

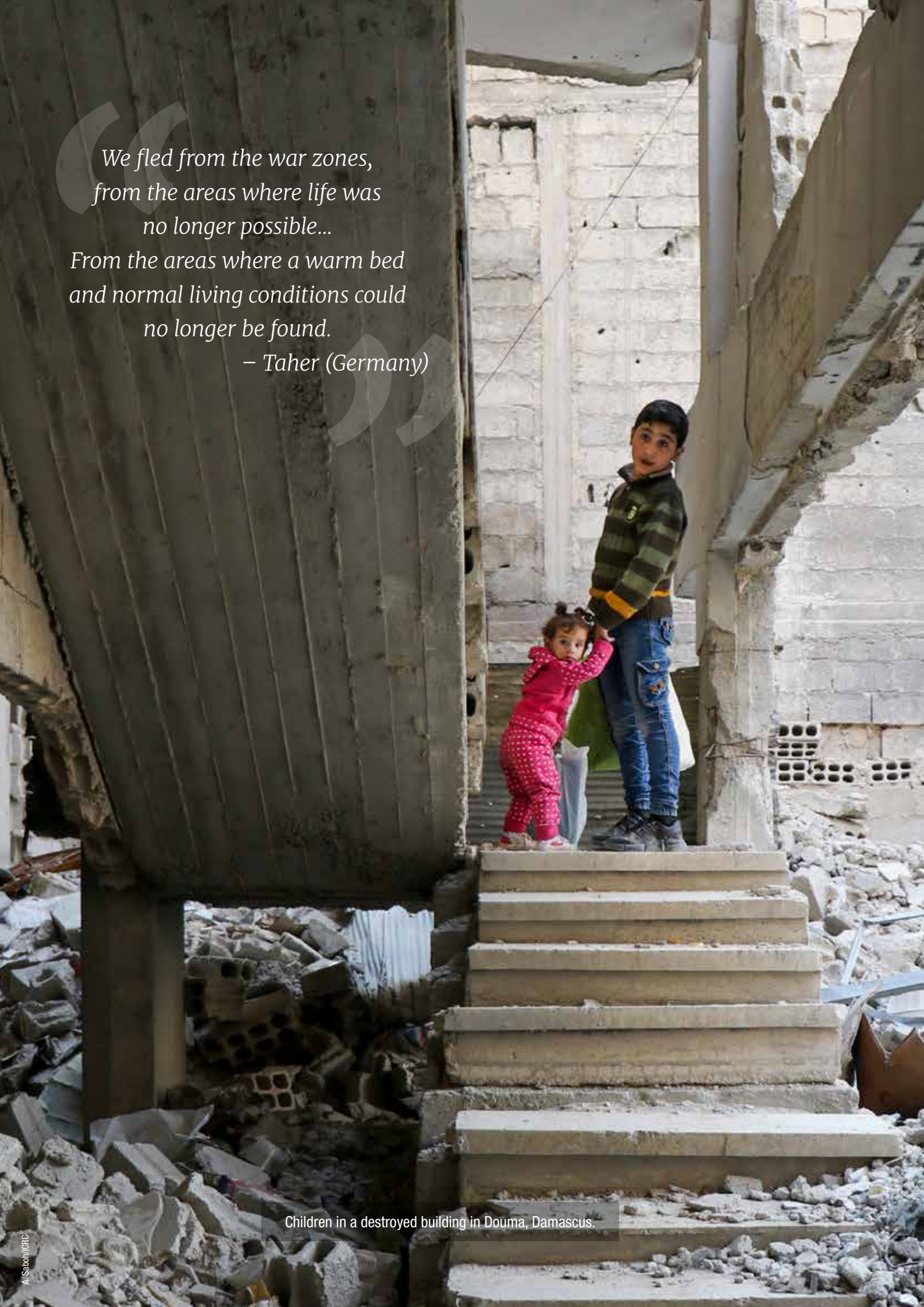
A DECADE OF LOSS: SYRIA'S YOUTH AFTER TEN YEARS OF CRISIS



*We fled from the war zones,
from the areas where life was
no longer possible...*

*From the areas where a warm bed
and normal living conditions could
no longer be found.*

– Taher (Germany)




Children in a destroyed building in Douma, Damascus.

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The International Committee of the Red Cross is an independent, neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. It acts in response to emergencies and promotes respect for international humanitarian law and its implementation in national law. The ICRC’s humanitarian operation in Syria is its largest worldwide.



*It was just a black cloud.
The war changed my life completely.
I've changed where I live,
my ambitions and all my plans.
All my memories have changed.*

– Rami (Syria)

Large-scale destruction of infrastructure in the old city of Aleppo.

INTRODUCTION

Ten years of violence have had a devastating impact on Syria. Hundreds of thousands are dead, tens of thousands have gone missing without a trace, millions are displaced and an entire region has been destabilized by the lasting consequences of this long-running crisis.

The conflict has also robbed an entire generation of Syrians of their younger years. Traditional milestones such as graduating from school, getting a job or starting a family have been missed during a decade of financial struggle, disrupted access to education and anxiety about the future.

What memories do young Syrians have of their formative years instead? How have they been shaped by the crisis? What do they want us to know about Syria today? And, crucially, what are their hopes for the future?

This report sheds light on young Syrians' experiences of the conflict and its impact on their current lives and future aspirations. It is based on a survey of 1,400 Syrians aged 18 to 25, of whom 800 live in Syria, 400 in Lebanon and 200 in Germany. The age range was chosen to represent individuals whose adolescence and early adulthood have been deeply marked by the conflict. The country locations were selected to ensure a variety of respondents in different situations.

The survey was carried out by market-research company Ipsos between December 2020 and January 2021. The questions covered a broad range of topics, spanning displacement and social disconnection, economic security, access to education, health, mental health and, crucially, what young Syrians want the rest of the world to know about their past and their hopes for the future.

The responses to some of the survey questions are presented in the following pages, alongside graphics showing how they break down. Note that, in some cases, weighted averages have been calculated across all three contexts. The report also uses short quotes – some of which have been edited for clarity – to illustrate key themes. These quotes are taken from interviews conducted by the ICRC with Syrians in Syria, Lebanon and Europe. Their testimonies can be consulted on syria10years.icrc.org and icrc.org.

Finally, the terms used in this survey should not be construed as representative of the legal opinion of the ICRC.

METHODOLOGY

In Syria, the survey was conducted over the phone with a representative sample (in terms of gender and region) of Syrians aged between 18 to 25. It was not possible to conduct the survey in the following governorates: Idlib, Deir Ezzor, Raqqa and Quneitra. In Lebanon, the survey was conducted via face-to-face interviews. Finally, young Syrians in Germany were interviewed either face-to-face or over the phone.

KEY FINDINGS

- **The Syrian conflict has left deep scars on an entire generation of young men and women.** Among the young Syrians surveyed, eight out of ten have experienced periods of no or very limited access to basic necessities. Two-thirds were forced to leave their homes and live elsewhere, more than half had to interrupt their education and, among young men, one in seven was wounded during the conflict.
- **Family and social ties have been sundered.** In Syria, 47% of young people have had a member of their immediate family or close friend die as a result of the conflict. In Lebanon and Germany, more than half have lost contact with a close relative.
- **The impact on mental health has been devastating and largely neglected.** Nearly two out of three young Syrians report having experienced anxiety in the past 12 months, while more than half have struggled with depression and sleeping disorders. Tragically, among all those who reported such emotional distress, very few have been able to receive medical treatment.
- **Access to food remains a major issue.** In Syria, three-quarters of young Syrians struggle to meet their or their household's basic needs. In Lebanon, the spiralling economic crisis is also putting a strain on resources: more than two-thirds of young Syrians living there lack financial means, and more than half report challenges in accessing food and health care.
- **Despite many differences in their day-to-day lives, young Syrians in all three countries appear united in their hopes for the future.** While those who left Syria feel fairly well accepted (especially in Germany), most young Syrians continue to view their native land as their home. Over the next ten years, they hope to find stability (65%), "happiness" in general (39%) and start a family (33%). Crucially, 70% of young Syrians consider themselves optimistic about the future.



Amina is raising her three children alone, in al-Wafideen camp in rural Damascus, since her husband passed away.

ICRC

*They grew up during a war filled
with bloodshed, suffering and missiles.
They never got to experience the
childhood we had.*

– Amina (Syria)



Ten years have passed since the beginning of this crisis. In ten years, we lost a lot of people. Our lives have completely changed. The greatest challenge is the loss of my brother and of my husband.
– Fatima (Lebanon)

This couple returned to their home in Zabadani with their daughter. Their son and his family will also move in, once their apartment has been renovated.

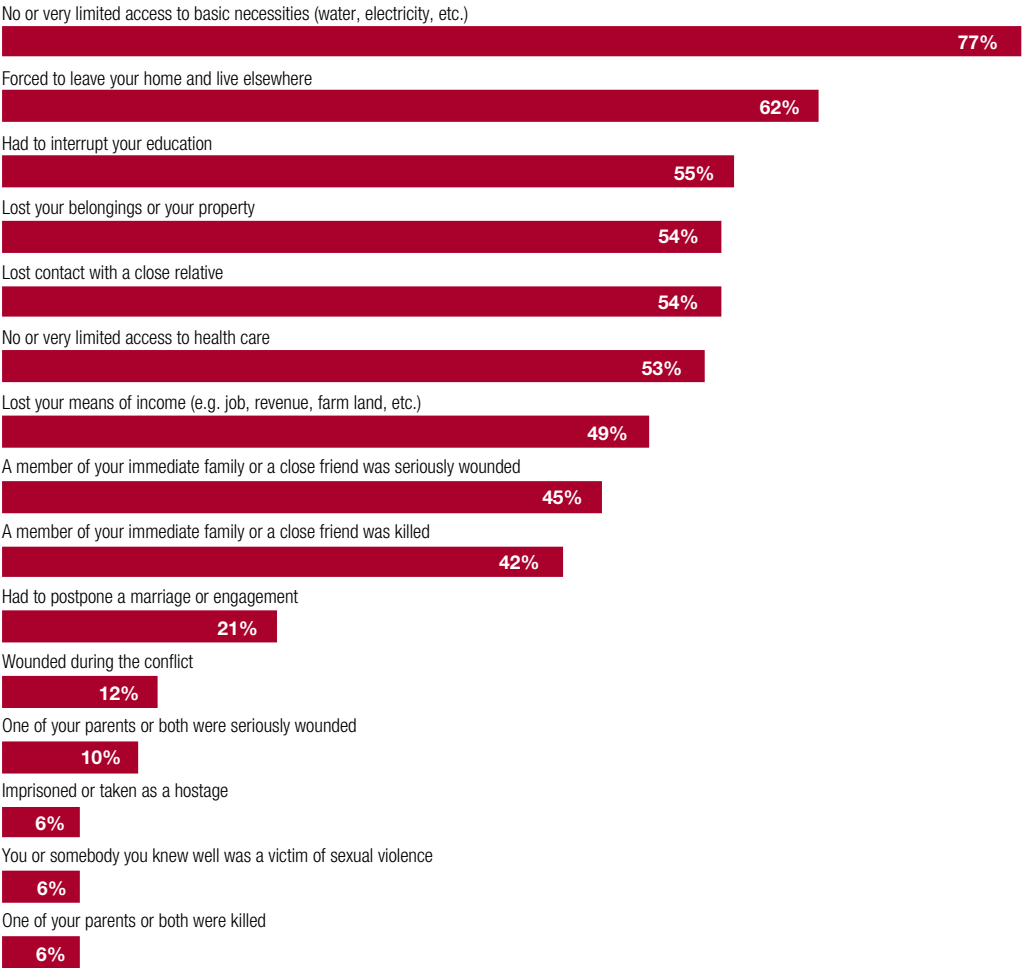
SURVEY RESULTS

TEN YEARS OF LOSS, DISPLACEMENT AND DISCONNECTION

The impact on young Syrians’ families and friendships has been devastating and is, in many cases, permanent and beyond repair.

- In Syria, nearly half of young Syrians have had a member of their immediate family or close friend killed. Among those living in Germany or Lebanon, one in five has had one or both of their parents killed or seriously injured during the conflict.
- Three out of five young Syrians were forced to leave their home. Many recounted missed milestones and interrupted plans, with one in five having postponed their wedding because of the conflict. Be it in Syria or in Germany, seven in ten young Syrians remain single.

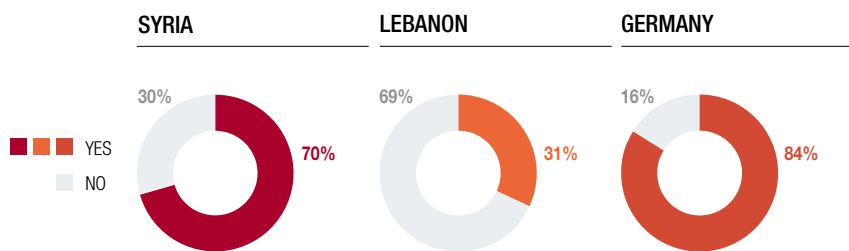
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DID YOU EXPERIENCE AS A RESULT OF THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA?



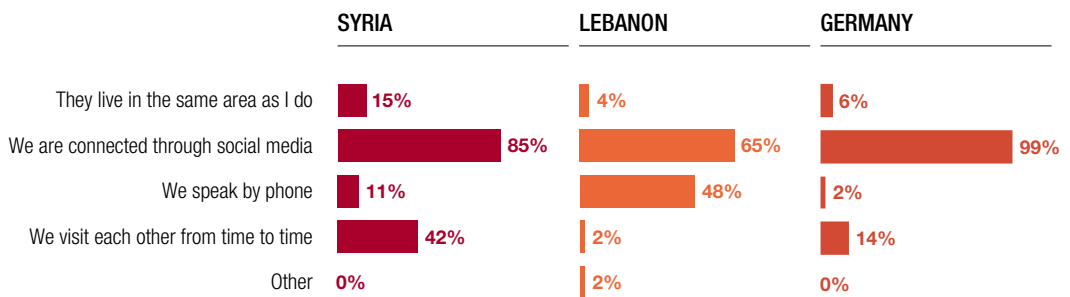
The above percentages are equally weighted averages for all three contexts surveyed. Base size: Syria 800; Lebanon 400; Germany 200.

- More than two in five young Syrians (41%) currently living in Syria have lost contact with a close relative. In Germany, this figure is more than half (55%) and, in Lebanon, it is more than two-thirds (68%). Help finding missing or separated family members is a pressing need for 27% of all the young Syrians surveyed and for 40% of those in Germany.
- Nearly seven out of ten young Syrians consider their friends to be a great source of happiness. Unfortunately, three out of ten of those in Syria have lost touch with friends they had before the conflict. In Lebanon, this figure rises to seven out of ten. Those who have been able to keep in touch do so mostly via social media.

ARE YOU STILL IN CONTACT WITH SOME OF YOUR OLD FRIENDS FROM BEFORE THE CONFLICT?



IF YES, HOW DO YOU KEEP IN CONTACT WITH THEM?





The hardest thing in my life is that I wasn't there when my brother had a new baby. I wasn't there when my daughter got married.

– Samira (Spain)

Samira and her husband moved to Madrid, in Spain, to start a new life, but they're struggling to make ends meet.

One of the problems my kids faced is bullying for the work their mom had to do. For example, my daughter faced a problem finding a husband and getting married because of what I do for a living.

– Amina (Syria)



Amina works as a mechanic in al-Wafideen camp in rural Damascus.

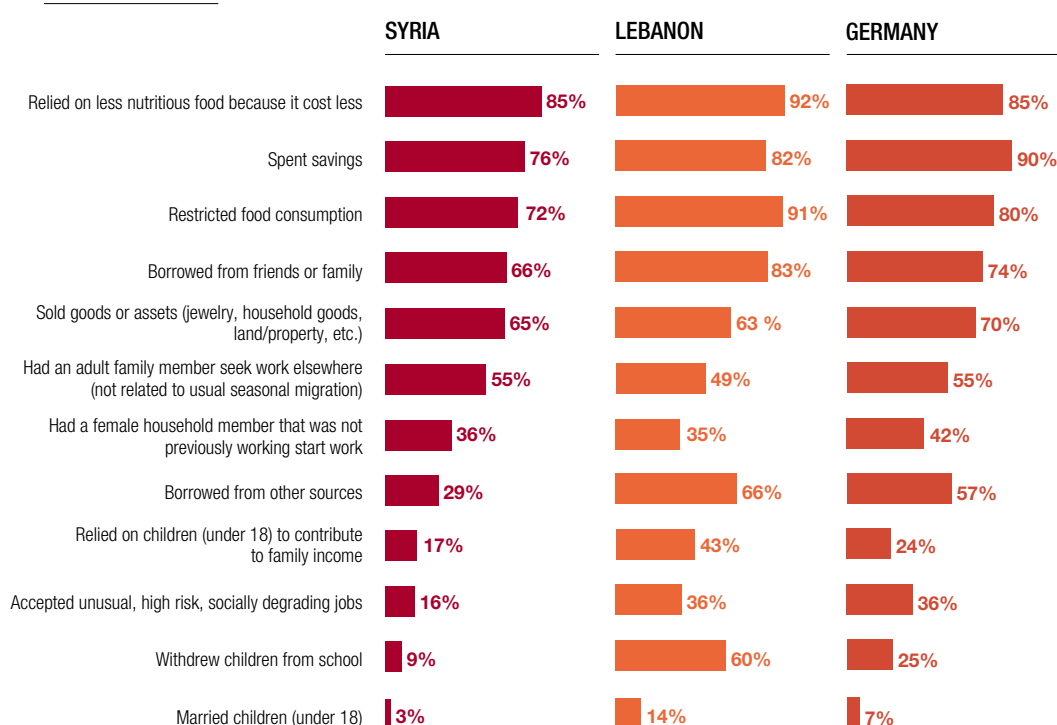
TEN YEARS OF ECONOMIC INSECURITY

Ten years of violence have left many young Syrians – particularly young men – excluded from a shrinking job market and struggling to make ends meet. Seven out of ten recall having no or limited access to basic necessities at times.

- In Lebanon and Syria, young Syrians say employment is their number one need. In Syria, the conflict has robbed one in three young Syrians (33%) of a means of income and even more (36%) of their belongings or property. In Lebanon, the figures are 70% and 81%, respectively.
- In Syria, more than one in six young men – and one in three young women – say they have no source of income at all. Nearly four out of ten young Syrians struggle to access food and seven out of ten, electricity. Their households have coped by using up their savings (76%), selling off goods or assets (65%) or taking on new (55%) and, sometimes, high-risk and socially degrading (16%) forms of employment.

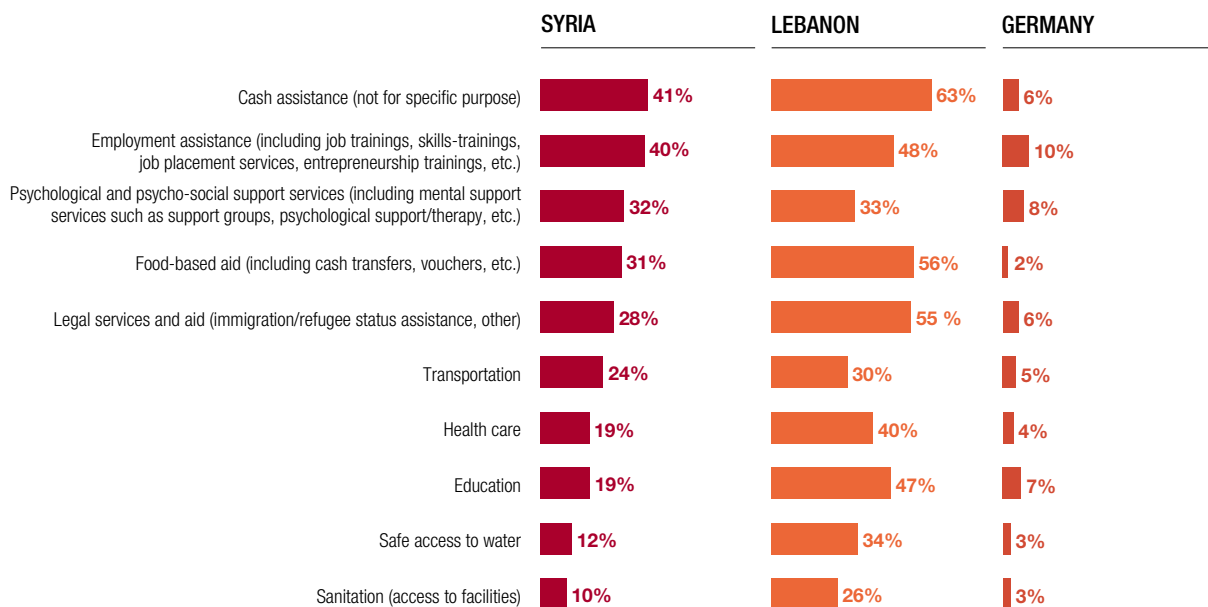
The money I used to have when I was ten years old is more than the money I have now that I am 24.
– Ahmad (Lebanon)

WHAT STRATEGIES HAVE YOU OR YOUR HOUSEHOLD USED TO COPE WITH NOT BEING ABLE TO MEET YOUR BASIC NEEDS?



- In Lebanon, the majority of young Syrians interviewed said the greatest challenge they currently face is having enough money on which to live (54%). Nine out of ten households that are struggling to make ends meet have restricted their food intake (with women almost unanimously bearing the brunt of this burden), 43% have had children under 18 in their extended family go out to work and 36% have accepted high-risk or socially degrading jobs.
- Cash assistance was the number one essential service that Syrians in Syria and in Lebanon needed but failed to access. This was followed by food-based aid and legal services for respondents in Lebanon, and employment assistance for respondents in Syria.

WERE THERE ANY RESOURCES AND SERVICES THAT YOU WANTED TO ACCESS BUT WERE UNABLE TO?





Local people help Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteers unload food parcels from trucks at an improvised warehouse in Bludan's main square.



Destruction in the old city of Aleppo.

TEN YEARS OF DISRUPTED EDUCATION

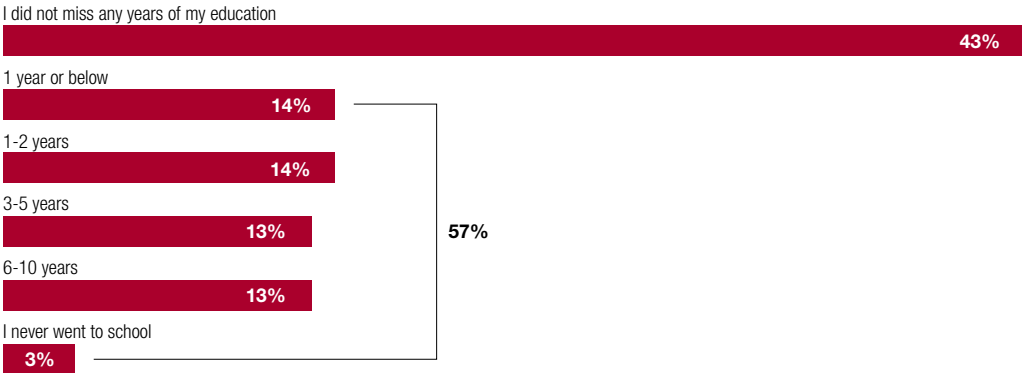
The only beautiful memory that I can remember before the last ten years was going to school. We used to go in the morning, feeling safe, without being afraid of anything.

– Mouna (Syria)

Syria once boasted a basic level of enrolment in education of almost 93%, with 2.8 million students enrolled in secondary education and more than 650,000 at university.¹ Today, more than half (57%) of the young Syrians surveyed report having missed years of school – if they got to go at all.

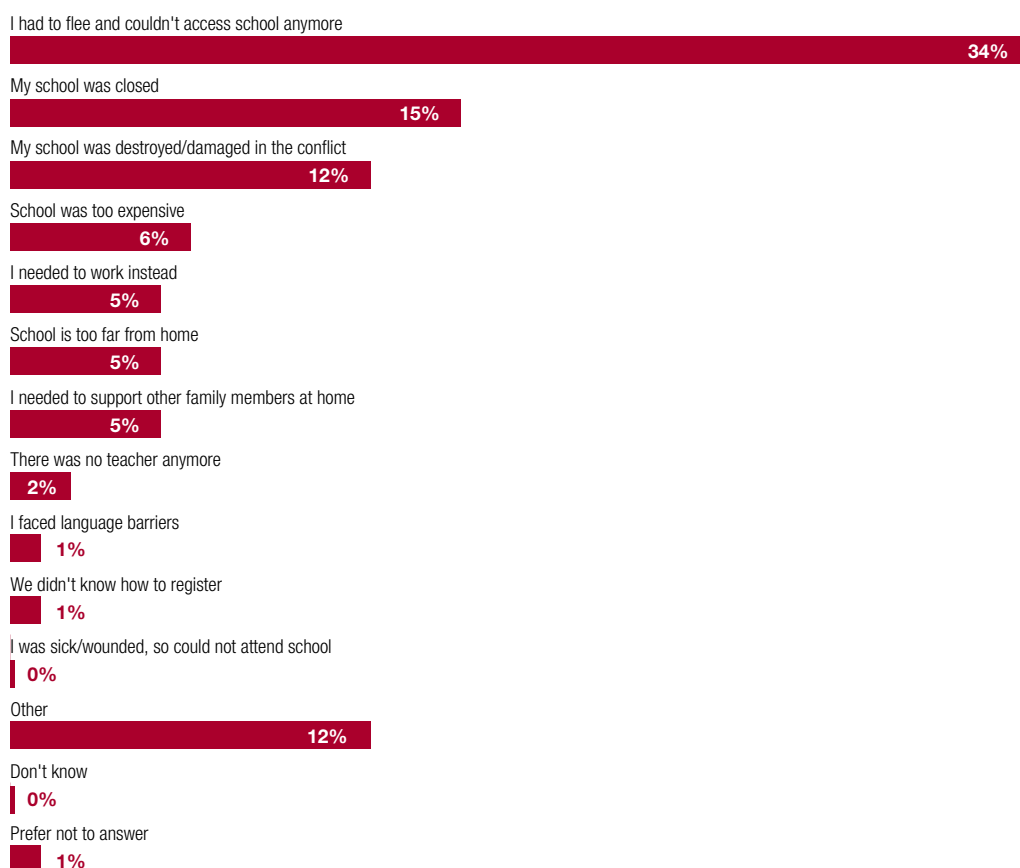
- Young Syrians routinely identify access to education as one of their top four needs. While the majority managed to reach secondary level, almost four out of ten Syrians aged 18–25 only got as far as primary school level, are illiterate or never went to school at all. Interestingly, while male students outnumber female students at primary and secondary levels, almost three-quarters of Syria’s university level students are women.

DID YOU MISS ANY OF YOUR EDUCATION BECAUSE OF THE SYRIAN CONFLICT? IF YES, HOW MANY YEARS OF EDUCATION DID YOU MISS?



¹ Cara, British Council and the University of Cambridge, *The State of Higher Education in Syria pre-2011*, 2019; and World Education Services, *Education in Syria*, 2016.

WHY DID YOU NOT GO TO SCHOOL/HOW COME YOU HAD TO MISS PARTS OF YOUR EDUCATION?



The above percentages are equally weighted averages for all three contexts surveyed. Base size: Syria 800; Lebanon 400; Germany 200.

- In Syria, nearly four out of ten young Syrians had to interrupt their education because they were forced to flee. One in ten saw their school close and one in seven had to give up school because they had to work or could no longer afford tuition.
- In Lebanon, seven out of ten young Syrians missed several years of school – often, five or more. This was either because they had to flee (21%), their school was closed (21%) or the building was damaged – or even destroyed – by the conflict (20%).
- Education is also frequently sacrificed by households struggling to meet their basic needs. In Lebanon, six out of ten such households withdrew their children from school and one in seven married them off. This partly explains why three-quarters of Lebanon's young Syrians have been educated to primary level only. In contrast, 90% of young Syrians in Germany have reached secondary level or higher, with three out of ten young Syrian men and six out of ten young Syrian women in full-time education there.



Ahmad has been in Lebanon since 2014 and works with the ICRC mental-health team as a focal point.

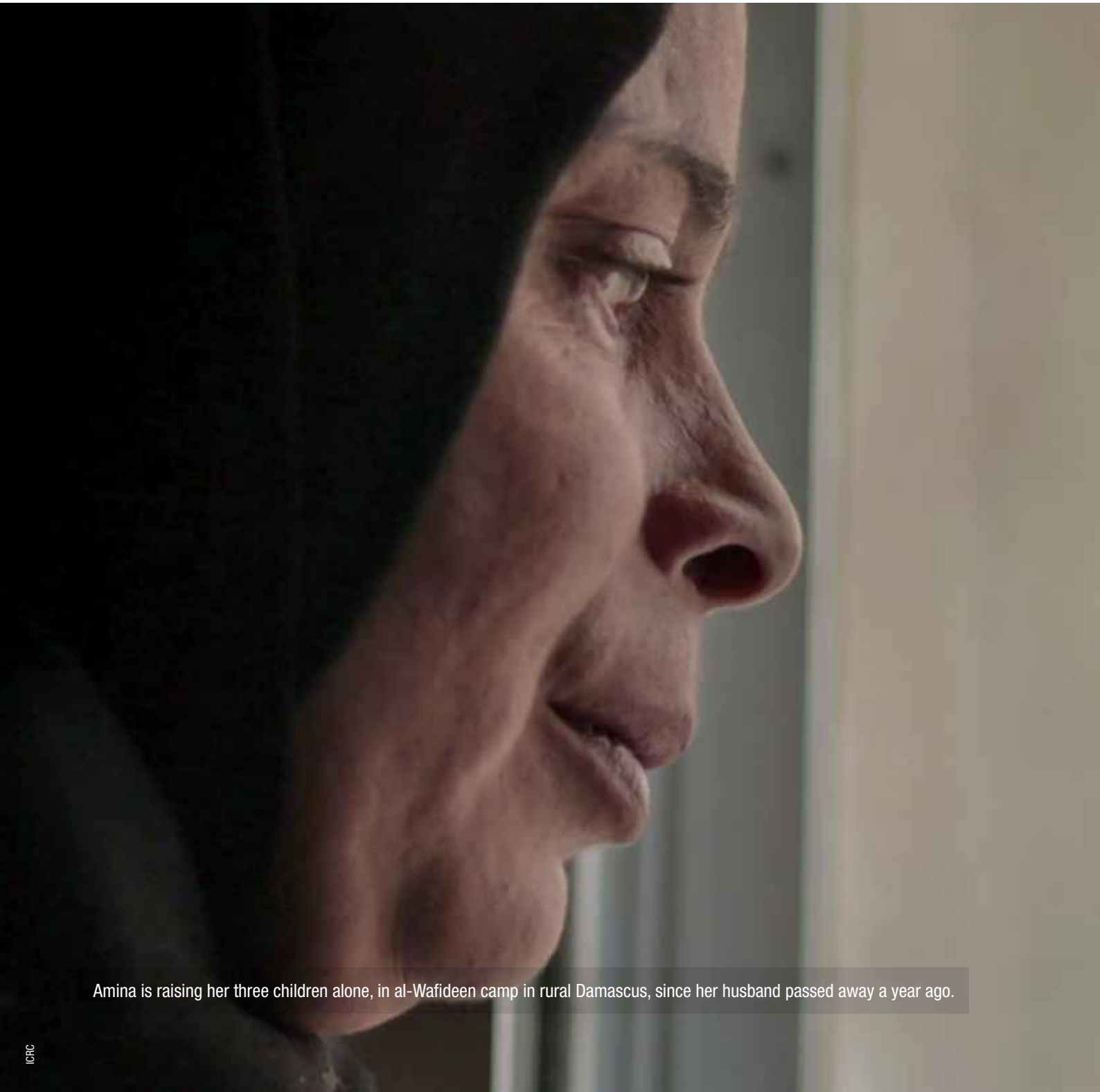
The last book I read was a ninth-grade science book. My teachers used to tell me I was good at maths. I was planning to join university and become a maths teacher.

It used to be my dream.

– Ahmad (Lebanon)

*My kids have flashbacks of the sounds of the missiles
... not the bloodshed itself, but the sounds are carved
in their memories.*

– Amina (Syria)

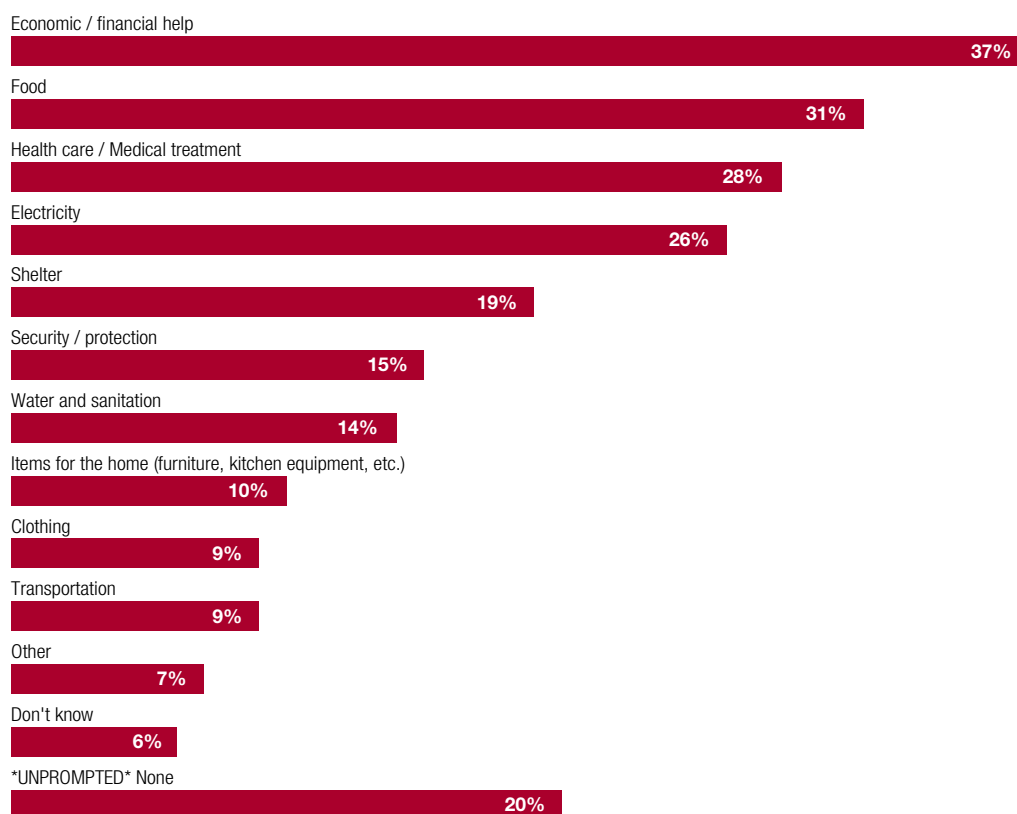


Amina is raising her three children alone, in al-Wafideen camp in rural Damascus, since her husband passed away a year ago.

TEN YEARS OF DETERIORATING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

One in every two young Syrians has seen their access to health care compromised by the conflict. In fact, young Syrians cite health care as one of the top three resources they have the most difficulty accessing. The past ten years have also taken a huge toll on an entire generation's mental health.

WHAT ARE THE THREE RESOURCES THAT YOU CURRENTLY FIND MOST DIFFICULT TO ACCESS TO THE EXTENT OR STANDARD YOU REQUIRE?

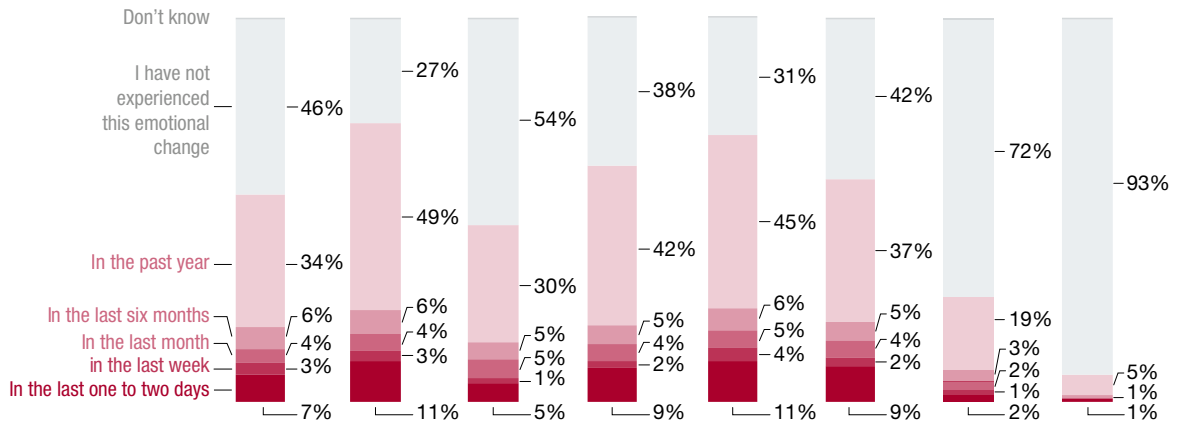


The above shows an equally weighted average of the three contexts surveyed. Base size: Syria 800; Lebanon 400; Germany 200.

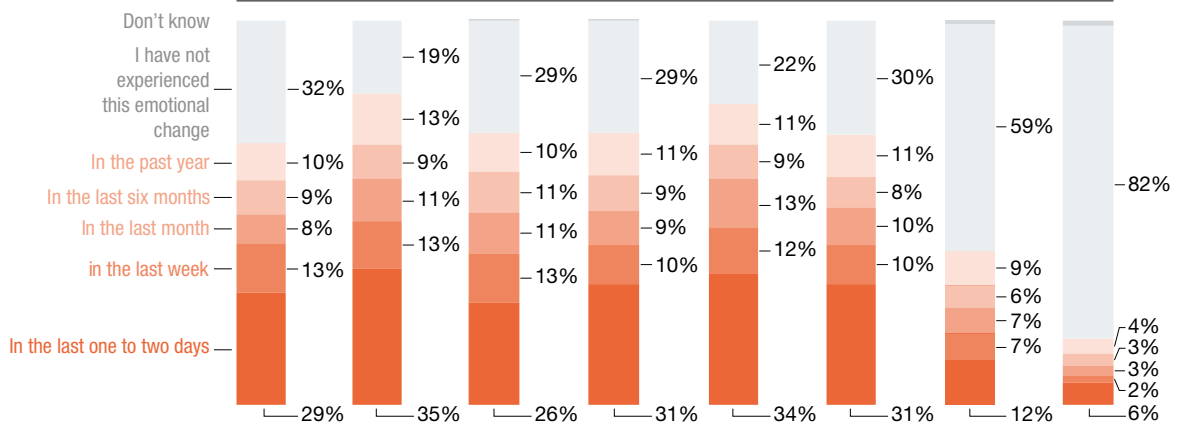
- Young Syrians living in households that have struggled to meet their basic needs have repeatedly had to compromise their health, whether by cutting down on nutritious food (88%), reducing their food intake (82%) or taking on high-risk or demeaning work (29%).
- In Lebanon, 53% of young Syrians consider health care to be unavailable to them. While this figure is not as high in Syria (37%), a third of the respondents there struggle to access water and sanitation. The least deprived are young Syrians in Germany, where 98% report health care as available, 100% have safe access to water and 99%, to sanitation.

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING EMOTIONAL CHANGES IN RELATION TO THE CONFLICT OVER THE PAST YEAR? IF YES, PLEASE INDICATE WHETHER YOU LAST EXPERIENCED THIS EMOTIONAL CHANGE IN THE LAST ONE TO TWO DAYS, IN THE LAST WEEK, IN THE LAST MONTH, WITHIN THE LAST SIX MONTHS OR IN THE PAST YEAR.

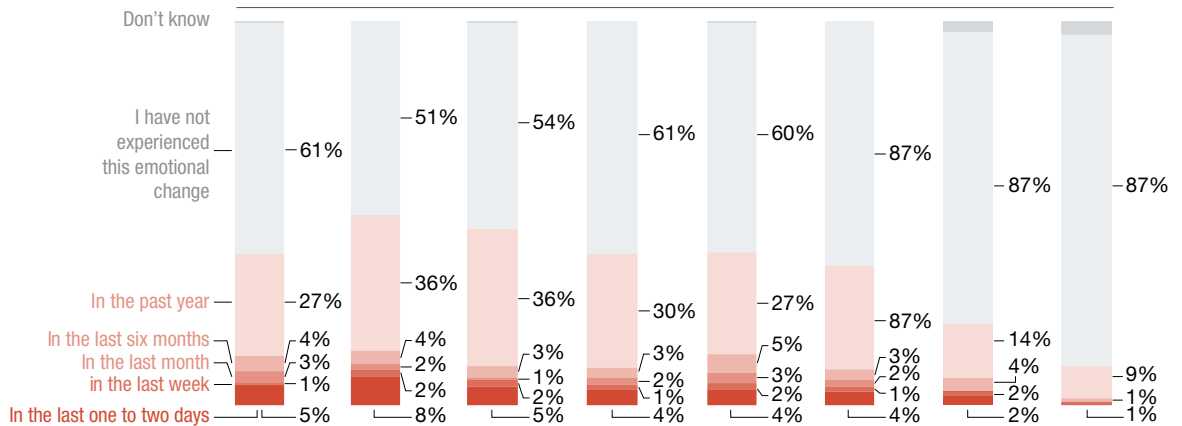
SYRIA



LEBANON



GERMANY



Sleep disorder

Anxiety

Feeling lonely

Frustration

Distress

Depression


I have experienced an emotional change, but I don't know how to qualify it

I have experienced an emotional change and received medical treatment

- In the past twelve months, young people in Syria have experienced sleep disorders (54%), anxiety (73%), depression (58%), solitude (46%), frustration (62%) and distress (69%) because of the conflict. These emotional changes occur particularly frequently among young Syrians in Lebanon. Incidentally, this group is also the least likely to remain in touch with their old friends, and the least present on social media (women especially).
- While young Syrians in Germany consider psychological support their most pressing need (56%), their peers in Syria and Lebanon are torn between their need for employment, education, health care and humanitarian assistance. Both groups are also far less aware of the availability of mental health support – resulting in a mere 7% receiving the attention they needed.

*In our village, everybody liked me.
I was very popular and funny.
I used to tell jokes. Now, I no longer
have room for laughter. Life doesn't
make me laugh anymore; no jokes,
no fun. Life has stopped.*
– Ahmad (Lebanon)

Consultation room in the health centre in Kafr Laha, a village in the area of Houla, north of Homs.
There are only 14 doctors in the entire region to care for a population of 70,000.



I wish the world could see the reality in Syria – not just what’s on social media. Now all you see is war, destruction and people in need. But what we really need is spirit. I wish the world could see our history, our art and our new generations, because we have something big and genuine, and that’s the most important thing.

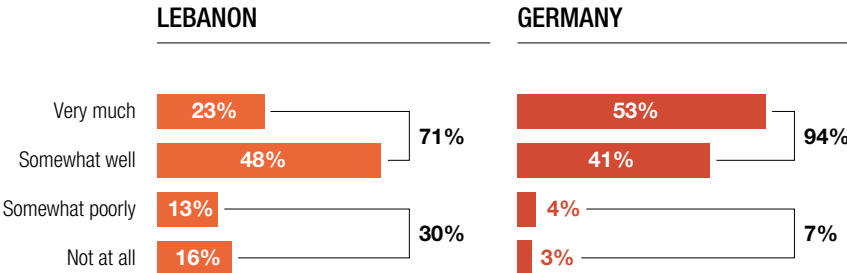
– Rami (Syria)

Rami is an artist living in Aleppo.

THE NEXT TEN YEARS... FUTURE HOPES AND AMBITIONS

Young Syrians are unanimous in their hope for stability, happiness and greater public awareness of what their generation has been through.

DO YOU FEEL ACCEPTED IN YOUR NEW COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE?



- More than nine out of ten young Syrians feel accepted in Germany – half of them, “very much” so. Those in Lebanon also feel accepted (71%), although only one in five feels “very much” accepted. In both countries, however, the majority of respondents continue to consider Syria their home – young women, especially.
- Despite the many challenges they have faced, seven out of ten young Syrians consider themselves to be somewhat or very optimistic about the future. Specifically, young Syrians hope to achieve stability (65%), find happiness in general (39%) and perhaps have a family (33%). These hopes reflect what members of this generation consider the greatest sources of happiness, namely health and physical well-being (84%), safety and security (75%), meaningful work (70%) and family and friends (>66%).
- Finally, many young Syrians continue to feel that their experiences aren’t well understood by the wider public. They wish more people knew about the negative experiences caused by the conflict in Syria (51%), how it has uprooted their lives (20%), the lack of essential resources it has created for them and their peers (29%) and the living conditions that Syrians have had to face for ten years now (16%).

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR LIFE TO LOOK LIKE IN 10 YEARS?



Personal stability Have a home
Stability 65% Stable life
Stable job Improved living situation
Good financial status



Security Better life
Be happy 39%
Safety Better future



Good health
Physically and mentally well 39% Living a healthy life



Have kids To be married
Have a family 33%
Have a partner



Resume education
Study more 15%



Meet basic needs 5%

WHAT DO YOU WISH PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT WHAT SYRIA HAS BEEN THROUGH OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS?

Problems
Difficulties Crises
74% Destruction
Conflict Negative experiences



Seeking refuge
29% Lack of essential resources
Homelessness High cost of living
Displacement Famine Hunger



Effect of conflict
16% The Syrians' suffering conditions



11% Loss of people's lives






Negative effect of conflict on children
4% Prevented from studying



We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

People know they can count on us to carry out a range of life-saving activities in conflict zones and to work closely with the communities there to understand and meet their needs. Our experience and expertise enable us to respond quickly and effectively, without taking sides.

Cover photo: Former head of the ICRC delegation in Syria, Marianne Gasser, speaks to residents as they gather around an aid convoy in Madaya, rural Damascus.

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