

Could there be light at the end of the tunnel?

Noura, 30, and Ola, 38, both single mothers, are sisters-in-law. They became inseparable since they resolved to flee their hometown in Homs with their families in January 2013.

As war raged in their village, Noura along with her husband and three children and Ola, who had recently lost her husband, and accompanied by her five children were forced to leave their village. They only packed the bare necessities and left their lives behind.

Noura's husband was arrested at a checkpoint inside Syria as the families were on their way to Lebanon.

After several displacements in Syria and no news of her husband, Noura lost hope of finding him, and the two women decided to pursue their journey to safety with their children.

With very little in their possession and no documentation, crossing legally to Lebanon was not an option and they had to resort to the road through the mountains across from Arsal, east of Lebanon. They were hoping to join their relatives in North Lebanon where many Syrians had already sought refuge.

"We escaped Syria in the hope of a more stable life but we slid further into desperation" said Noura. Since their arrival in Lebanon, Noura, Ola, and other relatives, were on a constant search for a place they could call home. Limited livelihood opportunities, the absence of assets, the decreasing humanitarian assistance and increasing debts coupled with unaffordable rent and rising evictions, forced them to keep moving between informal settlements and substandard shelters.

The households moved six times within a period of four years. In the meantime, Ola had to take her 13 year old son out of school to start supporting the family financially. "I feel guilty that my son is taking the responsibility of my family at such a young age and I'm afraid he's going to blame me in the future", stated Ola.

Noura added: "If we were educated we wouldn't have reached this point. I can't even help my children with their homework". Regarding the decision to marry off her 13 year old daughter in order to cope with the harsh living conditions, Noura says, "I know that forcing a child into marriage is never the best option, but I had no choice".

Towards the end of 2018, both families moved in with their relatives into a house in an unfinished building in Minieh near Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city. The house did not meet the minimum standards of safe and dignified housing, and was missing doors, windows, and handrails, as well as water and sanitation facilities. This put these women's families at high risks in regards to safety, privacy and health. In 2018, more than 10% of refugee households, like those of Noura and Ola, had to move out of their accommodation mostly because of evictions, unaffordable prices and unsuitable living conditions (VASYR 2018).

"With each year of residence in Lebanon we have been facing new challenges. Would there be light at the end of the tunnel?" wonder both women.



Credit: Solidarites International

“ We didn't expect life in Lebanon to be that much of a struggle. ”