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Higher Education in Forced Displacement

A UNHCR PHOTO EXHIBITION

Commissioned by:

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With the support of



WORLDWIDE, THERE ARE OVER 21.3 MILLION REFUGEES. ONLY 1% HAVE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION.

This exhibition tells the stories of refugee students in Kenya and Jordan who overcome all the bleak figures, odds, boundaries and labels to take control of their lives and achieve success on their own terms. These are the stories of individuals who do not let their unfavorable situations define who they are and who they want to become, and of the programmes that support their journeys to more meaningful lives. These are stories of those who have the chance to unlock their potential, who are translating their hardships into motivation. Ultimately, these are stories of resilience and hope, of solidarity and determination, of self-realization in the face of adversity.

The men and women you will meet are refugees by necessity. They became students by choice, and with the difficulty of opportunity: financial pressure on their households, language and cultural barriers; competitive learning programmes undertaken in contexts with restricted access to electricity and connectivity. Sometimes they must also meet the realities of movement restrictions, police harassment, and tiresome legal and

administrative procedures that their host community peers don't have to navigate.

By seizing opportunity despite its cost, by refusing to let challenges become obstacles, their student cards rather than their refugee cards come to define them. The powerful programs that support these students, whether DAFI scholarships or Connected Learning opportunities, provide platforms for greater protection. Higher education nurtures refugee students as change-makers who can take the lead in identifying sustainable solutions for themselves and their communities. It gives them back a sense of self-worth, belonging and purpose. It is what enables them to thrive, not just survive.

Regardless of the challenges ahead, the students you will meet in this exhibition are determined to constantly aim higher. In the refugee world, certainty is a scarce commodity, and the future is largely unknown. For now, all they know is that higher education sets them on a hopeful trajectory, and maximizes their chances to build a brighter future for themselves, their families, their communities and, ultimately, their countries. It is a stepping stone to becoming who they are. Everything else is beyond their control.

The Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) virtual global classroom, situated in Kakuma 1, the oldest and most densely-populated part of the Kenyan refugee camp. In this classroom, 79 students, 22 of whom are women, follow a blended three-year Diploma of Liberal Studies, combining face to face support with online learning.

JWL offers a much-needed higher learning opportunity in a context characterized by challenges. Obstacles facing students include financial difficulties, cultural or traditional practices that do not favor girl's education, congested schools, under-resourced facilities, a lack of trained teachers, and often gaps in recognition of earlier studies.

But within these constrained conditions, JWL is a beacon of hope, providing a high quality degree from Regis University, from within the camp conditions.

“Education has a high value in it self; it is timeless,” says Yves Shema, the Project Director. “What gives me hope and encouragement is that I know that once our students leave our programme, they are well educated and have many more chances to succeed in life.”

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Mariam, 22, from Somalia. Arrived at the Kakuma refugee camp in 2008. Enrolled in the Diploma of Liberal Studies offered by JWL.

"I think the best way to defeat an idea is to educate people. As Mandela said, "education is the greatest weapon you can use to change the world." In my community, there

are cultural norms which I disagree with, especially regarding limits to girls' education. I believe I can contribute to transforming these norms. I have to study hard in order to help change my society.

I believe in the future generation and people like me who can make the world a better and more peaceful place.

Today I am still a refugee, I don't have a choice. But I believe in myself. It doesn't matter how long it will take, I will make something out of my life."

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“My mother never went to school. Sometimes she doesn’t see the value of education. But I am powerful, I know what’s right or wrong, and that I need to do as much as I can to educate myself.

Being raised by a single mother, I had to work from age 6. I was selling sweets on the streets. My family couldn’t afford the school fees. At that time, I would sneak into schools and try to learn small things, like how to spell my name for instance. One day, the head teacher called me over. After I explained my situation, he helped me enrol. I am so grateful to him. I owe him a lot.

Here in Kenya, my studies were not recognized. Besides, I didn’t know English then. So I had to return to grade 3. After two weeks, I was moved to grade 4. From then on, thanks to my hard work, I kept on jumping classes.

I have always had dreams. That’s what has kept me motivated all this time.”

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Mariam shows her student ID.

“This JWL programme is excellent and I am very grateful to all who have supported it. I cannot relocate to go to university, in Nairobi for instance, but this special opportunity allows me to study here in Kakuma, near my family.

There are still challenges. The largest I face is that I also have to work and provide for my family. They depend on me. I have a mother and two sisters. Our father abandoned us when my mother was pregnant with me. So I study and work to have a better future.

I work for UNHCR as an interpreter. Sometimes they require me there at the same time I need to study. It often falls at the same time, which can be a problem since I cannot study at night.”

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Mireille, 34, from Burundi. Mother of four. Arrived in Kakuma in October 2015 and is enrolled in the French-language course on Ethics offered by the University of Geneva in InZone's MOOC Learning Center.

“One morning in June 2015, armed men came to our house in Bujumbura and arrested my husband, my cousin, and I. They accused us of organizing demonstrations against the regime. In prison, I was tortured and raped. My

husband disappeared and I haven't heard from him yet. My cousin was murdered.

On this photo, you can see my ankle, which was broken by one of the policemen, using a metal bar. On the other one, you see Claude, the man who helped me escape, carrying me together with two other men. We fled to Rwanda, where my children and I were reunified. I finally got surgery in Nairobi, thanks to UNHCR, and, after five months, got

transferred with my family to Kakuma.

This experience left me traumatized. They broke my leg, yes, but it's my heart that was really wounded. I don't keep these photos as evidence but as memories, to help me remember what happened and to remind me how much good or evil can be in someone.”

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Claude (left) is the man who helped Mireille escape from Burundi. In camp language, Mireille and her four children are “size 5”.

“Back home, I was far into my bachelor’s in economics at Lake Tanganyika University when all this started. I was actually writing my final thesis. But after all that happened, I was traumatized and depressed. I barely left home for almost a year. The men who had thrown us into jail even came all the way to Kakuma, searching for us. I lived in fear.

Here in Kenya, my education is not recognized. There is also the language issue. I am working on my English but it still requires improvement. One day I heard about the courses in French provided by InZone, on Ethics and on Children’s Rights. I decided to apply. Distance learning courses are a good alternative to traditional learning, until I can finally complete my bachelor’s, and hopefully my master’s.

I wish to raise my kids in a safe environment, where they receive quality education. Here in the camp, it is difficult. My dream is to open an orphanage. I myself grew up in one. Children need to receive all the opportunities we can give them.”

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From left to right, the DAFI contingent studying at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kakuma campus: Chelia, 26, Chagodi, 28, Mvuyekure, 29, Martin, 25, Omar, 27.

Omar: "This is our main classroom. But professors have been on strike for four weeks now, all over Kenya. Usually they are flown to Kakuma to teach for a week or so, which often creates scheduling problems."

Chelia: "Learning here in the camp is very difficult, because of the environment, especially the heat. It is hard to concentrate."

Mvuyekure: "A big challenge is the distance between our homes and the campus. Using moto taxis is expensive. All five of us have to work as teachers or community mobilizers, for which we get incentives. Yet this is a great opportunity, for which I am very grateful. After I came from Burundi in 2010, I completed several distance learning courses, but I was looking for an on-campus degree. Now I know I will achieve my dream of completing higher education, unlike most refugees, unfortunately."

Chagodi: "There is not a single book or computer on this campus. It is a problem for our assignments, when we have to look for references, etc. We rely mostly on our handwritten notes, our phones and the handouts we manage to print out. Yet I am very grateful to UNHCR and DAFI for the chance I was given. Initially, I was hopeless, like many people in the camps. I didn't know what to do after finishing high school. But I got this chance and I want to give back to the community. I tell them that they must work hard to achieve their dreams."

Omar: "I am grateful to all UN agencies supporting refugees here. The UN is like a mother and a father to orphan refugees. When they go through the education system here, they get to understand that they are human beings, that they are important. Many of them don't actually know that. Myself, I arrived here when I was 12. I did my primary, secondary and tertiary education here. This is something great. I really want to give back to the society, even as a volunteer. It doesn't matter where I will be. As long as there is a human being that needs support and who I can help, I will do something. Not financially but through my knowledge."





Martin, 25, DAFI scholar, from South Sudan. In Kakuma since February 2006. BA in Commerce at Masinde Muliro University, on Kakuma campus.

"I enrolled here before I got the DAFI scholarship. The first year, I was paying for the fees myself. It was very challenging. When I got the scholarship, I felt deeply relieved. Now I am very optimistic. I am working hard. When I'm done with my degree next year, I will be able to face life outside. I will do my best to change things positively for people. I will also try to do a master's degree. I see a bright future for myself. I always have. I am getting there, thanks to my hard work.

When you go to the camps, you'll see youth that have finished high school and do not move on to higher levels. We need more support and more opportunities, if possible. Through education, by helping refugees you are helping society. Take the five of us here: now we are empowered and will be able to make a difference in our home countries. Higher education opens up your horizon and perspectives. It elevates you. Refugee youth are willing to learn, to excel. They can benefit so much from it."

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Chelia, 26, DAFI scholar, from South Sudan. In Kakuma since 2002. BA in Disaster Management, Conflict Resolution and Humanitarian Assistance at Masinde Muliro University, on Kakuma campus.

"When I got the DAFI scholarship, I was happy because I was finally able to fulfill my dream. I always dreamed of going to university but I never had enough money. The scholarship is a blessing. It is taking me beyond what I had imagined. When I got the scholarship, I knew I was going to do my best. There are challenges but I don't let them be obstacles. I look at them as lessons and as directions for what I want to achieve.

This scholarship has helped me a lot because what I have learned I am now able to share with my community. My degree is in conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance. In the future, I want to help widows and orphans. I feel I should always be by their side, helping them. I have always had the dream of opening an orphanage. It can be anywhere. Another dream is to build a hospital and a school.

I believe education is what is inside someone. Whatever the situation one is in, it's up to them to know what they want. With hope and faith, one should be able to do what they want."

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Clarisse, 21, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Kakuma since October 2015. Enrolled in InZone's 8-week course on Human Rights.

"I grew up in the South Kivu Province of DRC but we had to leave to the North Province first, with my parents and my four siblings. Then we had to leave the country because my father was persecuted. He was a Professor of Human Rights.

When we reached the border between DRC and Uganda, we were arrested by soldiers. They killed my father and raped my mother. I ran away and ended up here. I heard that my family went back to DRC.

I don't know anyone here. I live by myself. I had to leave the Congolese quarter because I was being annoyed by boys there. Now I live among Ethiopians. I don't want to get together with a boy because then I'd have to get married and have kids. All I want to do for the moment is study and make a future for myself."

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"When I finished my secondary school in Congo, I was prepared by my father to go to university in Nairobi, but I was not able to do so because of the war. When I arrived here, I started to learn English: basic and then advanced. Now it is very good. Then I took a computer course for six months. Now I'm taking this Human Rights course with InZone. Once I'm done with it, I'll be able to help my community and other people anywhere in the world.

I will apply for scholarships. That's also why I've worked so much on my English. Here in Kenya, my secondary education is not recognized. It's an issue. My opportunities here are limited. I haven't been able to go to university yet, although I've tried. So I started volunteering as a teacher at Mogadishu Primary School. I am hoping it will eventually help me get into university.

What's my future going to be like? I really don't know. All I know is that I must keep studying and take all my chances."

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Innocent (and wife Aline), 34, from Burundi. In Kakuma since July 2013. Diploma in Liberal Studies with JRS-JWL.

“I left my home country when I was a pharmacy student, due to a family conflict. I was about to finish my studies and they got scared that I might become some kind of threat to them. They threatened me and I had to leave.

When I got here, the first thing I did was to learn English. After that, I joined the JWL diploma course. My wife also studies. We will both graduate by 2020. Our plan is to go back to Burundi and stay with her family, unless something comes up. You never know.

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“We go to church every Sunday. Since I arrived here in Kakuma, I’ve met so many people from various countries and backgrounds. Some of them have experienced hardships way bigger than mine. But still they are generous to each other. You see solidarity everywhere. We talk together as equals. This has been a great lesson for me.”

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“When I arrived, I wanted to keep learning. I was afraid that if I found a job, it would take me away from my studies. Studies are what will truly help me in the long run, not money. The conflicts in my home country happened because people do not have enough education. Also, I wanted to show my family that what they did was wrong and that they should never harm anyone in the same way ever again.

But still with my wife we had to sustain ourselves. So we started our own liquid soap business.

One part of our house is a little shop, another one is our production space. In front of the house, we’ve planted aloe vera that we use to cure various problems in the community. We sell our soap to locals as well as to schools, etc. My background in pharmacy and chemistry came in handy. I was also trained in Nairobi for two days. That’s where I get the raw material and chemicals from.”

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Hodan, 24, from Somalia. Born in Dagahaley camp, in Dadaab, Kenya. DAFI scholar. Bachelor's in International Relations at University of Nairobi (1st year).

"At my final high-school examination in 2012, I received a C grade. I was missing three points to apply for the WUSC scholarship to go to Canada. So I repeated my final year and finally got B minus. Then I applied for the scholarship, but my birth date and place were incorrect on my refugee certificate, so I was rejected. I've tried to have it changed but have never succeeded. I wasted three years. I was teaching at different schools during that time, but my mind was still on the scholarship. It is something I had been aiming for since my childhood. So I was extremely disappointed. I had lost every hope.

In 2016, I applied for the DAFI scholarship and was accepted. My plan was to study medicine, but it wasn't possible in the end. In any case, I am very appreciative of the opportunity I was given.

My family has always been very supportive. Without their efforts, I wouldn't be where I am today. Usually in my community, girls are not encouraged to study. Their grades are not as good as the boys', due to house duties, early marriage, etc. It's unfair. But in my case, I only have one brother and four sisters, so my father had no choice! All of us have completed our secondary education."

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"I came to Nairobi in October last year. Life here is quite challenging. I miss my family a lot. I only have my brother here. The cost of living is high too. The rent is expensive, transportation and printing school materials too. There is also the problem of being bothered by the police. Here in the city, but also when I travel back to the camp by bus.

The campus is a safe place. There, no one cares if I'm a refugee or not. I'm just a student.

I see a bright future for myself. Being born in a refugee camp will not make me give up my dreams. I study International Relations. After I finish, and once there is peace and stability in my home country Somalia, hopefully, I wish to become an Ambassador. Or even the Minister of Foreign Affairs!"

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Geneviève, 22, from Rwanda. DAFI scholar. Bachelor's in education at Kenyatta University in Nairobi.

"I am passionate about education. In order to survive as refugees, acquiring education is the only way. I am a living proof of that. I study education and have been teaching for a while now in Kenyan schools, during my holidays. It has been great. I am also a football coach.

In the future, I wish to work with different organizations to support street kids and refugee kids. Many of them have a hard time going to school. I want to do something for them. I hope to obtain a Kenyan work permit, but it is not easy, and it is expensive."

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"I was actually born in a camp in Congo. After that we went through Uganda, and we arrived in Nairobi when I was about 1 year old. I grew up in Nairobi, so for me, language is not an issue. I can totally blend in.

However, when you apply for university, your file is marked with a "F", for "Foreigner", and your fees are significantly higher. There is also the issue of police harassment. They often stop you on the streets and ask for your papers. Then, although everything is in order, they bother you and extort money from you. Sometimes they even bring you to the police station and detain you there, until you pay something."

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From left to right: Muna, Fatuma, Kimonyo, Abdi and Isnino. Enrolled in distance BA in Arts and Geography from York University, Toronto. In the back, the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) Center in Dadaab.

Isnino: "This degree is making us feel important. We are very devoted to it. Without BHER, it would be impossible for us to pursue higher education. Here we can interact with so many different people, from different cultures. We learn a lot from one another, including from the students at York University in Toronto."

Muna: "Women are really encouraged and supported here. It is very much needed and appreciated. This programme has shaped us into who we are today. But we need more opportunities like this one."

Kimonyo: "When I arrived in 2010, I had lost all my hope. My future had died. But when I saw the ad for the BHER programme in 2013, I was the very first one to apply! Now I'm empowered. I can do many things. Education opens our thinking."

All: "There are many challenges here: if we do find work, we are largely underpaid. The

Kenyan encampment policy is restrictive for us. The Internet connectivity is bad. At home, electricity is also a problem. Access to computers too. And there is the recognition of our degrees. We're being told: "this course is only for refugees, for people who hope to leave Kenya. It is just for entertainment." They don't understand how valuable it actually is."

Isnino: "The real learning is what's happening in the classroom, beyond racism, gender or culture. We're changing one another. We accept people as they are. We respect each other."



Mark (center), 54, from Uganda. In Dadaab since 1987. Distance BA in Arts and Geography from York University, Toronto, through the BHER program.

"I came here when I was 25. I am now 54. I remained almost 30 years without learning anything new. I was in a state of mental hibernation. It was like I was asleep for eternity. But learning woke me up. I had been teaching since 1997 but myself, I wasn't learning. I wasn't exposed to anything new. At some point I needed to understand what sort of things people are engaging in nowadays, what kind of innovative studies people are now getting into.

Now with this degree, I'm trying to explore, discover and understand. I have to shape my perception of things. I'm updating my knowledge. It has been very interesting for me. It has made me understand how the world is being driven. I hope to continue my studies, depending on my performance. Hopefully I will have the opportunity to do a master's degree.

I have four children. They are all studying. I don't want them to be like me. They must surpass me in learning. I want them to have more opportunities and greater liberty to make their own choices."

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Abdallah (left), 29, married and father of one. Originally from Dara'a, Syria, and living in Jordan since 2014. Nora, 30. From Palmyra, Syria. Residing in Jordan since 2015. Both are enrolled in InZone's Global History MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) – in partnership with Princetown University – delivered at CARE's Community Center in Azraq camp.

Abdallah: "In Syria, I was in my fourth year of economics and accounting studies. I was also a teacher in primary and secondary schools. One day, on my way back from university, I was arrested at a checkpoint and detained for 24 hours. They sent me home but didn't allow me to commute anymore. Our city was then under siege for two years. When the Free Syrian Army opened a breach, my wife and I left. Our families stayed behind.

Having to stop studying was like a slap in the face. I was hugely disappointed. Since I've been here, I've volunteered for several organizations in the camp and have taken different online courses. I recently enrolled in the InZone programme here at the center. It is excellent."

Nora: "I was working in the archive unit of the Syrian Ministry of Agriculture and was a political science student at Damascus University. When the war started, I could no longer go to the university. There were too many checkpoints and arrests. We couldn't leave the city. Electricity, wood, water: everything became scarce. Bombs were falling down every day. One day it fell on our home and killed my father. We all thought we would die. The only thing we learned during that time was to identify the various types of aircrafts and what kind of armament they carried. When we got the chance, my mother, my seven siblings and I fled. I can no longer think about Syria. I am still in shock. I saw too many dead bodies there. All I want to do is keep studying and find a job."



Bushra, 23, from Dara'a, Syria. In Irbid, Jordan since 2013. Here at UNHCR Offices in Irbid. DAFI scholar. Pharmacy studies at Philadelphia University.

“Due the war, our family was separated. I live here in Jordan with my mother and two of my brothers. Two of my sisters are still in Syria, one is in the US, one in Turkey and one in Saudi Arabia.

When I came here, all I could think of was “when will I go back?”. Studying was not in my mind. Eventually, I enrolled in pharmacy at Philadelphia University. I didn't have a scholarship then so for two years, life was very challenging, financially speaking. I worked as a home teacher to support myself.

But now that I have a scholarship, I can fully concentrate on my studies and on getting the best possible grades; they have gone up, by the way, with the scholarship.”



“Life is easier now. My late dad was a physician and also wanted me to study at university. So now I have the possibility to fulfill his dream. Yet I feel bad for all the other students who had to interrupt their studies, and who don't have a scholarship. They need more support. I feel sorry for them. I hope they will get the same chance I did. In the future, I will help rebuild Syria. The society there will need a good drug delivery system, among many other things. I don't expect the war to be over by the time I complete my BA in two years. So I'll probably have to do my master's here in Jordan or abroad, if ever that is possible.”



Asmaa, 21, from Dara'a, Syria. In Jordan since 2012. DAFI scholar. BA in Arabic Literature at Zarqa University.

“When I got here, I went into my last year of high-school. But I wasn't able to keep up. Things were too different, too hard. I dropped out for two years. During that time, I worked in a clothing shop. I finally went back and passed the final examination.*

I finally got my hopes back up. Thanks to DAFI now, I only study. I don't have to work anymore. Life has changed for the better. Before I was sad. I was often crying. I had lost hope. Now I feel confident and successful. I am first in my class.”

** Her diploma sits on the desk in the study room (bottom left on the photo).*

“I am the oldest of seven siblings. So I have the responsibility to be a role model for them, to show them that they can be successful. After everything the family has been through, I want to give them all hope. I don't want to be looked at or labelled as a refugee but as an achiever. I also want to prove that refugees are full of skills and resources. They can contribute a lot. I will build my own future, my own identity. No one else will do that for me. I will take chances to thrive and won't wait for chances to come to me. One day, I will go back to Syria and teach there. I will contribute to educate future generations.”

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Asma'a, 23, from Dara'a, Syria, in front of family home, Zaatari camp, Jordan. DAFI scholar, Al al-Bayt University, BA in English Literature (1st year).

"I was studying English Literature at Damascus University. But we were forced to flee in 2012 due to the war. Until I received the DAFI scholarship, I was not able to resume my studies. We didn't have the financial means. For almost four years, I stayed home. I was very pessimistic about my future. My father used to be an English teacher in Syria so he would home-school me. But he was very sad too. It was stressful.

DAFI means that I'll have a brighter future. For me and my family. And for the next generation of Syrians. My dream is to become an English Literature Professor at University.

Receiving the scholarship was a huge relief. We danced all day! Life at university is beautiful. I have lots of friends there. We are all kind to each other.

Today is also my first day as English teacher for International Relief & Development. I am really excited!"

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Monther (right), 27, with brother, in front of family home, Zaatari camp, Jordan. From Syria. Law graduate (top of his class). DAFI scholar. Al al-Bayt University. In Jordan since August 2012.

"I was studying law in Damascus but we had to flee in August 2012. I interrupted my studies for two years. During that time I volunteered for several organizations, supporting the local community. It helped me get through that difficult period. It took me some adjust to the life here in the camp, with the heat, the power cuts, the limited services.

I was accepted in the DAFI program in 2014. I cannot even

describe how I felt that day. I was getting my hopes and my dreams back. Education is everything in my life. I am very grateful to Jordan, UNHCR and all the other organizations working in the camp.

Actually, I graduated just last week! Now I'll be looking for opportunities to do a master's degree, and hopefully a PhD. I can't stay too long without studying. But so far there isn't much available. Eventually, I want to go back to Syria and serve our people there, by using my skills and my knowledge."

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Maral (top), 18, from Baghdad, Iraq. She has lived in Jordan since March 2016. Abdul-Aziz (right), 19, from Baghdad, Iraq. Residing in Jordan from 2005-2007, Syria from 2007-2011, and Jordan again at end of 2011. Depicted here at Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Center in Amman.

Abdul-Aziz: "I was 7 when we left our home country. I've been studying with Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) for more than three years. I've taken several different online courses here. All of them are free. JWL is like a community for us. We come here to learn and to meet people. You know, most refugees don't have a lot of activities. JRS also supports us in looking for scholarships, without which it is impossible for us to go to university. The fees are simply too expensive."

Maral: "I came to Jordan one year ago with my family. I was two months into my 12th grade in Baghdad but was not able to continue that here. I came to JRS and have taken several courses so far: English, IT, psycho-social case management, etc. My family has applied for resettlement. We hope to go to Australia soon. If so, I'll try to complete my high-school there. We will see what happens. I don't have too many opportunities at the moment. I am motivated but... there's is some kind of void in my life."

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Jordan, March 2017





“I work 16 hours a day, every other day. Yet I still manage to have excellent grades. I am looking for a different job with less hours. That way I will be able to study more and reduce the overall duration of my studies. But the job market is tough for Syrians here. We do not necessarily get promoted despite our qualifications and skills.”

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Mohammad, 27. From Damascus, Syria. DAFI scholar. Business Administration at Amman Arab University. In Jordan since 2012.

“Since we arrived in 2012, I’ve been working as an accountant in a gas station here in Jordan. Until last year, I wasn’t studying at all. It was a very hard situation. The pressure was high. One day I opened Facebook and saw an ad

for DAFI. I was approaching the age limit for it. This was my last chance. It came to the rescue, so to speak.

Before the war, I was in my third year of English translation studies in Damascus. But the DAFI staff advised me to take Business Administration instead, because I’d have more opportunities afterwards.”



Ala'a (top), 22, and Omar (23). Both have lived in Jordan since March 2013, arriving from Dara'a, Syria. Both are DAFI scholars, taking a BA in Education at Al al-Bayt University

Ala'a: "I was studying media and journalism at Damascus University before the war. Here in Jordan, I spent two years with no access to formal education. I can't even start to describe how I felt when I received the DAFI scholarship. A year later, I got married and today I am a mother. Perhaps the scholarship was the key to good fortune!

For the past three years, I've been volunteering for Doctors Without Borders as social researcher and mental health supporter. We are achievers. This is the byproduct of our difficult life. It gives us extra motivation."

Omar: "Life here is different. Take the physical environment of the camp for instance: the lack of electricity, the houses, the roads, etc. We have had to adjust.

I studied Education for two years at Damascus University before we had to leave with my family. Here, in Jordan, I stayed three and a half years without studying. It was tough. I was hopeless. I volunteered for Mercy Corps in Zaatari refugee camp. Then I received a DAFI scholarship, thank God, but I had to start over because I couldn't obtain an equivalence of previous studies.

I wish to become of teacher at university and a 'trainer of trainers', but who knows what is going to happen? Our future is very uncertain at the moment."

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Ala'a, 22, on her way back from university, going home in Zaatari camp, Jordan.

“Life in the Zaatari refugee camp is difficult. I hope to complete a master’s degree and perhaps a PhD. My wish is to become a university professor. But I am scared that I might have to stay in this camp, or that I will not be able to obtain financial support to complete my studies.”

Higher education plays a central role in protecting young refugees and fostering pathways to solutions for their communities. The large-scale displacement seen today will have significant impact for UNHCR’s tertiary education programming.

So far, DAFI scholarships have supported more than 9000 students worldwide. Meanwhile, over 5000 students have benefited from connected learning programs. UNHCR and partners – including the Connected Learning Consortium for Higher Education for Refugees – will continue to explore innovative ways to expand access to quality higher education for refugees in effective and cost efficient ways.

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