in Jordan, Abu Zeid attended school with the encouragement and support of her brother. At the age of 10, she dropped out to look after one of her sisters with a disability.

When the pandemic hit, her sister passed away, eliciting a period of grief that consumed Abu Zeid.

“It was a really tough phase for my family,” Abu Zeid said. “Now, I am back in school to pursue an education and become a doctor one day to help those like my sister.”

### Dreams

Ahmad Saleh said she dreams of founding a school to “help children learn,” emphasizing the unspoken power of education.

“I no longer see myself as a housewife,” Ahmad Saleh said. “I believe I can make a change in the world. I will do so by becoming a teacher, advocating for education and ensuring children understand the importance of education.”

For AlAboud, “Yamal” – the Arabic translation of “hope” – undergirds her embrace of discomfort.

“I want to tell my younger self to trust in God and that things will change for the better,” AlAboud said. “I now have hope in life. I’m proud that I’ve made it this far and achieved what I dreamed of.”

Ahmad Saleh finds the most coveted gift of education is “learning to communicate with people from different backgrounds.”

AlAboud said her education pushed her to envision a future beyond Jordan.

“With my education, I now dream of moving to a foreign country and graduating from one of the best universities,” AlAboud said. “I know that I’m going to make it one day – that I’m going to study, finish everything and achieve my dreams.”

Alloush said she hopes girls with the privilege of receiving an education “never give up.”

“Nothing will be easy,” Alloush said. “We have to put in the effort to become better and study better. Then, you will realize that it’s all for something – it’s worth it.”

One day, Alloush said she dreams the war in Syria will end and “life will be beautiful.” She sees her education as the most powerful tool she has been afforded.

“Through my education, I will define our future and help our children,” Alloush said. “Through my education, I am learning methods of discussion and dialogue. Through my education, I have broken the barrier of ignorance. That is the greatest gift of them all.”

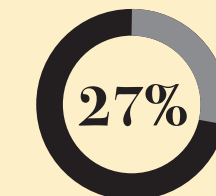
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## By the numbers: Refugee crisis



Half of all refugees do not receive an education.



27% of refugee girls attend secondary school.



50% of refugee girls in secondary school dropped out during the pandemic.

Sources: Education Development Trust, UNHCR

Photos by Grace Hamilton Graphics by Eden Leavy