



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

A photograph of a woman wearing a grey headscarf, holding a young child in a striped sweater. Another child is visible in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The background is dark and out of focus.

THE SYRIA CRISIS

Six Years
of Conflict

An update for private supporters
on the situation inside Syria

Contents

Six years of conflict: Timeline of a crisis	4
Six ways you're helping families still inside Syria	8
Six stories of people you've helped	10

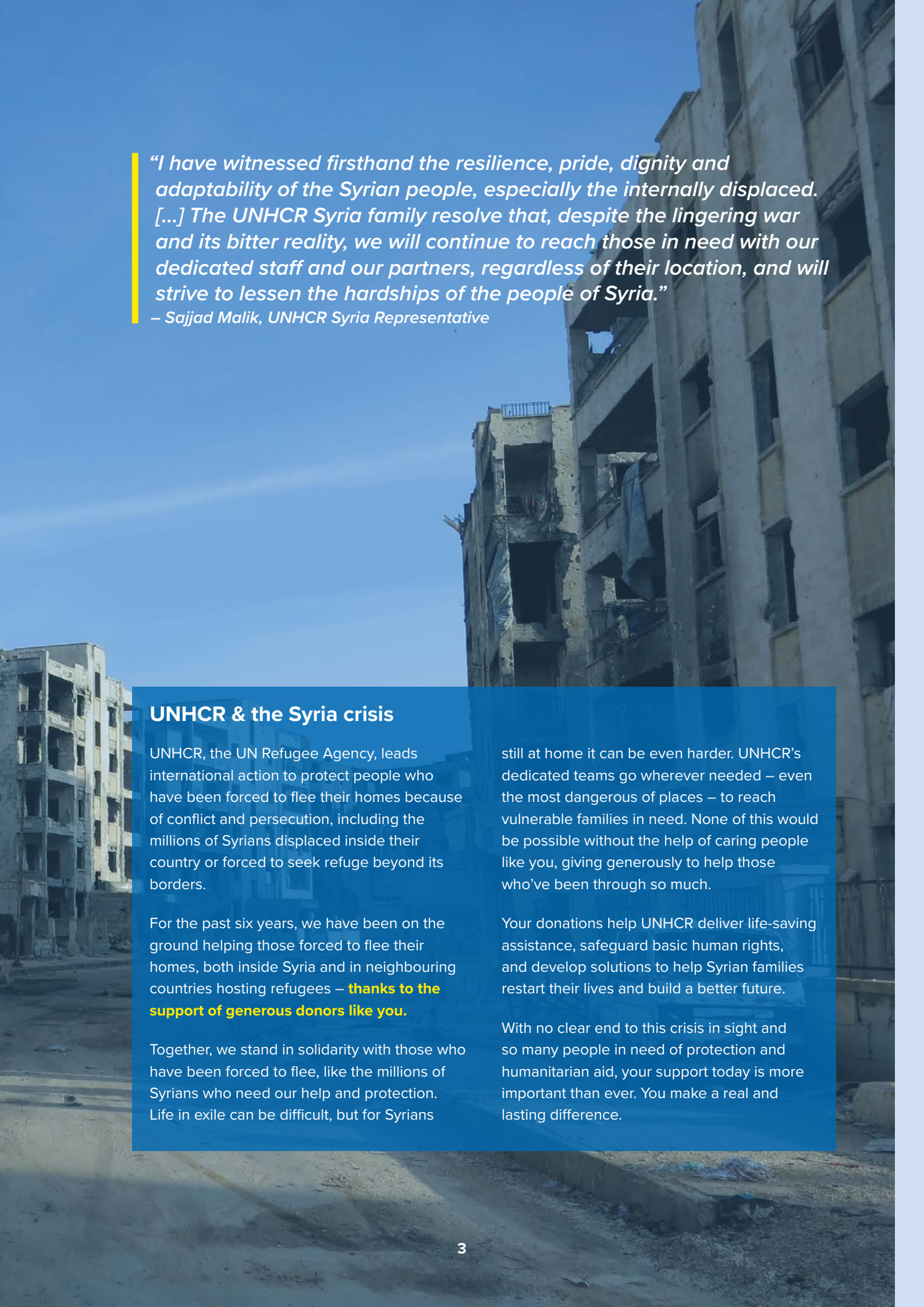
Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared by UNHCR's Private Sector Partnerships (PSP) Private Sector Communication team to update private donors and supporters on how they are helping Syrians forced to flee their homes.

Design: UNHCR DES

Cover image: © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

Published: 7 March 2017



“I have witnessed firsthand the resilience, pride, dignity and adaptability of the Syrian people, especially the internally displaced. [...] The UNHCR Syria family resolve that, despite the lingering war and its bitter reality, we will continue to reach those in need with our dedicated staff and our partners, regardless of their location, and will strive to lessen the hardships of the people of Syria.”

– Sajjad Malik, UNHCR Syria Representative

UNHCR & the Syria crisis

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, leads international action to protect people who have been forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution, including the millions of Syrians displaced inside their country or forced to seek refuge beyond its borders.

For the past six years, we have been on the ground helping those forced to flee their homes, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries hosting refugees – **thanks to the support of generous donors like you.**

Together, we stand in solidarity with those who have been forced to flee, like the millions of Syrians who need our help and protection. Life in exile can be difficult, but for Syrians

still at home it can be even harder. UNHCR's dedicated teams go wherever needed – even the most dangerous of places – to reach vulnerable families in need. None of this would be possible without the help of caring people like you, giving generously to help those who've been through so much.

Your donations help UNHCR deliver life-saving assistance, safeguard basic human rights, and develop solutions to help Syrian families restart their lives and build a better future.

With no clear end to this crisis in sight and so many people in need of protection and humanitarian aid, your support today is more important than ever. You make a real and lasting difference.

Six years of conflict: Timeline of a crisis

Do you remember when conflict erupted in Syria six years ago? At the time, no one could have known that it would become the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time.

Six years on, there are nearly five million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and beyond. Inside Syria, over six million people have been forced to flee their homes to seek safety elsewhere in the country.

Here is a look at some of the key events and milestones that have marked the past six years. Through it all, with your support, UNHCR has continued to assist the millions of Syrians who have been forced from home, while calling on all parties to find a permanent peaceful resolution.

2011

March

The Syria crisis begins when peaceful protests spread nationwide.

May

Protests grow, violence escalates, and Syrian families begin to flee their homes. In Turkey, the first refugee camps open.

2012

July

UNHCR and Jordanian authorities open Zaatari Refugee Camp. One year later, it will be home to some 120,000 refugees.

December

The number of Syrian refugees seeking safety in neighbouring countries reaches half a million. People continue to arrive, in need of protection by UNHCR.



2013

March

One million Syrian refugees are now registered with UNHCR.

April

UNHCR warns of the global implications of the crisis and the increased need for funds to support the Syrians who have found safety in host countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. The influx of Syrian refugees is a significant strain on these countries, which is why UNHCR works to support both refugees and local communities in host countries, thanks to the generosity of donors like you.

August

The number of Syrian refugee children reaches one million. The next month, the total number of Syrian refugees passes the two million mark.

2014

March

Over six million people are thought to be displaced within Syria. By mid-2014, nearly half of Syria's 22 million population is estimated to be affected by the conflict and in need of humanitarian aid.

October

More and more Syrians risk deadly sea journeys across the Mediterranean to reach safety in Europe. By the end of the month, 31% of all those arriving by sea are Syrian.

2015

July

The number of Syrian refugees surpasses the four million mark.

August

The UN Security Council expresses grave alarm over the continuing crisis in Syria, which has claimed an estimated 250,000 lives, and displaced 12 million people.

September

The image of a Syrian toddler, Aylan Kurdi, whose body washed up on a Turkish beach after a failed attempt to reach Greece, shocks the world. UNHCR sends teams to Greece and other transit countries including Hungary and Serbia, to offer protection and support to the tens of thousands of people arriving in Europe in search of safety.

2016

January

UNHCR takes part in an aid convoy to deliver life-saving food aid and blankets to starving civilians trapped in besieged towns inside Syria, including Madaya. More convoys follow, bringing UNHCR blankets, winter clothes and other aid to families in desperate need.

July

A fierce battle breaks out for control of Aleppo, largely cutting off humanitarian access to Syria's largest city and threatening the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians. Renewed fighting in August displaces thousands, leaving many people out on the streets. UNHCR rushes to provide shelter and basic items like mattresses and blankets to the displaced.

December

After months of siege of eastern Aleppo, government forces re-establish control over the entire city. Your donations allow UNHCR to give out essential aid including winter clothes, to keep displaced families warm and dry through the harsh winter months.



2017

January

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, travels to Syria. After spending time in Homs, he heads to Aleppo. Shocked by the scale of the devastation, he calls for accelerated humanitarian aid for millions of people trying to rebuild their lives in Syria:

“We need resources, irrespective of all the politics around this war. This is absolutely necessary and urgent for millions of people in Syria. We saw it in Damascus, we saw it in Homs, and we see it in Aleppo...All the Syrian people need help. We cannot abandon them because the crisis is not over.”

- Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017

Six ways you're helping families still inside Syria

Six years since the start of the crisis, the needs of people displaced inside Syria continue to grow. Throughout it all, UNHCR has been present, delivering the vital support your donations make possible.

Together, we continue to help Syrian families in their hour of greatest need. Their resilience is inspiring. UNHCR is the primary agency leading on protection and community services, shelter and the distribution of essential relief items inside Syria. Despite serious risks to their own safety, our staff are out there every day, helping identify and assist those in most need. We couldn't do it without the donations of caring people like you. Here are six ways you've helped struggling families in Syria this past year.

1 You sheltered families forced to flee their homes

After six years of conflict, hundreds of thousands of houses in Syria have been damaged or completely destroyed, forcing millions to seek refuge in collective shelters like schools, unfinished buildings or cramped basements. For women, children, the elderly and the disabled, living in these conditions can be especially risky. UNHCR teams work hard, day in and day out, to give Syrians displaced inside the country access to proper shelter. For example, we renovate family housing and collective shelters. When other options are not available, we provide tents to give emergency shelter to families forced to flee. In 2016, your generous donations helped UNHCR provide shelter support to over 91,000 displaced people in need inside Syria.

2 You helped protect the most vulnerable

In 2016, thanks to your support, UNHCR reached over two million vulnerable people in Syria with protection and community services. This includes legal aid, psychosocial support, vocational training, community-based initiatives as well as raising awareness on issues like sexual violence. For example, UNHCR and partners helped people who lost their birth certificates or other key documents when they fled their homes to apply for new ones. This legal aid is key to ensuring people can access basic services like education and health.

3

You helped protect the **health and well-being** of displaced people

Damaged health facilities. Shortage of medicine and staff. Power outages. Six years of conflict have dramatically deteriorated healthcare services in Syria. To protect the health of the most affected communities, UNHCR and partners provide free access to primary health clinics and support life-saving medical and surgical interventions, among other activities. In 2016, nearly 700,000 displaced people in Syria had access to health care – through the support of generous donors like you.

4

You gave children a **chance to learn**

Thousands of schools in Syria have been destroyed as a result of the conflict. In 2016, UNHCR worked with 13 education partners inside Syria to provide education-related activities in community centres, shelters and public schools, to ensure access to education for displaced and refugee children affected by the crisis. Tens of thousands of primary and secondary students have benefited from extra training, remedial and catch-up classes, with teachers trained on child protection and psychosocial support, in coordination with the Ministry of Education.

Did you know?

Since the start of the crisis in 2011, the average life expectancy in Syria has fallen by 20 years.

5

You gave **vital supplies** to those most in need

When people are forced to flee their homes, like millions in Syria have had to do, they often leave with nothing but the clothes on their back. That is why providing basic supplies like warm blankets, kitchen sets and jerry cans for water is so vital. In 2016, thanks to your support, UNHCR reached over three million people with basic aid items like these. We deliver essential supplies to the most vulnerable – even in hard-to-reach areas. During times of extra hardship, we adapt the supplies we provide. Over the past winter, for example, we provided more than 579,000 high thermal blankets and 158,000 winter clothing kits, to help people survive the coldest months. Sometimes a simple blanket can make all the difference to a child or adult exposed to the cold, wind and rain, without the protection of a home.

6

You helped people **find a way to earn a living** to support their families

Building on the resilience of people struggling to survive inside Syria, UNHCR helps displaced families and host communities improve their well-being and situation by providing vocational and life skills training. These courses included language courses, sewing, hairdressing, computer and knitting. In the first six months of 2016, your donations also supported the distribution of 2,000 livelihoods kits including plumbing or carpentry kits to displaced people who have lost their means of living. Together, in the same period, we gave out over 160 small business grants, to empower the most affected displaced people to start new businesses. This helps the local economies and benefits the community.

Six years of conflict: Six stories of people you've helped

When you read about the crisis in Syria, the numbers are staggering. Six years. Nearly five million refugees. Six million displaced inside Syria, forced to flee their homes to seek safety elsewhere in the country. Many are unable to leave and depend on the help of UNHCR and our partners on the ground.

But behind each of these numbers are real people with hopes, dreams, and families. People just like you. UNHCR and partners are working to bring assistance to as many as possible – thanks to the support of donors like you. Six years on, here are the stories of six resilient individuals and families in Syria carrying on through it all, from the hardships of conflict to the trials of flight.

Helping Basirah survive winter

Basirah comes from a village in rural Lattakia. She was forced to flee her home due to conflict but eventually returned. Her husband died in the crisis and she now lives alone. Basirah herself suffers from injuries, with a bullet and a splinter in one leg. This winter, she received winter assistance from UNHCR including blankets to keep her warm during the cold winter months. *“Life is getting harder every day but UNHCR’s winter assistance will make life a bit easier for us,”* Basirah says.



Injured widow Basirah, who received UNHCR winter assistance including blankets.



Omar (right) and his friend Abdullah. Both passed their school exams after registering for remedial classes at a UNHCR-supported community centre in Damascus.

Helping Omar continue his education

Displacement and insecurity across Syria have caused thousands of Syrian children to miss school. 19-year-old Omar spent almost six years out of school, after dropping out to support his mother and sister when his father died. He worked odd jobs until, by chance, a friend told him about remedial classes offered at a UNHCR-supported community centre in Damascus. UNHCR's accelerated education programme aims to help students follow the curriculum and pass their exams, and give those who had to drop

out a chance to catch up on what they missed when displaced. Omar registered at one of the centers and last year he successfully passed his ninth-grade exams. "My mother was so surprised when she saw my certificate, for her it was unbelievable," he says, "Now I feel doors are open for me, I can dream about a good future after a long time of distress."



Displaced from Homs, 36-year-old Sherien was given a fresh start thanks to a UNHCR livelihoods programme and small business grant scheme.

© UNHCR/Bassam Diab

Giving Sherien a chance to start over

Before the war, Sherien worked as a hairdresser in Homs, where she lived a quiet, normal life with her parents, siblings and close niece Lara. Then her neighbourhood was attacked. Sherien spent three horrifying days hiding in a basement. After that, she fled to Damascus for safety. There, news reached Sherien that her family home and her brother's restaurant had been destroyed, throwing her into a deep depression. Everything seemed to be falling apart around her. With no college education, Sherien's hope in life began to fade. But her young niece Lara gave her the strength to start over. "She looked up to me as a role model and it was hard on me to let her down," Sherien explains. Determined not to let that happen, Sherien applied for a

hairdressing course under a UNHCR vocational training programme. She did so well, obtaining two certificates in hairdressing and makeup, that she went on to complete a business skills course. This qualified her to apply for a UNHCR small business grant and open her own salon. These grants are designed to help displaced people inside Syria, like Sherien, start their own businesses. "My salon is proof that I exist," says the 36-year-old, who has gone from pain and despair to success, through hard work and sheer determination. The salon has brought hope for a better life to the entire family. Her brother is giving her a helping hand and her niece Lara is excelling in school. Sherien named the salon after her.

Helping Mazen restart his life

Before war broke out in 2011, Mazen ran a bustling tailor's shop with a staff of 25. But when fierce fighting closed in on his home, Mazen, his wife and three sons quickly packed their lives into a few bags and fled to nearby Damascus. "I left when I heard the first gunshot in our neighborhood. I thought it would be a few days and we would return home," Mazen says, "We still don't know what happened to our house." Forced out of his home and thriving tailor's business, the 46-year-old first survived by taking cleaning jobs and selling clothes. But he was anxious to get back to the job he knew best: tailoring.

To cut costs, he started over working out of an old rented van. Last year, he received a small business grant under a UNHCR-backed programme to help displaced people find a source of income and plans to rent a shop with sufficient space to rebuild his tailoring business. "I am working to feed my three children," says Mazen, "Imagine your child asks you to buy him something and you are powerless to do anything about it." The hard-working tailor is just one of the many displaced people inside Syria determined to support their families no matter what.



After losing his home and job, 46-year-old Mazen benefited from a UNHCR-backed small business grant to restart his tailor business.



Nuzha with one of her nine children, outside their UNHCR tent in a camp for displaced people in Tartous.

Sheltering Nuzha's family

39-year-old Nuzha fled her home in Aleppo with her family when fighting reached the neighbourhood they lived in. Seeking safety, the family sought refuge in a former summer camp turned into a camp for hundreds of displaced Syrian families. Located in the coastal city of Tartous, the camp mainly hosts Syrians displaced from Aleppo. "*We suffer here with the weather but otherwise we can survive,*" says Nuzha, who, like so many, wishes to "return safely to our home."

Nahla's story: Healing the deep wounds of war

As a psychiatrist in Syria, Nahla has a tough job. The 35-year-old heads up the mental health and psychosocial support department of a UNHCR-funded clinic in Damascus, treating the increasing number of Syrians affected by psychological trauma after years of brutal conflict in their homeland. The most common conditions are depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. "The crisis has had a deep psychological effect on people," explains Nahla, who is determined to help. Many of her colleagues have left Syria, but she stayed. "Before the crisis I wanted to move abroad and specialize in child psychiatry, but I changed my mind and stayed to be with my family and help my country," she says. That decision was not without cost. Like many of her colleagues, Nahla has lost family members and has herself been displaced from home by the fighting. The work also takes a psychological toll on medical practitioners themselves. "No one is unaffected by what's happening in Syria," she says, which makes her work all the more critical.



Syrian psychiatrist Nahla (right) heads up the mental health and psychosocial support department of a UNHCR-funded clinic in Damascus, treating people affected by psychological trauma.

unhcr.org