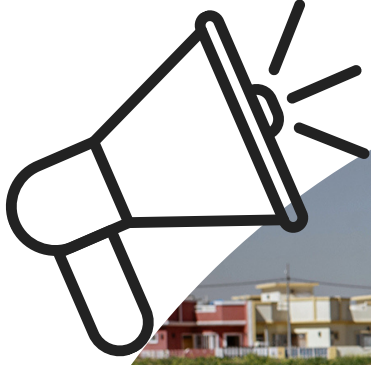


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**11 YEARS ON...**

## **SYRIAN YOUTH STILL DREAM BIG FOR THEIR FUTURE!**

Syrian youths in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan share their concerns and hopes for the future with NLG members ahead of the Brussels VI conference

**NO LOST GENERATION**  
MAY 2022

# A CONSULTATION WITH SYRIAN YOUTH

On 28 April 2022, No Lost Generation (NLG) members consulted with a group of Syrian and Palestine Refugees from Syria (PRS) adolescents and youths in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Syria to discuss **their concerns, suggested solutions and hopes for the future ahead of the Brussels VI conference of 9-10 May 2022.**

The group included 6 young women between the ages of 16 and 24, most of whom were still studying at school or university, and residing in Lebanon's host community, as well as Zaatari, Azraq and Baqa'a camps in Jordan. Two young men with disabilities aged 16 and 17 years old from Azraq camp also took part in the discussion.

And lastly, a youth officer from a local Syrian NGO based in Turkey and supported by Project Soar was conveying key messages from young women and girls in Northwest Syria.

The discussion revolved around five key discussion themes:

- **Daily challenges** faced by children, youth and their families
- **Impact of the humanitarian response** and other suggested solutions
- **Hopes and dreams for the future**
- **Key messages for stakeholders meeting** at the Brussels conference
- And lastly, **some messages of hope** for the young generations impacted by **the recent conflict in Ukraine**



No Lost Generation is an independent and concerted effort by multiple stakeholders which aims to ensure that the most vulnerable children, adolescents and youth affected by the Syria crisis have access to education, protection and opportunities to engage positively in their community and society. NLG initiative also strives to uplift Syrian children, adolescents and youth's voices at key events and gatherings such as the Brussels conference on Syria.

# I - DAILY CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILDREN, YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES

The most recurrent concern shared by youth participants was access to education and self-development. While some locations suffer from **lack of educational opportunities**, there seems to be many barriers faced by the youths to access them when these opportunities do exist. **These barriers range from legal to financial to psychological.** Regarding the latter, a 24-year-old young woman from Zaatari camp expressed the frustration she faced when trying to access education opportunities, saying that **“as a young girl, I was supposed to experience academic opportunities and self-development opportunities during these key years of my life... I struggled with the level of education in Zaatari camp... I did not feel like the teachers believed in us or were motivated to support us at first”**.

In addition, the lack of motivation often experienced by the youths seems to push them towards negative coping mechanisms that might have long-term effects, especially given **the lack of long term Mental health and Psychosocial support (MHPSS) services in certain areas.** In Lebanon, although many public schools began hosting Syrian refugees when the crisis began, a 20-year-old young woman who was now finishing high school explained how obstacles related to legal residency can stand in the way of children and youth’s access to educational services.

**“Some youth without legal residency in Lebanon could not take part in the official school exams,”** she said. The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects have also compounded barriers to education with **many struggling to follow remote learning due to limited resources at both the school and family levels.**

Young Syrian refugees also complained from **lack of job opportunities and deteriorating economic conditions in host countries.** Several participants reported an increase in prices and difficulty finding a job even after having graduated from high school or university. For a young 17 year old boy with visual impairment from Azraq camp, additional economic challenges are posed by his disability. **“I wish God would restore my sight so that I am able to work and support my parents”**, he said.

A decade on, **poor living conditions in refugee and Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps were also still a major concern.** Young Syrians from different refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon highlighted poor infrastructure impacting 24/7 access to electricity and water. As for the youth officer representing a group of young girls in Northwest Syria who are supported by Project Soar, she highlighted their concerns regarding **the lack of privacy in overcrowded tented IDP camps** as a major factor leading towards increased vulnerability, lack of privacy and increased risks of sexual harassment.

**Movement in and out of camps was also a major concern** for Syrian refugees in Jordan who wished to be able to move more freely in order to visit relatives, seek healthcare, and pursue educational or employment opportunities in the host community. A 24-year-old female volunteer with War Child in Zaatari camp also expressed concern that many children, particularly in camp settings, were being deprived of a normal childhood.

She mentioned the story of a young girl who needed urgent health care, saying **“we had to refer her in a bus to a hospital outside of the camp... the girl had never seen a bus in her life and was too scared to go on board which delayed her access to healthcare... This might seem funny to you but many children in the camp have never seen a park, a mall, a car or a bus in their lives”**.

## II – IMPACT OF THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND OTHER SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Many of the Syrian youths highlighted **positive impacts** stemming from the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis over the years. **Many of them enjoyed engaging in volunteering opportunities and benefited from access to basic education and health services**, including some MHPSS services in schools. The young man with visual impairment from Azraq camp said that he was able to learn how to read braille language thanks to support from Mercy Corps. When talking about summer camps organized by a UNRWA during school breaks, an 18-year-old PRS university student said that it **“was a really nice experience because each one of us was able to develop his or her own talents during the camp activities”**.

The youths also expressed the need for further services and support, particularly when it comes to **accessing healthcare services, from physiotherapy for persons living with disabilities to mental health support** for children and youth who experienced trauma. **The need for financial assistance, including financial aid to pay school and university tuition fees**, was raised as families in host countries are now facing deprivation of basic needs due to ongoing economic crises. Many youths expressed concern that the financial stipends their families were receiving were not lasting the month due to the increase in prices of basic goods and the large number of children per family.



The young high school student in Lebanon also raised **the importance of further MHPSS support for children and youth**, similar to the services she was able to access through Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). **“When a refugee child first arrives to a host country, he or she might stay at home, feel isolated from others, and their mental health will slowly deteriorate... but when they have the chance to attend classes or activities organized by humanitarian organizations and socialize with other children... it will make all the negative thoughts go away.. I am one of these children... sometimes at home when I see my family struggling I find it very difficult to cope... but when someone takes the time to listen to my concerns and give me advice... it makes a huge difference for me... we need more child centered activities especially linked to education and MHPSS..”** she said.

She also mentioned the importance of tackling bullying: **“there are still Syrian children in Lebanon who have never been to school... There is also a big fear of bullying which is rampant in schools... This affects the child’s self-esteem and can have long-term impacts on his or her behavior... we need more support for students facing bullying and organizations need to tackle the root causes of this issue...”**

Persons with physical disabilities such as the 16-year-old young man from Azraq camp also **wished for further assistance to overcome his disability**. **“I received a chair from Mercy Corps in the camp which allowed me to attend school... however the road conditions in the camp still make it very challenging for me to move around on my own... an electric chair would allow me to be even more independent”.**

**When someone takes the time to listen to my concerns and give me advice... it makes a huge difference for me...**



*A high-school Syrian student from Lebanon*

In addition to the desired services, **the issue of transparency of humanitarian organizations was raised**. **“We hear of funding that arrives for camps but in terms of implementation on the ground we do not see the impact or we are not consulted as to where the aid goes.”** said the 24-year old girl from Zaatari camp.

As for the 25 year old PRS student residing in Baqa’a camp, she suggested **the creation of youth committees so that young people can be further involved in the decision making and humanitarian response processes** so that they can be better tailored to their needs.

## III - HOPES AND DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

Despite the hardships of the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic crises, **the Syrian youths still maintained big dreams for the future.** The dream of **continuing education and graduating from university** seems to be on the wish list of many.

The 25-year-old Palestine Refugee from Syria (PRS) pharmacy student supported by UNRWA said her dream was **“to finish [her] studies and open a pharmacy.”** As for the 17-year-old high school student from Azraq camp who is attending World Vision’s youth center, she wished **“to study media at university and become a journalist.”** The 20-year old high school student in Lebanon hoped **“to be able to specialize in a field that [she is] passionate about, related to either engineering or medicine...”**

She also hoped to be able to support her parents and provide them with a dignified life, in addition to buying them a house so that they would not need to worry about rent at the end of the month.

The young men living with disabilities in Azraq camp wished for **better living conditions in the camp as well as more work opportunities.** The 16-year-old boy with physical disability in Azraq said **“I wish for a better quality of life, camp life is very hard for me with my disability”.** **“I hope for easier transportation within the camp and better roads here... paved roads instead of sand so that I can move around more easily”** said the young man with visual impairment.

And lastly, **many of the young people had not seen family members and relatives since the start of the conflict,** as they had been separated due to various displacements and unable to reunite.

The 20-year-old young woman in Lebanon explained that her family had been divided between Syria, Lebanon and Turkey for 8 years now, and that she wished to see them all again one day.

**If I had one wish, it would be to see my older brother who is in Turkey and whom I haven't seen since I was 11 years old.**

*17-year-old girl from Azraq camp*



## IV - KEY MESSAGES FOR STAKEHOLDERS MEETING AT THE BRUSSELS CONFERENCE

The Syrian youths hoped **that stakeholders meeting at the Brussels conference would continue to believe in them**, invest in them, and support them with achieving their life goals. **“We have a lot of potential as young Syrian girls and boys, we just need your support to achieve it...”** said the 17-year-old girl from Azraq camp.

**“We have so far experienced more than a decade of conflict... We need to keep in mind that the children who were displaced ten years ago are now young adults searching for better opportunities to develop themselves... if we fail to guide them towards these opportunities they will resort to negative coping mechanisms and lose hope for their future.. the potential is there, we all have big ideas and dreams, we just need a bit of support and guidance to make them a reality”** said the youth officer representing young girls from Northwest Syria.

This need for long-term support was also reiterated by many others in the group.



**“We need to be able to develop ourselves during those key years of our lives, in order to be able to go back to Syria one day and rebuild the country with the skills that we have acquired...”** said the 24 year old youth activist from Zaatari camp.

Some young Syrian refugees also hoped that stakeholders would be able to help with bigger challenges, such as **finding a solution to the conflict so that they could return home to Syria**, and others hoped for them to tackle racism and sectarianism in host communities as well as bullying in schools, thus **fostering more acceptance for refugees children and youth to thrive**.



**We all have big ideas and dreams, we just need a bit of support and guidance to make them a reality.**

*A youth officer, speaking on behalf of young girls from Northwest Syria*

# V - MESSAGES OF HOPE FOR THE YOUNG GENERATIONS IMPACTED BY THE RECENT CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

When asked about the conflict in Ukraine, where a new generation of children and youths are now experiencing violence and displacement, **the Syrian youth wished to primarily convey messages of hope:**

**"I wish to tell them, do not give up! What is happening to them is outside of their control and it is not their fault... as it was also not our fault in Syria..."** said the 17-year-old girl from Azraq camp. The 25-year-old PRS university student had similar advice: **"Don't be afraid, don't give up, don't lose hope because of the war... And most importantly, stay focused on your education and stay hopeful for a brighter future!"**

My message to everyone is: treat others as you would like to be treated yourself.. because you never know when you will face a difficult situation and you might need someone to support you... We need to act together as nations to support one another, and always welcome those who are fleeing violence with an open heart, no matter where they are coming from...

*A 18-year-old Palestine Refugee from Syria university student in Jordan*

**As major stakeholders in the Syrian crisis response meet in Brussels this week, it is crucial that the voices of Syrian youth continue to be heard and taken into consideration. Now is not the time to let them down!**

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