

# Syrian Refugee Women and Girls Project

**In October 2017, a team of three, including Pat Hynes, the Director of Traprock Center for Peace and Justice in the United States, traveled to Lebanon to visit the Syrian refugee camps.**



The other team members were Janice Raymond from the international Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) and Esohe Aghatise from Association IROKO (Italy).

The purpose of the visit was the following:

(a.) to document the situation of Syrian women and girls escaping to Lebanon as war refugees and living in the refugee camps; and

(b.) to spotlight the significant role of Syrian and Lebanese women as *political actors* who are combating all forms of violence against women and creating programs for women and girl refugees that give them a future.

We travelled from Beirut to a town five kilometers from the Syrian border in the Bekaa Valley. Over 365,000 of Syria's registered refugees live in this poorest region of Lebanon.

# Bekaa Valley Refugee Camps

## 350,000 Syrian refugees in Bekaa Valley



- Over 12 million people — nearly 60% of Syrian population — are either internally displaced (6 million) or refugees (close to 6 million) due to war.
- Syrian war refugees are found in surrounding countries: Turkey, Jordan, Iraq (Kurdish), Egypt, and Lebanon.
- There are 350,000 Syrian refugees in Bekaa Valley, where we traveled from Beirut. Bekaa Valley is Lebanon's most important farming region.

**NOTE: Poorer countries host most of the world's refugees (84%).**

# 6 million Syrian refugees

Source:

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2017/06/20/turkey-records-largest-number-of-syrian-refugees-un-reports>



Syria's seven-year (and still ongoing) civil war remains the largest single cause of displacement.

Turkey has the largest number of Syrian refugees worldwide (45%, about 3 million), with Lebanon next.

One-third of people living in Lebanon are refugees (450,000 Palestinians have been living there for 70 years, since the NAKBA, and now 1.5 million Syrians). This is the largest percentage of refugee population in any country in the world.

The number of people displaced from their homes across the world due to war, persecution, and climate disasters is 65.6 million and growing, according to a new 2017 U.N. report.

And nearly 70 years after Palestinians first fled today's Israel, some 5.3 million Palestinians are currently living as refugees – the highest level ever recorded, the UNHCR has said.

Despite the huge focus on Europe's migrant crisis, it is poorer countries that host most of the world's refugees. A full 84% of refugees are living in low- and middle-income countries, the UNHCR has said, with this "huge imbalance" blamed on "the continuing lack of consensus internationally when it comes to refugee hosting and the proximity of many poor countries to regions of conflict."

# Exploitation of Refugee Women and Girls

- Trafficking for prostitution
- Domestic violence
- Sexual exploitation by landowners for rent
- Child marriage
- Child labor
- Kidnapping and trade for weapons, fighters, and ransom
- Rape as a tactic of war



## **“In Syria’s War Economy, Women Have Become a Form of Currency” — *Syria Deeply***

“Syria is flush with war profiteers...”: “the most brutal consequence of this has been the use of women as a form of currency.”

“Women are kidnapped for ransom, sold into marriage and, in some cases, traded for weapons and goods and used as negotiation leverage” by all sides. For example, Islamic State has abducted women and girls in Iraq and Syria and collected an estimated \$40 million in ransom for them. They have also offered “female virgins” to lure foreign fighters.

Both IS and pro-government forces have kidnapped women and girls for ransom. Pro-government forces have targeted women from wealthy families who will pay large sums for daughters to avoid rape and scandal. The resistance side has also done this, though less so.

NOTE: Women suffer much more from war than men. Male resistance fighters are hailed as heroes when released from prison, whereas women live in shame and silence for having been raped in prison, due to the social stigma. “All parties in the 6-year war stand accused of violence against women, done prolifically through house searches, at checkpoints, in jails and in displacement camps and refugee camps outside the country. Forced marriages of young women and girls are also part of the grisly picture.” — *Rape by Terrorists: UN Report – Sexual Violence as a Weapon of Terrorism*, by Dulcie Leimbach, May 02, 2017

Syrian men have sold their daughters into marriage in exchange for help crossing a border. Women have been raped as a fee for crossing the border. They have also been “traded for weapons, goods and services.” For example, landlords demand sex in return for rent, or women are exchanged for captives from the other side (e.g., a government pilot for Free Syrian female detainees and vice-versa).

An estimated 60–70% of Syrian refugee children are working.

Most refugees are indebted (and 70% are below the poverty line, according to an Islamic Relief Study).

War profiteering occurs — with high land and tent rents, poor women, single heads of household, are forced to have sex for rent, and refugees are forced by landowners to work the agricultural fields, with some of the money taken by overseers. Women are paid less than men. — *Struggling to Survive: Slavery and Exploitation of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* (The Freedom Fund)

International donor pledges to Lebanon are made but “money [is] slow to follow commitments.” “Little though has been given has been given thus far by donors to identifying and tackling slavery and trafficking.” — *Struggling to Survive* (The Freedom Fund)

# Women's Stories

En route to refugee camp:

- Sexual Harassment
- Risk of being sold into prostitution
- Rape



**This is the story of 19-year-old Rana (not her real name), whom we interviewed with her baby (who was the age of the one in the photo) in the office of KAFA near the refugee camp in the Beqa'a (Bekaa) Valley. KAFA is a feminist NGO in Lebanon.**

**Rana left Syria for Lebanon 1-½ years ago when the war situation became very bad where she lived, bringing her handicapped sister with her. En route she met a man who offered to help her transport her sister.**

**When he wanted Rana to marry him and she refused, the man kidnapped Rana. She then agreed to marry him to protect her handicapped sister.**

The man that Rana had married intended to pimp her to other men. He beat her and forced her to drink alcohol to break her will. He brought men to the house for sex. She became pregnant. The man took her ID card so that she couldn't leave. Eventually, she did flee, at 7-months pregnant. Rana managed through another man to get her ID card, and meets her estranged husband publicly to see the baby. She is trying to get a divorce, with KAFA's help.

After leaving her husband, with no source of money, a woman invited Rana to her house, where she lives communally.

Women like Rana resort to begging on street.

**QUESTION: What do you hope for yourself and your child?**

“That I live in honesty and dignity in the future.” She wants her son to become a doctor. She had wanted to be a lawyer.

KAFA works with her: they provide individual and group psychotherapy plus help with her court case for a divorce. KAFA is having her ex-husband and other men investigated for trafficking Syrian women refugees into prostitution.



Hada is a refugee. Her son was injured by a sniper in the Syrian war, after which she left the country.

She had married for protection at the age of 13, but was abused by her husband.

She has a 12-year old daughter still in Syria, who is living with grandparents.

## Story of Hada

- **Hada was invited by a group of women to live with them. In reality, she was taken to a brothel.**
- **She escaped and lived homeless with her 5-year old son, engaging in informal work.**
- **Hada was gang-raped.**
- **KAFA offers a path out with services, including divorce.**
- **Hada is an idol for women in the self-help group at KAFA in Beqaa Valley. She is a survivor.**
- **Hada will star in a KAFA film.**

# NGOs working with Syrian women and girls

International Rescue Committee (IRC) operates in 40 countries and KAFA (ENOUGH, a Syrian feminist organization dedicated to ending violence against women)

REA (Relief and Educational Assistance Program of Social Support Society) has 5 schools in Bekaa for Syrian refugee children and teachers, reaching 2,800 children. REA assures girls' safety with transportation.

- Top: Maya of KAFA (ENOUGH), a >Lebanese feminist organization dedicated to ending violence against women
- Bottom: Petronille of International Rescue Committee (IRC), which operates in 40 countries (with Esohe Aghatise and Janice Raymond)



# Services Offered for Women and Girls by KAFA and IRC

- Literacy
- Reproductive health
- Creative activities to discourage child marriage (puppetry, role play, etc.)
- Psychosocial and legal services for trauma, rape and trafficking
- Life plan of action (UNHCR)
- Legal services for divorce
- Children in school
- Financial management
- Job skills and employment
- Mobile teams in camps — identify vulnerable children
- Lebanese — social cohesion



# Bar-al-Elias Refugee Camp

**No rights or resources provided by Lebanon:**

- No permit to work
- No education
- No refugee status

**UNHCR provides:**

- materials for tents, materials for studs
- drinking water
- short-term funds (potential money for plans of action: 3, 6, 9, 12 months)

**Land, with rental fees from land owners, is another risk for women and girls (sex demanded for rent).**

**Work in the informal sector (tolerated by Lebanon) includes domestic services, agriculture, construction (with risks of harassment and sexual exploitation, and with women in agriculture paid less than men).**

**Studs and insulation above ceiling  
2x4s; plastic sheathing on outside**



# Drinking Water

Provided by the UN Refugee  
Agency



# Human Waste Disposal

## *Unsanitary and Unsafe*



People reported that the port-o-potties provided were disgusting. They are also not safe for women and girls. Separate bathrooms are needed for women and men and women in leadership are needed in identifying and reducing the danger zones around camps.

Refugees have dug pits for disposal of human waste — note the proximity to house and water tank.



# Waste Disposal Trench

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- Waste discarded into trench.
- Children playing in trench have developed diseases.

# Role Model for her Sisters



**Fatima (not her real name) met us when we drove up to the camp with confident demeanor and bright eyes. Photo shows her two young sisters. Fatima has 10 siblings.**

**Fatima came here with her many siblings in 2011 because both parents were hit in the arms by snipers. With her parents taken to the hospital, the children were home alone. Her father came ahead of them and found a place in the camp for the family.**

**Fatima at first refused to come — she had finished high school and wanted to study philosophy. Finally, she relented. It took 4 to 5 hours to cross the border — there were so many cars.**

**QUESTION: Are there differences between men and women in the refugee process? Men are kidnapped and arrested; women receive verbal abuse and harassment.**

**Once in the camp, traditional culture dictates that women in the camp stay at home and that men's word rules. Fatima did work in agriculture with her father (which is usually work for uneducated women), in order to help pay for house materials and to set it up. She is still in debt.**

**Women refugees in agriculture are paid \$4 for 10 hours of work. (REA document)**

**QUESTION: Her experience of violence? Every day she goes back and forth to university, enduring verbal abuse from Lebanese men. She studies philosophy and midwifery at Lebanese University (the first in her family).**

**We interviewed Fatima in in her camp home, where she lives with her 13-month-old son and husband, who supports her studies. She was not able to study in the home with her nine siblings, but encourages and supports them all in education. Her sisters play with other uneducated girls — Fatima does not want her sisters influenced by them.**

**She and her husband teach at the local school (they are the only teachers in camp) and she is looked up to.**

**The motivation for her education is to return to Syria and serve her country. But she needs safety and security to go back. “I would like to put my head on a pillow and not worry.”**

**Does she know any women in camp who have been physically, verbally, sexually abused? She hears a lot about it, but doesn’t know any.**

**What does she think of early marriage? Her mother said, “Get education first, then the right man will come along.”**

**She sees many girls in camp as young as 13 entering into early marriage. She tells them that they are moving from one problem to another.**

**Fatima wants to have 2 or 3 children, not more, so that she can educate them and they don’t have to “beg n the street.” She educates herself on the Internet about contraceptives; her doctor advises her.**

**We talked about how other women her age treat her: She is seen in a negative light, and doesn't go out with them. (She is probably perceived as being above them and maybe as being too self-confident.)**

**QUESTION: What is she proud of? She prides herself on being a strong woman (she credits her mother) and that, if anyone does, she knows how to handle herself.**

**Fatima's sister-in-law's comments:**

**Overcrowding in living space is difficult — there is no privacy; conflict of different lifestyles.**

**Violence against women in camp? Yes, she hears it and sees it in public. (Example: a husband hitting his wife, especially true of men with more than one wife. She has been an active bystander in public when witnessing this.) She also hears of women/girls being verbally abused on their way to school.**

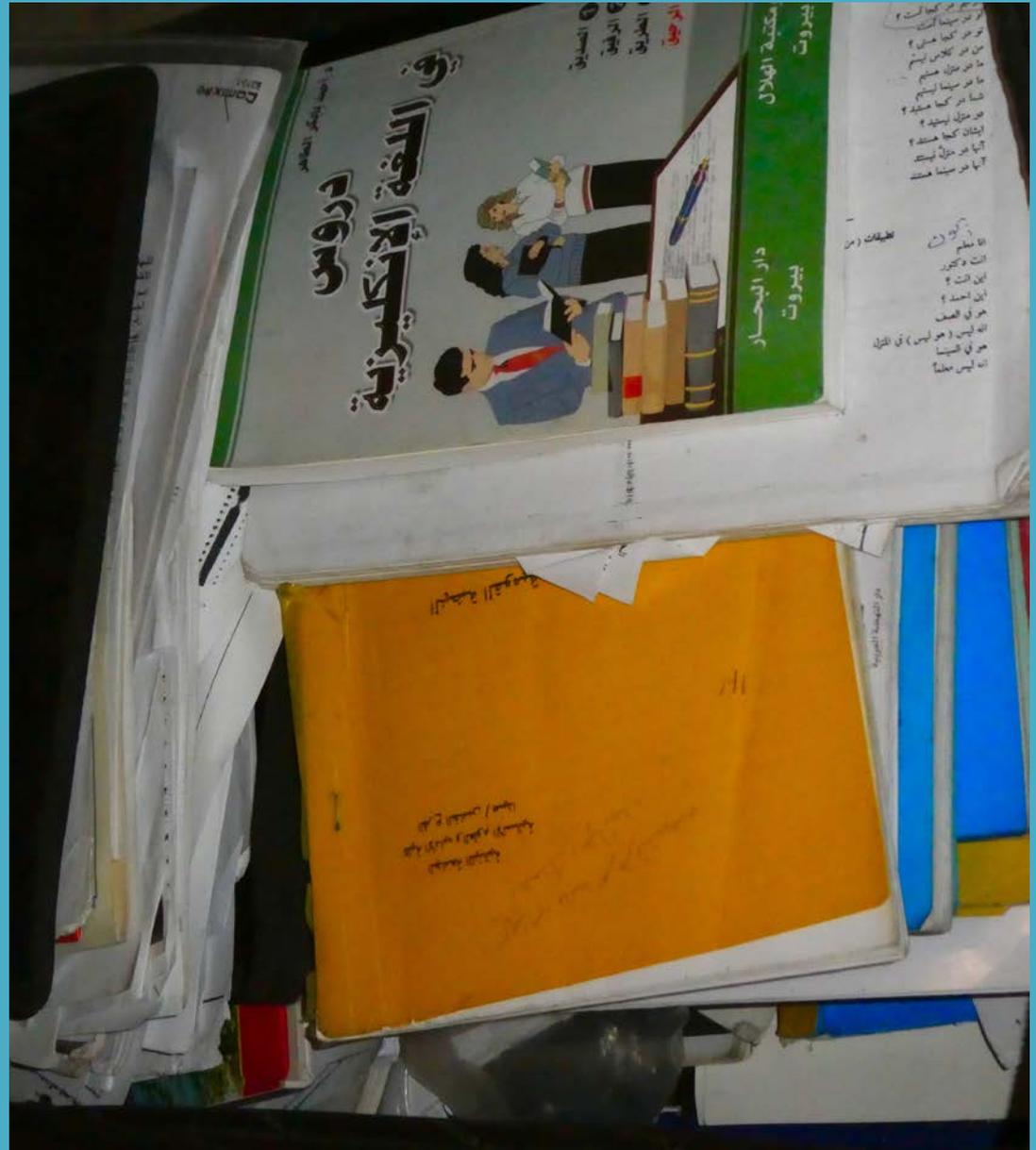
**She has not seen girls and women disappear from camp but has heard about it and learned of it on Facebook.**

**It is dangerous for women and girls in camp — she fears men breaking into their tent. Many tents have window openings covered.**

**She was married at age 15 and has a 6th-grade education. She would like to continue.**

**“Education is the biggest sword for success in life.”**

Photo: Fatima’s books and papers for her university degree



**Fatima's sister-in-law  
with her son and niece**





Janice Raymond with Syrian children

# School for Syrian refugee children

Created by Social Support Society of Lebanon

The Social Support Society Relief and Educational Assistance (REA) program has 5 schools, educating 2,800 refugee children, ages 5 to 14. It was begun by two dedicated Lebanese women and a committed staff of Lebanese administrators and volunteers.

Employs 200 refugee teachers, many who are educated Syrian women not able to get a work permit, thus helping the local economy.

Quality secular education, with one meal and transportation to and from school (making it safe for girls to attend). Extracurricular activities are provided — all the arts and sports, along with choir. Clothing and home furnishings provided for students.

Impressive — but reaches only a small fraction of children's educational needs (3%). 30% of grade-school-age children in Bekaa are in school with 0% in high school.

Syria once had among the highest percent of educated women in the Middle East. Girls in refugee camps are less likely to be educated than boys for reasons of safety and due to cultural attitudes about girls' education.

The Islamic Relief Society study "Invisible Lives: How the International Community is Failing Syrian Women Refugees," estimates that "around half of the nearly 500,000 school aged-children Syrian children registered in Lebanon are out of school" due to the costs of clothes and transportation and because of child labor.





School begins at 3 o'clock, after Lebanese school finishes. There are 450 children at the school, studying math, English, Arabic, French, civics, ethics and law.

The principal, who is Lebanese, does a double shift at the school.

Why? Passion to educate Syrian children. As refugees, they have nothing, and appreciate everything.

**“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”**

**—Frederick Douglass**

**Music and arts are part of the curriculum for Syrian refugee children.**







**We interviewed Syrian teachers, one of whom had taught Arabic in a Syrian university.**

**QUESTION: Is there a difference in teaching boys and girls?**

**Yes, generally boys are encouraged to be leaders, to speak up. Girls stay quiet and are shy.**

**One mother asked this teacher to focus on her son more than her daughter.**

**The teacher said “No, boys will have many options in life.” The mother replied, “girls have many options, we’ll marry her off.” The teacher then said, “She might not marry; she needs education. Especially with the war in Syria, educated boys and girls will be needed to rebuild the society.”**



## Trafficking in Women KAFA (Enough) in Beirut

**KAFA (Enough) — secular feminist organization founded in 2005 in Lebanon. Mission: “eliminate all forms of exploitation and violence against women.”**

**KAFA provides services and advocacy for women. It is working to resolve the dilemma of Lebanon penal law (which criminalizes prostitution but doesn’t enforce the law against buyers) vs. the new UN Protocol on Trafficking that Lebanon has signed, which does not criminalize women.**

**KAFA Study: “Exploring the Demand for Prostitution: What Male Buyers Say about Their Motives, Practices and Perceptions.”**

**The story of Lebanese traffickers who recruited vulnerable Syrian women and Iraqi women living in Syria for jobs in Lebanon:**

**75 women ended up in the Chez Maurice and Silver Hotel in the super nightclub area north of Beirut. They were beaten, tortured, and drugged to submit, never allowed out except to have abortions performed in a nearby clinic. Up to 20 men per day sexually used each woman. Traffickers garnered an estimated \$1 million per month from sexual exploitation.**

**Four women escaped and went to police. Police raided and closed the brothels and clinic, and they arrested the doctor who had performed 200 abortions. The ringleaders are still at large.**

**— “Dozens of Syrians forced into sexual slavery in derelict Lebanese house,” *The Guardian***

Beirut

Signs on  
every street  
corner and  
lamppost

# Rooms For Rent

Do You Need a Resident in Achrafieh  
close to the AUST ? ?

Here you can find everything you are  
looking for as if you have never left home.

In each room :

Your own Bed , closet and desk  
LCD - Plasma 32" + Dish

Fridge

Ac

Electricity + moter 24/24

Don't be shocked, all the utilities are for free  
Internet available for a good price

If you are interested call us **70 / 75 70 65**

Your Satisfaction is our GOAL ....

## For Girls Only

**Rooms For Rent**

**In Ashrafiyeh**

**For Girls Only**

**70 / 75 70 65**

Signs everywhere in Beirut suggest the entrapment and trafficking of young girls.

# Syrian League for Citizenship

The Syrian League was created at the end of 2011 (during the Arab Spring in Syria).

These women now work in exile, educating Syrians through seminars, workshops, and publications in Syria and in Lebanon.



They teach **principles** of citizenship and democracy, such as participation, freedom, responsibility, and equality, and **values** such as solidarity, civil consciousness, humanism, and public morals.

Workshop topics include: rights and responsibilities within democracy, secularism, women's equality, ethnic and sectarian diversity, sustainable development, and civil peace.

**Members of the League cannot return to Syria until Assad is out of power — they would be arrested.**

# Child Marriage

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**RAISE THE AGE**  
حدّدوا السن الأدنى للزواج

- Patriarchal tradition, especially in rural areas
- Huge gap in the ages of spouses
- Has increased in refugee camps (up to 2 times as much)
- Fathers sell daughters for money or to protect them

**Why marry at the age of 13, 14, 15?**

- Many girls live in crowded conditions, with no privacy and no school or work

See Janice Raymond's article on *Truthdig.com*, "Pity the Nations."

## Janice Raymond, "Pity the Nations"

**The Syrian League for Citizenship uses role-play between mothers and daughters (and pro/con debates between girls) to de-romanticize the rosy picture of early/child marriage that girls may have of privacy and a place of their own, a husband, etc.**

**"One workshop illustrates their challenge to the early marriage paradigm that dominates girls' lives in traditional families. The League recognizes that in addition to the patriarchal pressure that promotes early marriage, girls themselves may view marriage as a way out of their problems. Thus, the League works with mothers and daughters to challenge myths that early marriage 'protects' young girls.**

**"Girls might consider early marriage as a better option than a refugee tent where privacy and security may be non-existent. The workshop facilitator asks the daughter to speak about her dreams for herself that may include an education, a place of her own, a husband, and eventually children."**

## Janice Raymond, "Pity the Nations"

**Mothers and daughters are asked to exchange roles — daughters take the role of mothers and vice-versa. Discussion and debate follows after.**

**"The mothers, most who have been married very early, are asked to speak about their own experiences of marriage. Truths come out in these sessions. Many mothers echo the woman who says, "I lost my childhood. I had to leave school. Babies came quickly without my knowing anything about the sex act. I had a lot of responsibility and couldn't continue to see my friends. I had more problems than I ever had before, including a dominating [or abusive] husband.**

**"Mothers and daughters are asked to exchange roles and debate what the other has reported. The role-playing helps de-romanticize rosy expectations girls may have of early marriage when they hear themselves speaking as their mothers. And the mothers, for possibly the first time, are able to speak honestly about their lives and how things might have been different."**



**I dream of finishing my degree.  
I dream that all women have  
the support to learn, grow, and  
go after their goals.**

**— on the office wall of the  
International Rescue Committee**

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go after their goals.*



# Concluding Remarks

**Traprock Center is collecting funds for the feminist organizations in Lebanon, which work with women and children refugees to ensure women's safety and children's education. We recently sent \$10,000 and hope to do the same again.**



**Touch of beauty in a refugee camp: basil and marigolds**



**Food feeds the body; but flowers feed the soul.**

# Western Pollution in Lebanon



## Western Pollution in Chtaura

- Sexual Objectification of Women
- Junk Food
- Consumer Culture

# Center City Supping Mall, Beirut

Sexual  
Objectification



# Junk Food in Chtaura



**DUNKIN'  
DONUTS**®



AL

# Junk Food in Byblos



**Consumerism:  
Center City  
Shopping Mall,  
Beirut**





**Great contrast between wealth in Beirut and poverty in Bar-al-Elias Refugee Camp**