

# We are HERE, too



European Union  
Civil Protection and  
Humanitarian Aid



United Nations Population Fund

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We are HERE, too

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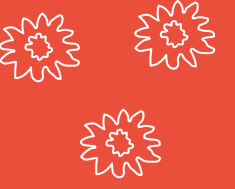
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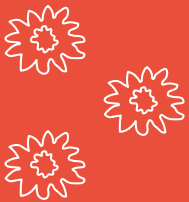
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## Introduction

Those who came were hundreds of thousands of women, men and children. Wounded, grieved, broken people... Most were starving and sick. Besides, they were uprooted.

Some had visited the neighbouring country Turkey before. Yet, this was an unplanned one. The horrors of war compelled them this time.

Everybody should have done their best. But how?

KAMER sought the answer to this question by talking to women who had been through similar experiences. Just then, a benefactor who declined to be named donated the first finance needed. In order to figure out how to do things, we started working considering the fact that the best way was to draw on previous experiences as well as gain new ones.

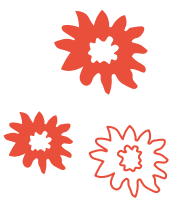
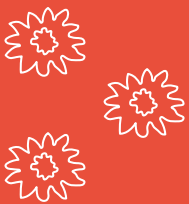
Then came the collaboration with UNFPA. We started to work together first in Antep and Adıyaman and continued in Diyarbakır, Batman, Mardin, Kızıltepe, and Maraş with a large team.

The worst would be witnessing, yet keeping silent. We did not sit silent. We are struggling...

Thank you our first donator for your contribution in providing us the tools for starting and devising our methods.

Thank you UNFPA for supporting us in healing the wounds of our thousands of new neighbours.

*Nebahat Akkoç  
On behalf of KAMER Foundation*



**After the awareness group meetings, I now let my daughters speak and state their opinions so that they raise their own children in the same way in the future.**

## AZALIA

If you ask me how happy I am nowadays, I would say I am very happy because I wasn't happy at all when I was in Syria...

I had a very difficult life there. Both my family and I had not only financial difficulties but also psychological problems. In fact, I faced emotional problems rather than financial ones there. My family migrated to Egypt before the war started. They moved away from me and I started to live with my mother-in-law in one of the big cities of Syria.

I am 27 years old now and got married at the age of 20. I am an Arab and third of six siblings. I studied English and Computer at a vocational school in Syria and tutored in a primary school there. Since I am not educated in Turkey, I cannot work here, thus I do not have any work experience. My daughter is starting school this year. I hope she receives an education here as good as in Syria. I have two daughters; one of them is five and the other is three years old. I gave birth to one in Turkey and the other in Syria. The doctor

in Syria was male, thus my husband did not allow me to give birth in that hospital. Then, we found a female doctor in a private hospital and I gave birth there. My second girl was born here, but the most difficult part was not being able to speak Turkish.

I experienced the war directly. When the war started, there were fighter aircrafts flying over us as we were walking in the streets. My daughter and I even saw crashing aircrafts killing people. We were deeply affected by these things going on around us, thus we decided to come to Turkey. We crossed the border with our passports.

My husband graduated from a vocational school where he studied in an electric programme. He was working as an electrician in Syria and he does the same job here in Turkey now. Before we moved to this city, we lived in two different cities as well. Yet, neither my husband nor I could find a job there, thus we finally settled here. Now, he has a small electrical shop and is

working with engineers in the construction sites. I am still unemployed.

I love this city and grew accustomed to it very much. Yet, we really had hard times in our first year. The second year was relatively easier, but, thank God, we are doing fine this year. It has been three years since we came to Turkey and my life has changed significantly starting from the very first year. For instance, I started to go out. However, I would be lying if I said the psychological effects of the war did not leave a trace behind. When we arrived, the most difficult thing for me was my second daughter's birth. I was pregnant when we moved here. I did not know anyone and could not speak Turkish as well. I had no relatives here. Although some of my neighbours helped me a lot, I sought the support of my family very much. I haven't seen my mother for five years and I desperately want to see her. When they were leaving Egypt to move to Germany, they came to Izmir and I couldn't go and see my mother then. I cried a lot and I still do. I miss her a lot. We can talk on the phone but it is not the same thing to have her here. Not being able to see her for five years is heartbreaking.

The best part of being in Turkey is leaving the psychology of war behind. I am also very fond of my neighbours in Turkey. There were times when they were a family for me. I also had friends from KAMER here. Now, I can easily go out and take a walk in the downtown. Actually, when I was single, I could freely go out in Syria. My father did not restrict us. Yet, I married in the time of war and the war restricted us a lot. During the wartime, I could only go out with my husband. My husband does not interfere anymore since we came here. I can go out on my own.

I saw KAMER on Facebook. Turkish literacy courses attracted my attention. It was a time when I wanted to learn Turkish to be able to go to hospital easily and teach Turkish to my daughters. Therefore, I first came to KAMER for literacy courses. Then, I joined awareness raising meetings. I have never been to a women's centre before in Syria. After I graduated, I started

to work, then I married and then the war broke out. Hence, I first met a women's organization in Turkey. During the awareness raising workshops, I was touched by women's rights issues the most. I realized that women and men had the same rights. My husband is not like that, but many men in Syria tell women not to talk and not to go out. There are numerous men who say, "I am in charge here, so you keep silent."

My life changed tremendously since I came to KAMER. Heretofore, I did not talk to my husband much, but now, I can easily express myself if there is a problem. And my husband also realized the change in me after I came to KAMER. In fact, he dotes on me more than ever now. He likes the new me very much. Besides, I became aware of children's rights and learned how to better communicate with my children. I also learned how to behave towards my children and how to play with them. I used to tell my daughters that they should not talk much or do particular things because they were girls. After the awareness group meetings, I now let them speak and state their opinions so that they raise their own children in the same way in the future. Our communication with my girls is very good now. They know what is right and what is wrong and they can express themselves very well. For instance, when I tell something to my elder daughter, she immediately draws a picture of what I say and describes it to her sister and tries to teach her. She also wants to help me in cooking or cleaning when needed. We also participated in KAMER's Playing Together Groups with my daughters. We now draw more pictures at home. My daughter used to draw a few lines and give up but now she draws with an eye to what she does. And I hang these pictures on the wall. My elder daughter wanted to be a doctor and she now says "I will be a doctor but I will draw pictures for sick children who come to see me and will make them happy."

In Turkey, there are people who discriminate and who do not. Everybody is not the same. I was never exposed to discrimination in my own neighbourhood but I follow the news and the Internet, and see that people are subjected to

discrimination. For instance, some Turkish people do not accept Syrians within their own community. There are not many differences among Arabian Syrians and Kurdish Syrians here. In fact, there wasn't much difference before the war. However, after the war, people started to discriminate others as Sunnites, Alawites or as Kurds, Arabs etc. Actually, nobody is different than the other.

There are also many beautiful things about Turkey. For example, the first thing that comes to my mind is that women are free in Turkey and the majority of its people are Muslims. Whoever wants to wear a headscarf is free, and whoever doesn't is free, too. And it is also very nice to be treated equal as Turkish people in hospitals and public gardens.

My biggest dream is to graduate from a university and start working. I studied English for two years in Syria and I want to study for four years here. I want to teach English at schools. For the time being, it is impossible for me to realize this dream since I am taking care of my daughters. I do not have anyone to look after them. Yet, in the future, I will definitely try it.

Surely, as any other Syrian, I want to go back to my homeland but I got used to living here very much as well. The customs, traditions and food here is very similar to Syria. Actually, the only thing I am sure about is not being willing to go to Europe. My children are also very happy to be here in Turkey. As a matter of fact, they do not know much about Syria.





**I am a woman  
and I have rights.**

## KULÎLK

Actually, I am not happy these days. Yet, I was very happy when I was in Syria...

I am 28 years old now. I am a secondary school graduate. I am Kurdish, yet learned Arabic at school. Thus, I can speak Kurdish and Arabic. Now, I also learned Turkish. I can write and read in English, but cannot speak. Back in Syria, we had the chance to learn French but I did not learn. If I hadn't married, I would have continued my education. I am a smart woman. Women in Syria do not have the same rights as women in Turkey. If it were, I would have finished my school and worked. I was engaged at the age of 16 after I had graduated secondary school. After a year of engagement, I married at the age of 17. Right after that, I got pregnant.

Before marriage, I was living in a village, and then we moved to a city. After I got married, I lived in the same house with my mother-in-law. You know how it feels! It was tough. We had economic problems then. It does not matter how kind your mother-in-law treats you. If

you live in the same house, you have problems. In the house, we lived together with my two sisters-in-law, one brother-in-law, my father-in-law and mother-in-law. The house had two rooms and a living room. I went through difficult times. I was crying everyday. Thank God, those days are over. I love my husband, thus I put up with all these hardships. I lived together with my mother-in-law for exactly five and half years. Then, we moved to our own house. We left the house solely with our clothes, without taking anything. We moved to my village, yet ISIS came and blocked the roads. We stayed with my own mother for one and half year. The village life was also tough. We had no water or electricity. We had to buy them, yet we did not have the money because there were no jobs. I never worked in Syria since my husband did not allow me.

I witnessed the war very closely. For instance, I don't cover myself but I had to do it for four months. ISIS came and ordered us to veil ourselves. I saw the soldiers of ISIS; they would never

look at covered women. We used to wear all black. I had two single sister-in-laws in the house living with us and we were afraid that ISIS might harm them. Living together with my mother was also very difficult. A married woman moving to her mother's house is not welcomed in our traditions. My relatives were gossiping about us living together with my mother. I couldn't stand all of this. I kept these from my husband. He insisted on learning about what was going on and I finally told him. Then, he said "Well, I will go to Turkey whatever it takes, I will work 24 hours if I have to and will get you out of Syria". Then, my husband's aunt came to Turkey and called us. She said, "Come to Turkey, life is easier here, at least, there is electricity and water. Most importantly, you can work here." My husband is a cook, thus he had job opportunities in Turkey. When we were in Syria, he had a very good job; he cooked for the prime ministry. He also cooks in the house but he messes up a lot. He cooks for half an hour; I clean the kitchen for hours.

We illegally crossed the border. It has been exactly 2 years and 10 days since we came. We had no money in Syria; hence I had to sell my wedding ring to cross the border. They paid 300 liras for that. Two years ago, it was easier to cross the border. The soldiers treated us kindly. My two sons, my mother-in-law, two sisters-in-law and I crossed the border. My husband came 15 days before we arrived. He worked for 15 days, rented a house and then we arrived. We had never thought of living through such things when we were in Syria.

The first days of our life in Turkey were difficult. First of all, the house was literally empty when we arrived. We slept on the floor for the first seven days. Then, I told my husband that I was going to work. He started shouting at me but I told him "I am going to work, so what?" I am literate. I learned some Turkish in Syria but could not speak very well. My village is a border village and we didn't have satellite there, thus we had Turkish channels. I used to watch Turkish channels. That's how I learned some Turkish. My husband asked me how I was going to work. He

told that my brother and mother would go mad if they learned. They would say to him, "Aren't you a man? How do you allow your wife to work?" I told him that I was determined to work no matter what. I went out into the street. There was a restaurant. I went in and asked them if they needed a staff. I asked in Kurdish and he looked at me saying, "Yes, we do!" and asked where I was from. I told him that I was from Syria. He hired me saying, "Come and work, let's give it a try!" I washed the dishes for three days and then started to wait on tables. I worked there for nine months. My husband was also working, so we started to buy furniture for the house. I bought everything I needed; I bought a washing machine, the sofa set. Thank God, I have everything I want in my house now. It is even better than my house in Syria.

I got pregnant after a while. I worked until I was 3 months pregnant, and then quitted my job. After I gave birth, my baby stayed at home for 4 days but we took her to the hospital when she got worse. She passed away when she was 7 days old. I don't know why she died. She was healthy but she was not meant to live. When she was in hospital, they had her blood sample and sent it to Izmir. They told us that we would get the results in five days but she died before we got the results. I had delivery by c-section in a state hospital. Everything was very good. I brought my baby back home. Then when she got sick, my husband took her to intensive care. He told me that he might also take him to a private hospital but after he checked the intensive care and found out that it was clean and the nurses were very attentive, he decided to stay. He told me "Every three child is attended by a nurse, we don't need to move to a private hospital, she is being taken care of well." But then she passed away. I was devastated. God spare all of us from the grief of losing a child. It is incomparable to anything. I got into a deep depression after that.

One day, my neighbour ran into a friend from KAMER while she was getting an identity card for her child in the police headquarters. She invited my neighbour to KAMER saying that women can receive support and medical service

in the centre. Later on, my neighbour went to KAMER and met women working in the centre. She also told me to go and meet them in order to get some medical help. We came together. When I came here, I was desperate; I wasn't feeling well, not at all. I didn't know how to read and write in Turkish. I could only speak and it was not very good. When they asked me how many children I had, I remembered my lost baby and started to cry. They asked what the matter was. One of them said, "Let her cry, she will be relieved". That's why I loved here. The people here are so openhearted.

I have been coming to KAMER for 3 or 4 months but I feel like I have known them for years. When they asked me to join Turkish language courses, I rejected since I didn't know what a course meant back then. They insisted saying, "Why don't you come? Come, so you can speak Turkish much better." But I told them that I was not feeling well, thus wouldn't come. Someone from KAMER called me 15 days later inviting to a meeting where Syrian women would come. Then, I attended the meeting. When I arrived, I said, "Well, all the Syrians must be here." However, I did not know anyone there. I thought that I was the only Syrian in this city. I looked at the crowd and said, "Where did all these people come from?" Subsequent to the meeting, I started Turkish language course. My psychology started to get better. I changed in a single month. I wasn't taking care of my clothes, didn't wear make-up, or didn't do my hair lately. In other words, I wasn't taking care of myself. Yet, I met KAMER, I pulled myself together and I feel much stronger now.

Literally, KAMER gave me strength. I am a woman and I have rights. I attended a lot of meetings here. We talked about violence, child marriages and communication with our husbands. I was deeply affected by early marriages. For instance, I had a child when I was 18 years old. Early marriage would harm women and I didn't know that. What's more, children should not be the mere focus of your life. You should also think about yourself. After these meetings, I changed myself. My relationship with my husband

also changed. I realized the oppression. I also changed my husband after I came to KAMER. He had hard times though. He sometimes complained about my transformation. He was saying, "You have changed, I can barely know you. You leave without permission." I told him that I was a woman and I had rights. I said, "Only staying at home with children, doing the cleaning and cooking is not the way how a life should be spent. A woman also needs to take a break sometimes." I learned it here. I came here everyday for two months. Now, when my husband says something, I tell him that I have my rights. Surely, I show him respect and love, that's what we have learned. But, he is also pleased with my transformation.

My relationship with my children was already good. I am not a nervous person. I never hit my children. We have been going to the mother and child Playing Together Groups in KAMER for a month and we benefit greatly. One day, we were cutting out shapes with play dough. When we went home in the evening, my six-year-old son wanted to play with the dough again. We also learn how to communicate with each other in the group activities. We learn Arabic songs, Turkish songs, and do recycling activities. I always tell my friends about KAMER. Sometimes, I take pictures of the activities we do together with my little son and my elder son says, "Mommy, why don't you also take me there? I want to come, too." He wants to join us very much. Yet, I also do activities with him at home. For example, I tell them a letter. When I say "A", they should say "apple", then I say "B", and my son says "banana". I give them the letters; they find the fruits starting with that letter. We play it in Turkish. I care about my children's education, that's why I want to go to Canada or Germany. I can't speak German or English but I am not afraid at all because I know that I can do it. And KAMER has a crucial role in this. They gave me strength. I was working in the restaurant and did not know anything about the life around me. For instance, the place I worked and KAMER's centre is very close but I had no idea about that. I was thinking that KAMER was a distant place.

If I list the things I love about KAMER, the first thing would be that KAMER empowers women. Secondly, it informs women. Many Syrian women learn things they don't know from KAMER. For instance, I benefited the language course a lot. After two months, I could read and write. Lastly, for instance, if I am sad and come here, I share my problems with them and they understand me. They are like my sisters. I have no one here but my brother-in-law. And I have KAMER. That's to say, the best part is that I have many friends now from both Syria and Turkey. Also, I was fasting in Ramadan and one day I was very sick. My husband and my children prepared the dinner. I was so happy. My husband prepared the dinner for me for the first time.

All of my neighbours are from Turkey. Only one of them is Syrian. They are not discriminating because they don't know that I am Syrian. They don't change after they learn most of the times. Being a Syrian in Turkey is not difficult for me because I can speak Turkish. Yet, some of my friends have hard times, especially in terms of language. What's more, in Syria men do not work as they do here. My husband works 12 hours a day. It is very hard. He has been working in a restaurant serving breakfast for two years. But if you ask, being a woman in Syria is more difficult than here. In Turkey, women can work and know their rights. And men have a single wife here, that's the best part. My husband has a single wife but, in Syria, men can marry four women.

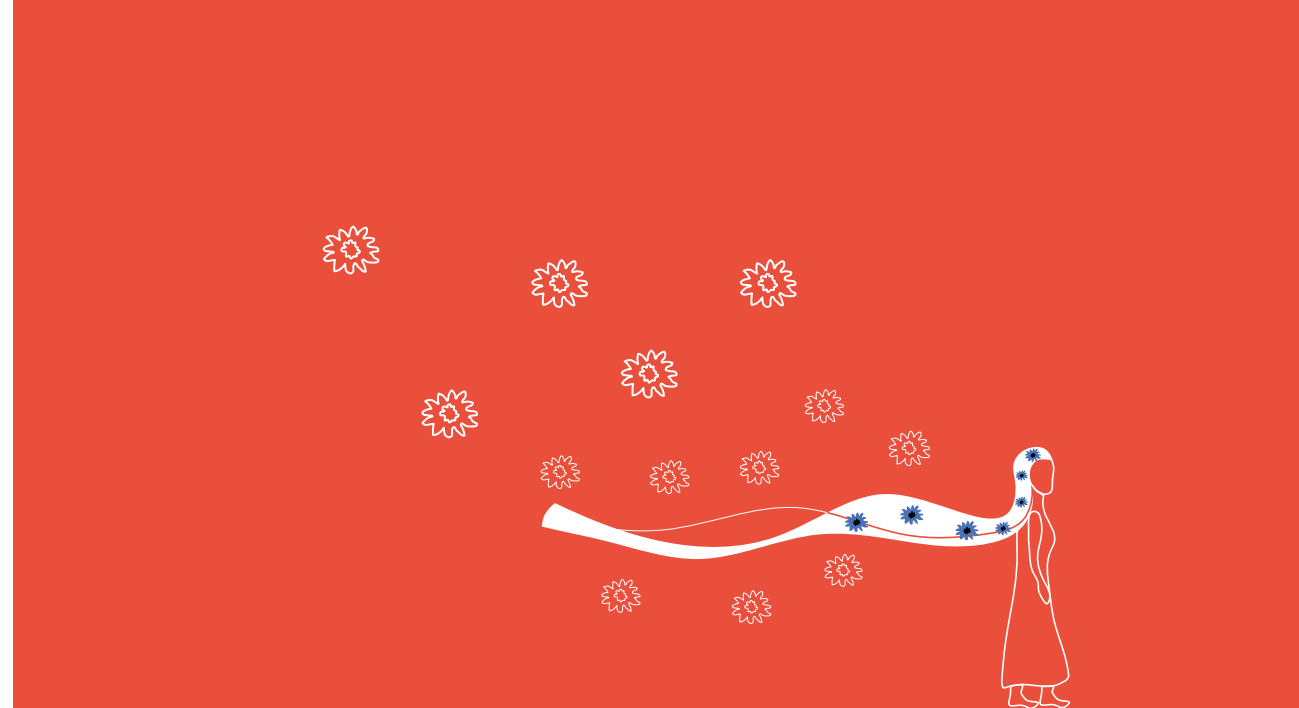
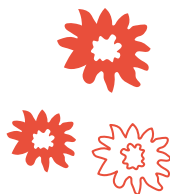
The best part of living in Turkey is that the streets, the parks, everywhere is very clean. The municipality is working well. That's why I love this city. My hometown resembles here very much. It is a beautiful city with its streams and trees.

One of my dreams was learning Turkish. I mentioned it before that we did not have a satellite in Syria; therefore I used to watch Turkish television channels. I wanted to learn Turkish a lot and thank God, I realized this dream. My husband used to restrict me a lot when we were in Syria. My sister-in-law could go to amusement parks but he wouldn't let me. He would say, "You are beautiful and I am jealous. You must stay at

home and my sister can go." He never let me out. But now, he allows me to go out here. For instance, if I ask him now to let me go to Istanbul, he would say okay. Turkey has changed him. When I was working, I was the only woman among 8 people. He allowed me to work there because we were in Turkey. He would never let me in Syria.

When I was a child, I used to dream a lot. I was dreaming of becoming a doctor, even a dentist. I would say I would be a dentist and straighten my crooked teeth. If I had the chance to study again, I would become a dentist. Now I tell my sons to complete their education, become a dentist and fix my teeth. They giggle and say, "If God lets, mom."

My dream now is having a baby girl. I wish I could have a daughter, do her hair, and dress her up beautifully... My biggest dream is the health of my children and my husband. And I have one more dream; I want to die before them. I shall never see another death of my children.



## LUTS

I am happy now. I wasn't very happy in Syria...

I am an Arab. My mother was a tailor and my father did not have a regular job. My life in Syria, especially after my marriage, was not good at all. My husband did not let me go out in Syria. Yet, the women in my neighbourhood were not like me. Actually, I am coming from a family similar to my husband. My family also did not allow me to go out before I got married. They married me off to someone similar to their customs. I was only 15 years old when I got married. After I had children, I was in the house with the children all the time. It was not only me that had problems but my children as well.

I am a primary school graduate. Unfortunately, my family did not let me go to school. We were 8 siblings in the family: 4 girls and 4 boys. The way my family treated boys were completely different from their attitude towards girls. The boys in the family were free and they were allowed to attend school. The girls were not allowed to go to school. Despite such oppression,

I could attend school and learned how to read and write.

After I got married, I had 6 children: 3 girls and 3 boys. I am 44 years old now. I gave birth to all my children back in Syria. My youngest daughter is attending a school in Turkey. My oldest son is 27 years old. He got married and I even have grandchildren. My other son also got married. They all married on their own will. Only my oldest daughter is still living in Syria and my other children and I are all in Turkey now.

We fled from the war. The war affected my children adversely. The bombs were falling from the sky and my children could not go to school. They were going to recruit my eldest son, thus we ran away immediately. My husband stayed in Syria. I escaped with my children except for my eldest daughter. We crossed the border with our passports. We witnessed and lived through the war and it was unspeakable.

We came to this city as Arabic was commonly spoken here, thus, thank God, we never felt

ourselves as a stranger. I was also never exposed to discrimination because I was Syrian. Women here do not treat Syrian women badly; we are not discriminated at all. Hence, I have never thought of going to another city or country.

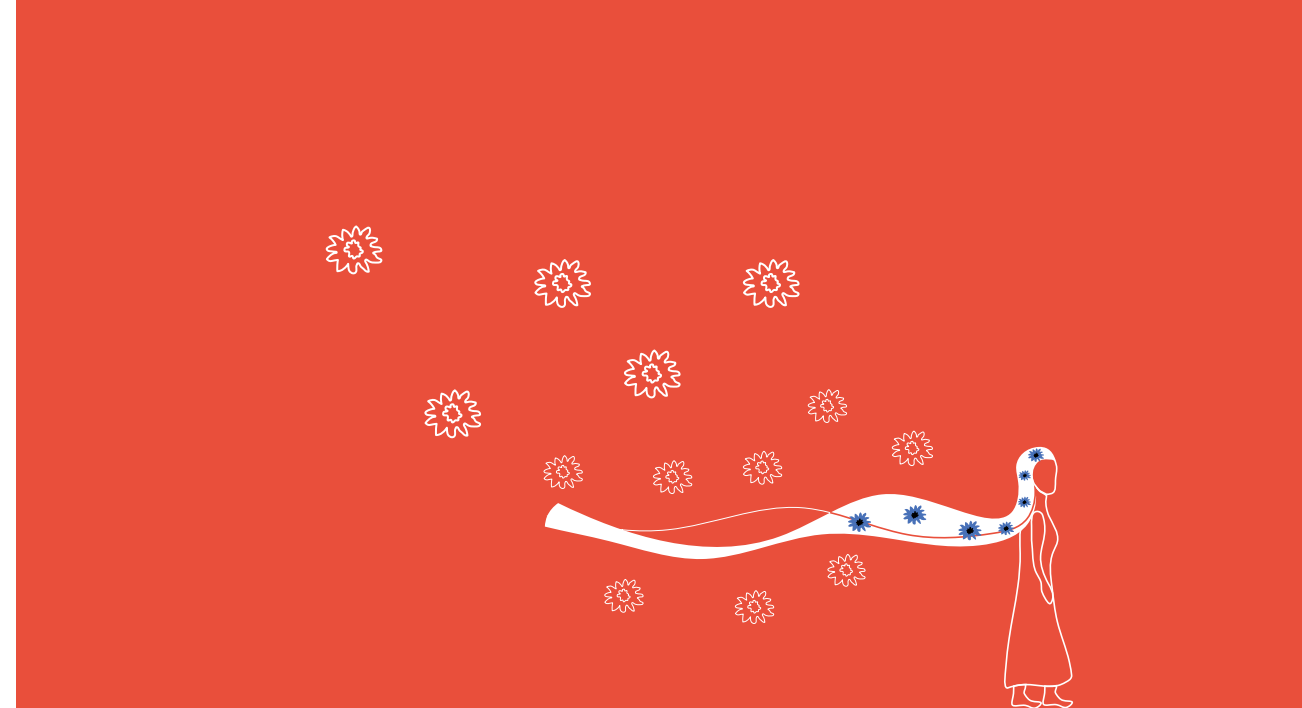
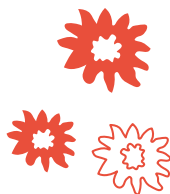
When we came to Turkey two years ago, everything was extremely difficult. Everything was expensive and most importantly, we did not have jobs. My son took care of us in that period. My husband came from Syria 5 months later. However, I became aware of the rights and freedom women have in Turkey and I decided to divorce. In Syria, divorce is a shame but in five months' time, I realized that this was possible and got divorced both religiously and officially. I realized that I was forced to live with him back in Syria. I experienced freedom for the first time in Turkey. Now, I can make my own decisions; I can go wherever I want. I am having the time of my life, what else do you expect? In fact, my ex-husband was a very mean person. After I got divorced, I thought that I would not marry again but now if I find a nice person, I would say "Why not?" In Syria, women were banned from everything but in Turkey, there is no such thing. Especially, being able to divorce is the most important right women have. And I exercised my right here.

I learned about KAMER on Facebook. Then, I called them and came here. We, the Syrians, can keep abreast of all the latest developments about this city and this country from Facebook. What I liked about KAMER in the first place was literacy and Turkish language courses offered here. Then, I also realized that it was a women's organization. There were also women's organizations in Syria but I was not allowed to attend them. Now, I will start the Turkish language course. Yet, my first visit to KAMER was eight months ago. I attended the awareness group meetings. During these meetings, the issue of women's empowerment touched me the most. I realized that I was empowered after attending these awareness meetings. When I was in Syria, I continuously had a feeling of anxiety in me, but now I am not afraid of anything. I gained more self-confidence after the meetings. What's more,

I knew that I was treating my daughters and sons equally. I realized how true this was during these meetings.

My biggest dream back in Syria was to have a profession. I want to realize my dream here in Turkey. I wanted to work at a lawyer's office but I could not speak Turkish. I am sure that KAMER will support me in realizing my dream. I will learn Turkish here. I want to stand on my own feet. I want to start my own business. If you ask me what I can do, then look at the lace gloves on my hands. I can do beautiful lacework. Yet, I want to learn to speak Turkish in the first place, and then I want to start my own business. We live in a rented house here and only my son is working. We barely get by. My son is only 22 years old but he is working very hard for us. And this city is very expensive for me.

I feel I belong to Turkey. If I had a job, if I could stand on my own feet in Turkey, I would never go back to Syria even if the war ended. If I describe KAMER to someone who has no idea about it, I would say, "Go and meet women in KAMER, you will never regret because that place is very special. You meet new people there and learn a lot of important things for women and, above all, you become stronger."



## NAZÊ

I am happy these days and yet I was very happy when I was in Syria...

I am thirty years old. I come from a wealthy family. My family has agricultural estate in Syria. Yet, things have become complicated after the war. We are 9 siblings: 6 girls and 3 boys. My parents are still in Syria, yet some of my siblings and I came to Turkey. My parents did not want to come as their job and home were there. They are not in a very good condition right now, but they are trying to manage. From time to time, my parents face threats from ISIS in their homeland. However, the biggest problem is not having electricity and water. This is a very exhausting process.

I stayed in Syria one more year after the war started. We did not have electricity, not even a second. It was the month of Ramadan and we were fasting without water and electricity. It was all in pitch darkness. I was sitting at home just like that all day long. I couldn't stand anymore. One day, I said, "That's enough! I can't

take it anymore" and four of us came here. The others are still in Syria.

I studied at the Law School in Aleppo. I was a lawyer. I came from a very strict education. The education in Aleppo is difficult but quite good. You cannot easily get accepted into Aleppo University. I graduated and was doing my intern. In fact, I was preparing for doing a master's degree but the war broke out. I had to quit and came here. I can speak Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic and English. Yet, I forgot English. My ethnic origin is Kurdish. We speak Kurdish at home. My brother is going to university here. It is easier to be a student in Turkey. The teachers do not push their students very much. In Syria, it is much harder. Actually, we start learning English at primary school. We have French and English as an elective course. You choose whichever you like.

In Syria, you can easily find a job with a Law degree. It is as if having a "green card" of Americans, like a key which helps you get in anywhere you want. However, I cannot work as a lawyer in

Turkey because I cannot get a certificate of equivalence here. In Syria, we learn ecclesiastics law the most in law schools. You don't have it here. As a civilization, we are similar, but in terms of law, it is very different. I would love to work as a lawyer here in Turkey. I checked but I can't. I am devastated about that.

I asked myself why I couldn't work here although I have been through a very tough education. I was a very respectable person in Syria. When I went to the courthouse, people held me in high esteem. I came here and I am worthy of nothing. I am looking for a simple job but I cannot even find it. Why? Because I do not have a good command of Turkish. As a matter of fact, even if you do a master's degree in Law, it is in vain as you cannot work. They won't let you. All my siblings are educated. One of them is a genetic engineer; he started a master's program on genetic engineering here. He attended a few months, and then he was admitted to Germany as a refugee. He is getting ready for that. As a family, we never stop our education. My sister is an English language teacher and she is working in a private school here. My other sister is a chemical engineer. If you ask my mother, she was never schooled but she supported all of us to have education. She always told us that she didn't have a chance but at least we had. My family always supported me. They did not discriminate between boys or girls but surely men are more important everywhere in Syria.

After the war broke out, I decided to leave Syria but my father did not want me to immigrate to Germany. In fact, I also did not want to go to Germany. I cannot do it. It is very difficult. I have a lot of relatives in Turkey. My aunt, my cousins, all of them are here in Istanbul, Ankara and Mardin. I would only like to live in Istanbul aside from here. There are more job opportunities there. At first, I was baffled when I could not find any job opportunities here. Then, I said I am glad that I stayed here.

I would love to go back to Syria and practice law there but I know that there is nothing left for us and it will be the same in the next 10 or 20 years. It will take time to recover. I cannot

think of going back right now and I do not want to. My relatives in Turkey supported us a lot, thus I did not have much difficulty here. Everything was settled when I arrived. Honestly, I also didn't feel alienated here. Yet, I felt discriminated on a few topics: education and job opportunities. I am a university graduate, and I still find myself complaining about why I cannot work here.

I did not experience any social discrimination due to being Syrian. We did not receive any humanitarian aid. I come from a wealthy family and one's economic condition is vital. That helps you through difficult times. Yet, not being able to practise my profession is eating my heart out.

When I came to Turkey, the most difficult thing was the language problem. I learned Turkish in a year. I did not speak a single Turkish word before I came here. For instance, I was taking the bus but could not say where I would get off. I was watching people around me and following what they would say. Then, I realized that they say "Somewhere available, please", I memorized the phrase. It took me a while to memorize though. I would talk to myself saying "My God! What would I say now?" It was so difficult. I realized this did not work and I still had difficulty, and then I understood that I had to learn Turkish. I looked for language courses but could not find. My sister was going to the university at that time and she learned to speak Turkish. I could not stand staying at home doing nothing. I decided to learn Turkish and start working no matter what happened. I started to watch Turkish lessons on the Internet for a whole year. I tried to learn sentence by sentence. For instance, if I were to go to a market, I learned what to say there. In my second year, there was a language course at the university. I took the course and studied grammar for six months there.

Now, I can speak quite well and I even have an accent. I speak like people of this city. That's because of KAMER. I used to read books and watch TV in Turkish and I used to speak proper Turkish without an accent. Then, I started to speak with the accent of people here. However, Kurdish spoken here in Turkey is different from Kurdish

spoken in Syria. I couldn't understand anyone when I first came. The Kurdish spoken here is mixed with Turkish. Some words are Turkish, some are Kurdish. Yet, I can understand now. I even sometimes speak Kurdish like people here in order to hide my Syrian identity.

For me, seeing that women could do anything they wanted here was the most pleasing thing about Turkey. In Syria, the professions women could practise are limited. Women and men are not equal but here everyone is equal. You can enter whichever profession you like. For example, being a secretary is not a good thing in Syria. Your family will be unwilling about it. However, it is different here. Women are freer in Turkey. I was also free in Syria but women in general are highly oppressed especially in terms of religion. When they come to Turkey, they feel relieved. They usually tell me "You are Syrian but educated and have a job. You are not like us, you can do anything."

I came to KAMER via a friend of mine. She was a friend of someone from KAMER. She was going to work here but she couldn't because of her baby. She was also going to university, thus she did not have time. She told me about KAMER Foundation. Then, I came here and we talked. They informed me about KAMER and the job as a health-care assistant taking care of women coming to the centre. I accepted and started to work.

I also attended the awareness meetings in KAMER. I was deeply influenced by the issues of violence and early marriage. I thought about children who are married off at an early age and I was so sad. In Syria, no matter what you do, boys and girls are not treated equal when they are raised. Boys in our family are also treated different and still they lay the table and there is always a division of labour at home. I prepare the dinner and they set the table. It was always like that in our family.

Now, I work as a health care assistant in KAMER. That's to say, I accompany women who are sent to the hospital. Unfortunately, no one listens to Syrian women when they go to a hospital. I witnessed it with my own eyes. They tell them to

go and they never listen. However, now everyone in the hospital knows us. When we go, they know that we come from KAMER. In addition to that, I work as a translator in the meetings held here. I talk to women. Sometimes they come for psychological counselling, I translate for them. Initially, people here, especially women were nice to Syrians but now I feel like they don't like us anymore. I don't know the reason. When we arrived, they would help more, yet now they act like they are fed up. Sometimes, I listen to the conversations in the bus; the driver says, "The Syrians ruined us!" without knowing that I am Syrian. He continues to criticize but I don't say anything. I stop myself not to get into a fight. However, believe me, there are people of any nature in Syria, both the good ones and the bad ones. And yet, not everyone is ignorant or dressed all in black.

I am so glad that my path crossed with KAMER. First of all, KAMER taught me to be self-confident. Previously, I had job offers but I was scared of not being able to handle it. Particularly due to language problems, I thought that I would fail. But now, I trust myself. Secondly, I learned to be patient. I was too impatient. I learned to listen to people. Women here told me many times to take a pause and listen and then talk. KAMER instils power and confidence in women along with teaching their rights. It teaches about the equality between men and women. I am happy to be a part of KAMER. All of my friends here are very nice. Besides, I am also working as a teacher in Syrian schools, teaching Arabic. I am so full of life.

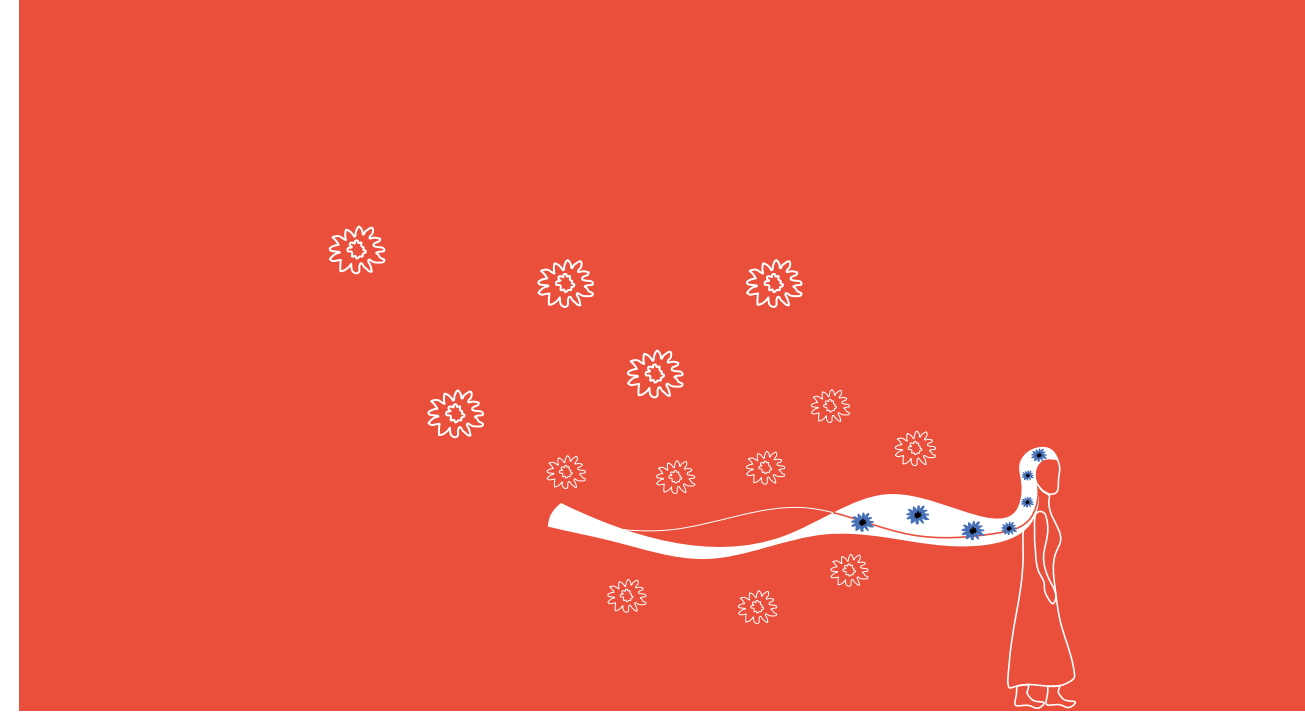
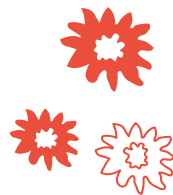
I am 30 years old now and I have no idea when the war will be over. But, if one day the war ends, things get back to normal and I can return Syria, I will start working on women's rights in Syria fighting against early marriages and kin marriages. Marrying four women is forbidden among the Kurds. It is not a very common practice among the Kurds, yet the Arabs marry four women. There were relatives who wanted to marry me even when I was in high school but I did not want to marry. My mother was forced into marriage; therefore she never forced us.



My mother's father passed away and her uncle forced her to marry. My relatives also wanted to marry me when I came to Turkey but I didn't accept. Right now, my sister, my brother and I are working and thank Goodness, we are doing fine. My family does not send us money anymore. We can manage on our own.

When I was in Syria, my dream was to be a lawyer. I studied law but I couldn't work as a lawyer. The war broke out while I was doing my internship and I had to leave my country. I regret that. When I came to Turkey, my biggest dream was to find a job. Thank God, I found it. Do you know what my biggest dream is now? Don't laugh at me but I want to fall in love. I don't have a boyfriend. I had one when I first came. He was from Turkey but it didn't work out. My family didn't intervene in my relationship. I immediately told them about my relationship and they did not say anything. They only asked who he was and his education. Education is the most important thing in our family. Nonetheless, then we broke up. I never fell in love in Syria and I wasn't looking for someone to marry. I had a lot of male friends. I am still seeing them but I never thought of marrying someone in Syria. My dream now is to love, to fall in love. It does not matter whether he is from Turkey or Syria. Whoever my heart feels close, I would choose him.

Where do I belong? When I meet someone, if she/he doesn't ask, I don't tell that I am Syrian. For instance, when I go to the hairdresser, I answer the call in Arabic. Then, they ask me which language that is, or where I come from. When I say Arabic, they understand that I am Syrian. Actually, right now, I feel that I belong to here. I can't go back to Syria anymore. Even if the war is over, everything is in ruins. For example, Iraq war broke out when I was a child and it still continues. This war won't come to an end soon. They say that those who migrated to Turkey after the war are doing well compared to others. Why? Because the cultures are similar... Thus, I wouldn't go anywhere else even if my family allows me. I also love this city very much.



## GHAZAL

I am happy these days. Before the war, I was not happy in Syria...

I couldn't go out much in Syria. Even if I did, I had to go with my husband. I was raising my kids at home. I have 3 children: 1 girl and 2 boys. My daughter is 15 years old, my elder son is 13 and the younger one is 7. I am 30 years old. My father died when I was a child and my mother married to someone else. Then, she sent all her children, 3 girls and 2 boys to the orphanage. When you are leaving the orphanage, that's to say when you finish primary school, they marry you off to someone. I was married off that way. I was only 12 years old. My husband was 10 years older than me. I gave birth to my first child at the age of 15. I never loved my husband and I still don't but we are still married. We live together in Turkey.

We took refuge in Turkey fleeing the war. We crossed the border with our passports. We were deeply affected by the war. My brother

was killed in the war. When things got worse, we talked and decided to come to Turkey. My husband was an ironer in Syria. He now has temporary jobs. We came to Turkey one and a half years ago. We chose here as we thought that the culture was similar to ours. The people here can speak Kurdish and Arabic. I am an Arab and I can speak both languages. I learned some Turkish, too.

When I first came here, I was frightened to go out. But then, I realized what made me happy the most here in Turkey: freedom... I could easily leave home in this country. And KAMER is the place I went as I left home on my home for the first time. My neighbour knew KAMER and she mentioned to me about it. Then, I wanted to visit but my husband did not allow me. He never let me out back in Syria anyway. Actually, my husband came to KAMER initially and asked for help. My neighbour talked to my husband, so he let me come and then I was able to visit here.

After that, I attended meetings held in KAMER. I was so happy to see the change in me. Before coming to KAMER, I took everything my husband said for granted, he was always right. And yet, now what I say is also true, I am also right. I show this to my husband and he tells me that I have a big mouth. Yet, my relationship with my husband has also changed. It is better now. Before, he used to say, "Women in KAMER know too much." I showed him what I know. One day, I called the police after a fight. That day, my children argued with their fathers and he told me that it was all because of me that I provoke them to disobey their fathers. Then, the quarrel got worse, even my mother-in-law got involved. As a result, I left home at 10 o'clock in the evening. It was winter and freezing outside. I didn't have anywhere to go, so I went to a park nearby and sat. The park was right in front of the Police Station. I wanted them to see me. A police saw me and approached. He asked me why I was sitting there out in the cold. I told him everything. I lost my nerves and started crying. Then, the police got angry saying "Who is this shameless man?" and told me to go home together. When we were heading home, I saw my husband and told the police that he was my husband. As he saw two policemen with me, he was petrified. He started shaking as if a chill ran down his spine. After that night, he started to change his attitude towards me. That's an example of what KAMER taught me. When I am here, I mean when I am in KAMER, I learned that I could call the police during such incidents. This is not possible in Syria. After that, we did not have a fight that big. In fact, he couldn't start one. Now, when we fight, I say, "I am not leaving the house, if I want, I will go and call the police, and thus you must go." My children take my side in the arguments. My mother-in-law is not in Turkey; she went back to Syria. Even if she were here, she wouldn't say anything because women cannot raise their voices, they cannot say anything. Do you know also how KAMER changed me? I think I did not know how to express myself before but KAMER taught me to communicate effectively. When we came, I did not know how to

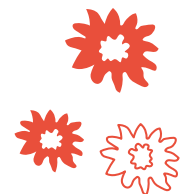
speak to people in Turkey. We now know how to speak and how to behave. Moreover, I have more self-confidence now. I am not afraid to go out. I did not know what it was like to go out in Syria. In fact, that's why I paid attention to learning Turkish: to be able to communicate people when I go out. If I go back to Syria one day, now I can go out on my own without worrying. As a matter of fact, I would love to establish a place like KAMER in Syria. If the war ends and everything goes back to normal, we want to go back after all.

Do you know what would I tell about KAMER to people? I would say KAMER teaches to express yourself, informs you about how to raise your children and explains how to behave towards your husband. My relationship with my children significantly changed after I came to KAMER. I tried to pass on what I learned from KAMER to my children. Unfortunately, I was not successful in recounting my knowledge to my younger daughter. She got engaged at an early age. She is 15 yet and is engaged to a man from Turkey of her own accord. I did not and do not want her to be engaged at an early age but she says, "He is from Turkey and I can only spend a beautiful life with him here. Life would be much better with him." And I cannot change her mind.

In Turkey, we were harshly discriminated for being Syrian. My seven-year-old son fell at school and the principle did not care for him. He neither called the ambulance nor took him to the hospital. On the other hand, my son pushed another student and he fell and they made a great fuss about it. But, when something similar happened to my son, they did not do anything. His mouth was almost torn to his ear. Thank God, he is doing fine now. What's more, when we were in Syria, people wouldn't say, she is a Kurd or she is an Arab but when we came to Turkey, things were different here. I have heard many things about people's ethnicity or political standing. People are discriminating here.

My biggest dream is to learn things, find a job and express myself well. I want to attend vocational courses to improve my hand skills. In this way, I can do handicraft and work. I definitely

want to go back to Syria. It is my homeland after all. Yet, if I cannot return to Syria and stay in Turkey, I don't want to beg for a living to a man anymore. I only stand my husband for the sake of my children for the time being. If I stay in Turkey, I want to receive education and become more and more empowered.



**I say, "Don't marry off your children at an early age, let them receive education and work."**

## PİRPİZEK

I am not so happy these days. I wasn't so happy back in Syria, either...

In fact, let me tell you something, I have never been very happy in my life. I lost my husband when I was 27 years old. Now, I am asking, how can I be happy? I came from a town close to Syrian border. I am Kurdish and 57 years old. My mother had 12 children: 8 girls, 4 boys. She is the only wife of my father. As a matter of fact, she gave birth to three more but they died. 20 years ago, my father died. Neither my father nor my mother was working. My sisters worked as a house painter, we used to live on that. I have never been schooled. I am illiterate. Yet, I can speak Kurdish and Arabic. Plus, I want to learn Turkish. Now, I started to figure out some words while watching TV. I got married at the age of 16. I was married off to my uncle's son. However, I loved my husband after we got married. He was nice to me. I have 3 sons with him. He died in a traffic

accident after 12 years of marriage. He was working as a driver.

I witnessed that all the boys were recruited into armed services at the outbreak of the war. They recruited one of my sons. I don't hear from him. I have no idea where he is or what he is doing. He has gone. Is he dead? Is he alive? I don't know anything. One of my sons, how can I say, is not sane. My eldest son is 32 years old now. My other son is 31 and the one in the army is 30 now. We saw the war was coming. There were armed conflicts among people. There were blackouts and water shortages. When there were mobilizations in our neighbourhood, we decided to come to Turkey. My children crossed the border illegally, and then I came through the border with my passport. It has been six months since we came here but I liked Turkey very much. In fact, I want to stay here and become a citizen. I don't want to go back to Syria even if the war is over.



We directly came to this city. Everything here is better than Syria. In Syria, I suffered from discrimination due to being Kurdish. We were oppressed by the Arabs. They were ahead of us in every field. Even our Arab neighbours oppressed us. They always made us feel that they were superior to us. But here, I have never been exposed to discrimination because of being Kurdish. Actually, I wasn't discriminated because I was Syrian, either. I did not experience much difficulty here. Therefore, I don't want to go back to Syria at all. As I said, I want to become a citizen.

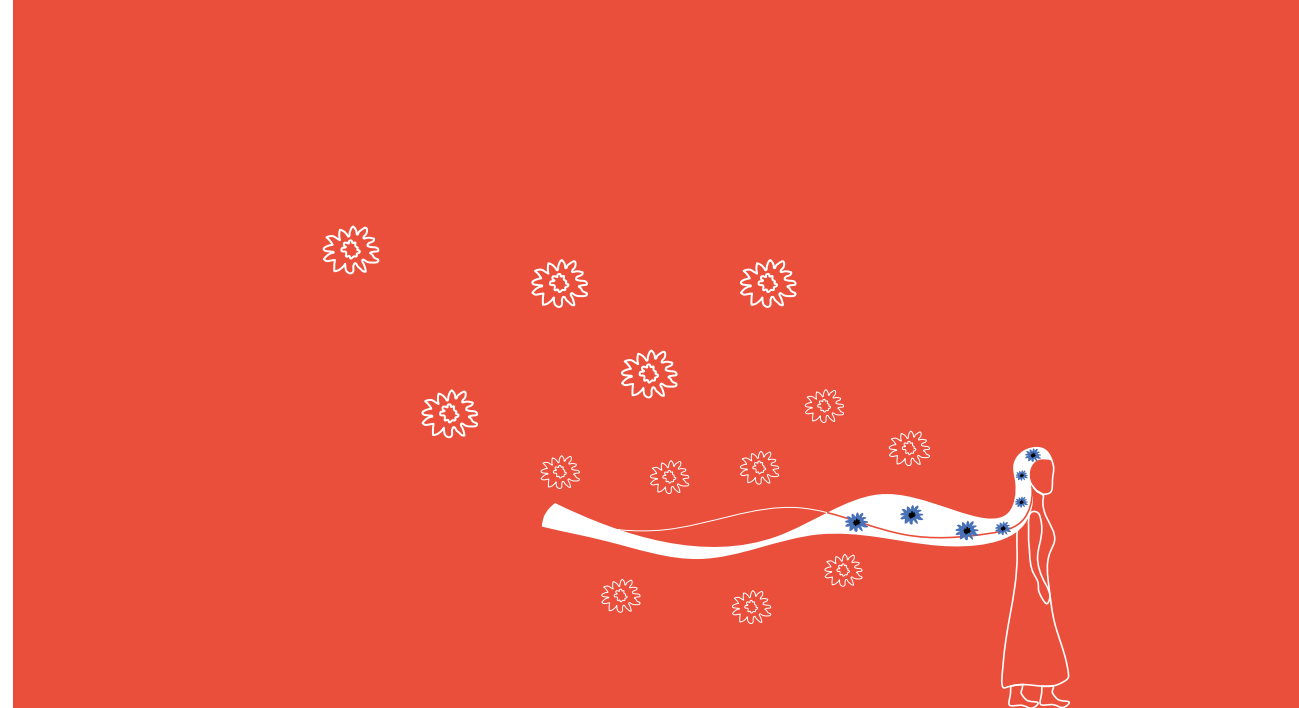
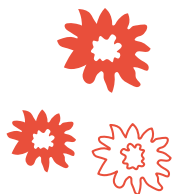
I live here with my two sons. We all live in the same house. My eldest son is married with 2 children. My daughter-in-law, my two sons, the children and I, 6 of us live in the same house. Only my eldest son is working. He is a plumber. We are staying in a house with three rooms. I think, this city is not expensive. It is easy to live with my daughter-in-law. I like her and I love my grandchildren very much.

I came to KAMER for the first time on June 8, World Refugee Day. I first heard of them in household visits though. After the household visit, I benefited their health-care services. I came to see the doctor here. In the week of World Refugee Day, we participated in the activities at the centre. We listened to music, danced and socialized. Everything was beautiful that day. There was a lawyer in the meeting briefing on early marriages. We participated in it. I am too old for this but they shared valuable information for young women. After the meeting, I mentioned about KAMER and the meeting to my neighbours. I always talk about KAMER. I say, "You can benefit free health-care services here." Then, I recount what I hear in the meetings. I say, "Don't marry off your children at an early age, let them receive education and work." KAMER makes me think of women's rights, women's freedom. Let women marry whoever they want and those who are married, both women and

men, should know their rights. For instance, when my son and daughter-in-law argue at home, I take the side of my daughter-in-law. I always stand up for women. Even if my daughter-in-law is wrong, I defend her by taking all the blame on me. I say to my son, "Come and yell at me." My daughter-in-law also came to see the doctor here a few times. She did not join the awareness meetings but she will.

My biggest dream now is to go on a pilgrimage and become a Turkish citizen. I want to spend rest of my life here.

If you tell my story to someone, say that she was not afraid of anyone; she always speaks the truth and she will always continue to do so.



## NEFİSE

I am happy these days but I was much happier in Syria...

I am a Sunni Arab. I have two sisters and a younger brother. My elder sister lives in another country; she is married with four daughters. My other sister lives in another city in Turkey. She has one child. My mother is here but my father is still in Syria. He wants to come but it is difficult these days. My brother lives in another country. I am a chemistry teacher. I am a university graduate. I worked as a teacher for two years in Syria. I received a qualified education. In Syria, education and health services are very good. Both of my sisters are engineers; one is a computer engineer and the other is an agricultural engineer. They were both working in Syria. My father had a spice store and my mother was a housewife. We came to Turkey with the whole family except for my father. After we came, my sister married someone with dual citizenship and moved to another city. Before I moved here, I lived in Istanbul for six months. My brother fled

abroad illegally from Izmir.

I witnessed all the horrors of war in Syria. When I was going to university, we were subjected to bombardments and were scared. Then, I moved to another city. There weren't any bombings, yet you could easily feel the effects of war. There was no electricity, no water, there was nothing. Thus, we decided to come to Turkey. In 2014, we crossed the border illegally. My father was too old to cross the border; hence he stayed in Syria. Now, we talk to him on the phone and, thank God, he is doing fine.

In the first years, we were severely discriminated in Turkey. For instance, in another city, we wanted to rent a house but the owner did not hire out since we were Syrian. Then, we moved here. Everyone here knows Arabic and Kurdish. We are not exposed to discrimination much in this city. It is like Syria. After we arrived here, I had to work. I earn some money but my father from Syria and my uncle from the United States still send us money in order for us to get by.

 Pretty, nice

I can speak four languages: Arabic, Kurdish, English and Turkish. I work at KAMER. My mother and I live in this city. Now, my aunt visited us from abroad, she is staying with us for a while. I think, I cannot go anywhere aside from here. I love Turkey. My mother and my father also came to Turkey and visited Istanbul for their honeymoon. I liked Istanbul and Ankara very much. Also, I have a boyfriend here. In fact, we are getting engaged in September. He is from Turkey and a distant relative.

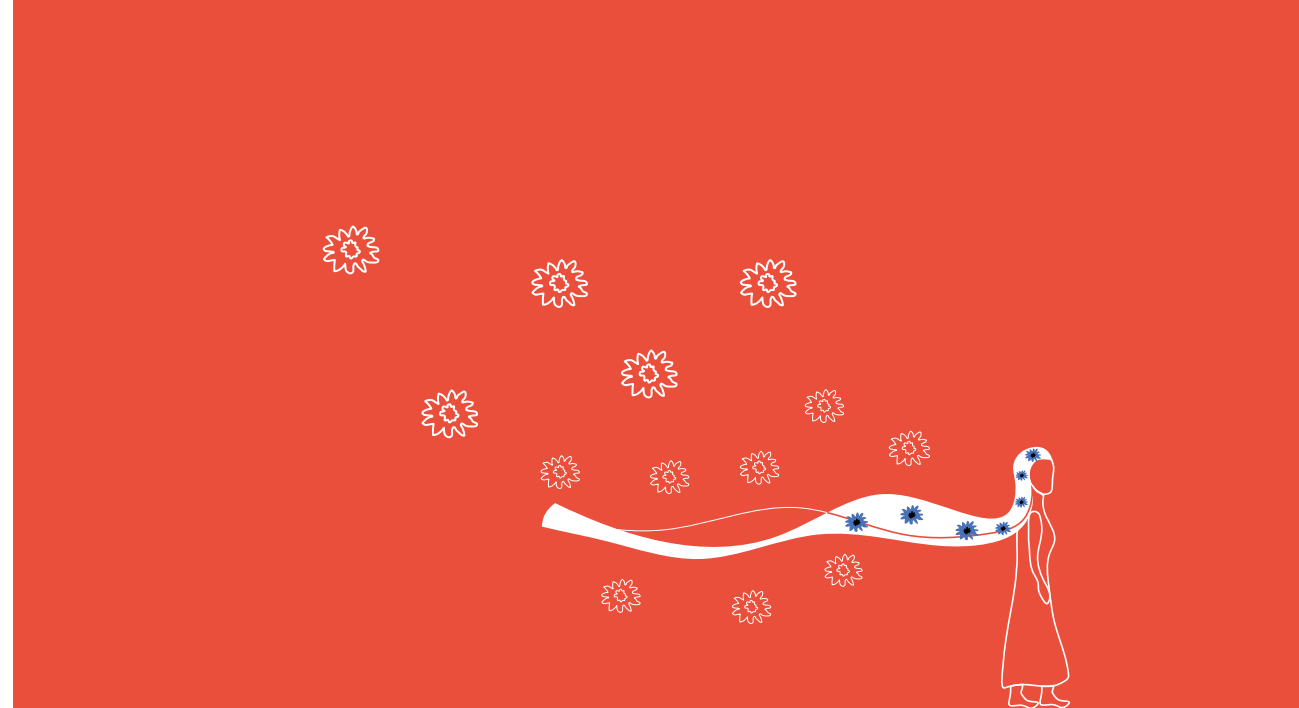
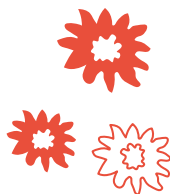
Despite the discrimination we experienced here, it was good to be safe. Everything is beautiful here. Actually, I had a comfortable life back in Syria. I was free. My family did not limit my freedom. Both my parents' families were open-minded, so my parents resembled them.

I learned about KAMER from a woman friend. She told me to go to KAMER if I wanted to learn Turkish. Thus, I came here and talked to a woman working in the centre. She told me to wait for the intermediate level since I finished the elementary level in TÖMER. They also asked me whether I would like to work at KAMER. I was happy to hear that and accepted. Then, I started working here. At the same time, I joined the language courses offered at different levels. I also attended some of the awareness meetings. Before attending these meetings, how can I say, I was a very nervous person. Yet, I am very relaxed now. In addition to that, now I know what I want. Previously, when my father gave me some money, I wasted my money on shopping unnecessary things. But now, the money I earn is my hard work and I buy only the necessary things with my money. I am more provident now. What's more, helping other people makes me extremely happy. After attending KAMER's awareness meetings, I became more aware of gender issues especially in marriage. When I get married, if my husband wants to sleep with me and I don't, then that's over. I won't sleep with him. I have the right to say "no" in this marriage.

Wherever I live, I want two things: peace and freedom. Yet, my biggest dream is to do a master's degree in chemistry or biology. In this way, I can complete my education in its fullest sense.

Plus, I want my father to come here. I want to spend rest of my life in peace. Peace is very important. For instance, my sister has severe problems with her husband. I think her husband does not love her. I think my sister does not love him, either. However, somehow they keep going for their children's sake. In fact, my sister wants to divorce. I stand by my sister in every sense. She should do whatever she wants. Actually, I did not know that we had rights before I came to KAMER. After I started working here, I learned we as women do have rights. Therefore, I wholeheartedly support my sister.

However, equality between women and men does not exist outside KAMER. In Europe, maybe such inequality does not exist but in Syria and in Turkey, it does. Upon coming to KAMER, I realized that there were no differences especially between woman and man, thus we were all equal. I learned about my rights. I realized that I could marry whomever I wanted. If I want to get married with a man, I will and if I don't, I won't. If I have a child, I will teach these to her/him. Besides, I always wanted to be a beautiful woman. In the future, I dream about myself as a woman who is a beautiful, strong mother of a girl with a master's degree.



## NADİDE

I am happy these days but I was very happy before the war back in Syria...

I am 35 years old. I have two sons and a daughter. My youngest son is 5, the eldest is 13, and my daughter is 11 years old. When we were in Syria, we had a very comfortable life. I graduated from fine arts department and worked as a fine arts teacher until I got married. I was teaching lacework and canvas embroidery. I quit my job after marriage. I married at the age of 18. We were 6 siblings: 4 daughters and 2 sons. When I was 16, my father died. My mother also passed away one and half years after my marriage. We settled into a city close to the border after marrying my husband. When the war broke out, we moved to a safer place. I witnessed the war for only three months. Afterwards, we came to Turkey. I am Arabian and Arabic is my mother tongue. I can also speak some Turkish and some English. I can speak Kurdish a little, too. I came to Turkey with my husband and children. My husband was a pharmacist in Syria and now he is

working in a community health centre here. In Syria, we were economically in a very good condition.

My relation with my husband is good, thank God. We had a kin marriage. I did not know him beforehand but I wanted to get married. We don't fight often. He was not so oppressive in Syria, yet he did not let me work. However, I came here and started to work because I wanted to produce something. He didn't let me work in Syria because we did not need it. He wanted me to take care of the kids but he had to allow here due to financial difficulties.

I received a very good education in Syria. I always wanted to study fine arts when I was a child. And I did. Before I got married, I also worked at a hair styling saloon and learned hairdressing there. Now, I work as a hairdresser here in Turkey. We are partners with a woman also working in KAMER.

It has been four years since we came to Turkey. My sister was living in Arabia before she moved to Turkey. One day I talked to her on the phone

and she invited us to Turkey. After we came here, we learned that ISIS attacked our hometown, thus we stayed here and didn't go back. Only two years ago, we went there for a couple of weeks. We brought our belongings to Turkey by crossing the border with our passports.

When we came to Turkey, economic problems were the most difficult part. We were unemployed and going through financial difficulties. My husband was unemployed for a year. My sister sent us money during that year. While I was working, my husband took care of the children and then we sent them to day care. Now that I am working, living here is not difficult anymore. I would not prefer to stay at home. Life here is not expensive and yet the rent for homes is high. I love to work and I am so happy to be working. I spent the money I earn for the needs of my children and the house. I can't say that I spend the money for my own needs. Children's needs come first. If any money is left, then I spend some for myself.

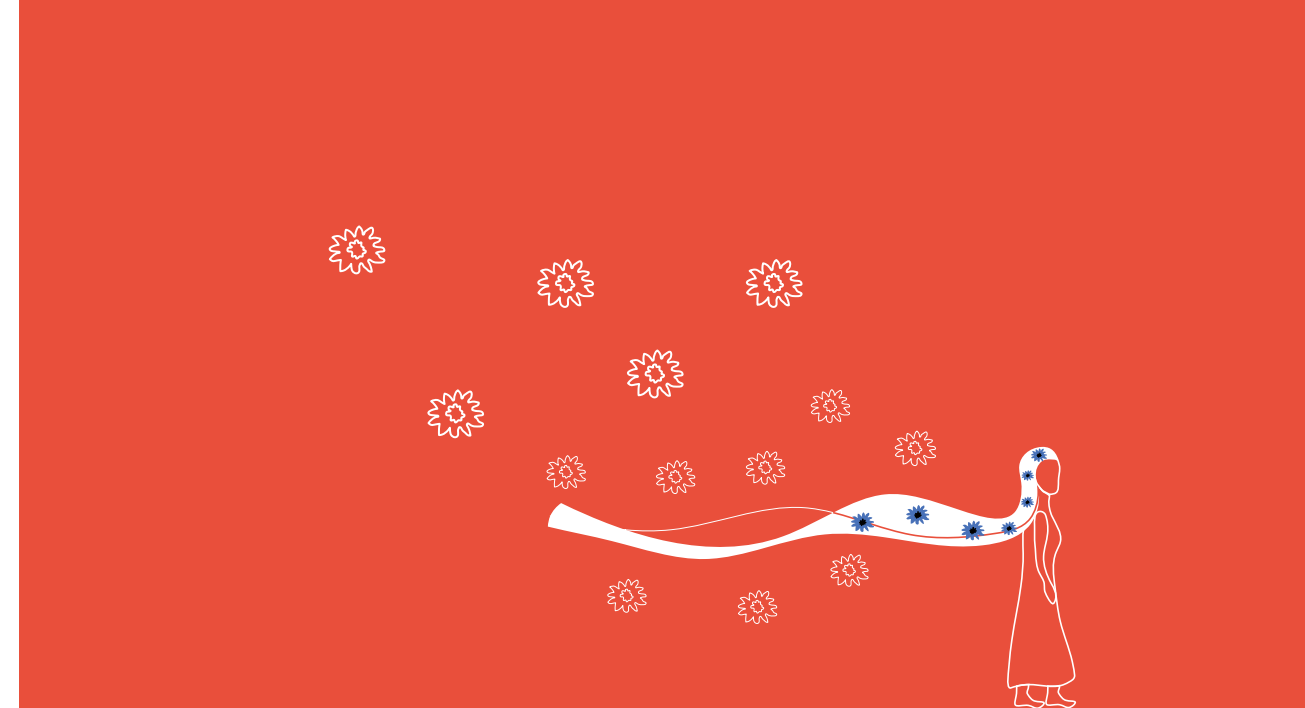
Unfortunately, I have no relatives here in this city. I have a relative in another city. My aunt and my brother live abroad. My brother is doing fine. The refugees are getting financial help there but he wants to come to Turkey. Before he went, he stayed in Turkey for a year, yet he decided to go when he found working here difficult. Now, he is living there all alone. Besides, he can't speak the language. In other words, he is unhappy. I would like to go there but only for a visit, not for living there. Actually, it would be great if he could come here. I don't want to live in a place other than Turkey. Living in Turkey is beautiful in every aspect because it is just like Syria. However, if the war ends one day, I would like to go back to Syria because it is my homeland, I feel I belong there. Yet, if things do not get better, I won't go back. I came to KAMER via a friend. We first met in a house visit and then came across a few times. She intended to open a hair styling saloon back then. She wanted to become partners and we started to run the saloon together. First she came to KAMER and then I did. KAMER visited me in the household visits. They invited me to the Turkish language course. I attended the course. Now, I can understand Turkish but I cannot speak. To be honest, I am a little bit embarrassed to

talk. I wish I could learn it in its fullest sense. At nights, I am surfing the Turkish websites. My children can speak Turkish fairly well. I am trying to learn from them. Especially my 13-year-old can speak fluently. From now on, I will come to KAMER more often because I love here very much. Everyone here is very kind. I am also learning some handiwork designs and crochet here. I tell of KAMER to women in the saloon as follows: "I feel very comfortable at KAMER. When I go there, I feel relieved. All my worries disappear there." I miss my family and Syria very much but I can share that at KAMER, and women listen to me. I feel relieved.

Thank God, I wasn't discriminated in Turkey because I was Syrian. Yet sometimes, people speak behind Syrians. For instance, when children fight, people from Turkey immediately say that Syrian kids disturb their children. In the hair styling saloon, no one discriminates against me. In fact, I have customers from Turkey who come particularly for me.

My biggest dream is to see my children go to a university, yet I do not have a dream for myself. I only want to be comfortable. I feel comfortable when I come home because I find peace there. I have my husband and my children there, and then I feel relieved. In the future, I am seeking only peace for myself. After fulfilling my children's needs completely, then maybe I can buy a dress for myself. Besides, I love furniture very much, especially antique ones. In my house in Syria, I had antique furniture. There is an antique market here where I sometimes buy antiques. People ask me why I buy these worthless things and I tell them they are very precious to me. When people come to my house, they should say this is a Syrian house in Turkey.

I love my husband and I cannot live without him I guess. We help each other. One day, if they permit my husband to work as a pharmacist, I will still work because I love to work and I want to continue. When my husband started to work, he told me to quit my job and take care of the children. I rejected and told him that I would continue to work. Sometimes, when he sees me tired, he tells me to stop working but I say "no." I am working and will continue to do so.



## BERFIN

How happy am I these days? I am happy. But before the war, I was very happy in Syria...

My grandfather is from Turkey. My father's parents are from this town. 50-60 years ago something happened, I don't know, they fled to Syria. They lived in a town close to border for a while, and then my paternal grandmother moved to Damascus. My paternal grandfather moved to Damascus when he was 15 years old. He met my grandmother there and they got married. Also my parents met there. We were born in Damascus. I was born in 1994. We are 8 siblings: four girls and 4 boys. I am the sixth one. My mother is here in Turkey with us but my father was martyred in Syria in the war. I first came to Turkey in 2013. Back then; my two brothers were in Turkey. I have stayed here for six months. My other brother and mother were in Syria then. They told me to come and go back to university. I went back to Syria and lived there for a year, yet things were never the same. In fact, it got worse. We evacuated our homes due to the war, changed

cities to live. We stayed in each city a few months. We couldn't remain in the same place long because of the war.

My father fell a martyr during that time. He was 50 years old. We lost him in 2012, 5 days before 2013. We were in a small town at that time. We had already emptied the house in Damascus but we needed some stuff from our house. My uncle asked my father whether he would go to the house. It was a cloudy day. My father said, "Let's go. Nothing would happen as there are no bombers today." My brother went together with my father. My uncle went to his home, took a bath and nothing happened. There were still some local people there back then. My father checked our house but he would also check our workplace whether any harm was done. While they were walking in an empty place like a square, my brother heard a noise and turned to my father to figure out where the sound was coming from and he saw that my father was lying down. He was shot with a sniper. My brother saw the

shooter from a distance. He immediately threw himself behind a wall. When my father was killed, the warfare continued but there were also soldiers of Free Syrian Army. Many people left the war zone, few were left. But, we were still going in and out of the city. My father went and was martyred. We don't know the shooter. His grave is in Syria now.

Upon my father's death, we decided not to stay in Damascus anymore. We moved to a town close to the border. Then, we crossed the border illegally. We ran through the border with my elder brother, younger brother and my elder sister. We walked whole day. In the night, the soldiers did not allow crossings. Someone told us that the gate was open as there were no soldiers. We started to run. We have relatives living in a border town; we walked from border to the town. Then, we came from that town to here.

Before the war, my father came to Turkey very often; we have relatives living in Turkey. My father was even thinking about buying a house from Turkey. He already applied for citizenship but it was interrupted due to the war. The documents got lost. Yet, we were already thinking about moving to Turkey. When we were living in Syria, we had rental income. My father had a workplace that he rented out. All of the siblings were going to school. One of my elder brothers had completed his master's degree in economy, and started PhD but when the war broke out, he had to drop out. He worked as a financial advisor in Syria. Now, he is working as an assistant principal in a Syrian school in Turkey. My family's economic situation was very good before the war. Yes, there was poverty in Syria but we were in a good shape.

Something happened to me because of the war but I don't know how to put it. When I first came to Turkey, I didn't leave home for six months. I was in a foreign city and felt out of place. I was in a foreign country as a foreigner. I couldn't speak the language. I couldn't speak Arabic when I went out. I was embarrassed about everything. However, the greatest difficulty I experienced here was discrimination. I wasn't wearing my scarf like this when I first came because people were making fun of the way I wore my headscarf.

The teenagers in the streets called me "Syrian! Syrian!" all the time. The way we wear scarf is different in Syria. We tie our scarves at the back and the end flows from one side. I was discriminated due to the way I wore my scarf. As I was feeling bad, I decided to wear like women here.

In the first day of 2015, I came to Turkey again and spent one more year at home doing nothing. My elder brother enrolled me in a university and I stayed at home preparing for the school until the beginning of the semester. Actually, I do some painting and I have exhibitions of my own. I attended painting courses several times here but it was all day long and my mother was alone at home. I stopped going. I thought that taking a Turkish language course would be much better. I attended a Turkish course until the school started. The first days of the school were very tough. I also faced discrimination at school. On the first day of the school, I was wearing a white dress; even my shoes were white. It was spotless. The teacher asked who came from another city and I replied that I was coming from Damascus University. He was amazed. The students were looking at me and saying, "She is Syrian." The teacher was also baffled but he didn't say anything. They were not used to seeing Syrian university students. When we were leaving the class, there were two girls behind me. My dress was all white and it looked immaculate. They knew that I could understand and speak Turkish. One of them told the other, "She is Syrian but she is clean." I looked behind and she was embarrassed but I felt terrible. Once, the teacher asked us to take notes while he was lecturing. I can't take notes fast. I am a hardworking student and I work hard but this was the first lesson. I asked the teacher not to read my notes aloud. I explained that I was a foreigner and my Turkish was not very good, thus I was taking notes slowly and poorly. I handed the paper to him and he read it out loud. I was upset but did not say anything. He said, "You are Syrian, is that so? Where did you come from? Which department did you study?" and asked where my father was two or three times. I didn't want to say since my father was a martyr. I cried. I can cry very easily. I left the classroom saying that I was sorry

and then he gave a break. The first lesson started like that. All my friends followed me to the restroom and asked me why I was upset. They were speaking Kurdish. Actually, I am Kurdish and I can speak Kurdish. I can also speak Arabic and English and now I can speak Turkish, too. We are good friends now. And the teacher loves me very much.

The school is on holiday right now. I completed my first year. My brother started a master's program again. He finished the first year and is going to write his thesis. My sister is studying sociology in another city; the language of instruction is Arabic. My other brother is studying economics and administrative sciences. My mother is a housewife. She is only a primary school graduate but she values education very much. She has more books than I do. She reads a lot. She encouraged all of us to study. I always have a book in my bag. My mother was also very happy before the war. Fortunately, we were economically in a good shape, there was no war and there was safety. We were out in the streets till night, visiting our relatives. We were peaceful. Women were going to schools or working. However, the life here has been very difficult yet some people still continued to improve themselves. Only one of my brothers did not go to the university because he is working. He started to work in a glassworks factory when he came here in 2013. The workers did not earn the same wage there. We always face such discrimination. Besides, Syrian women are discriminated more than Syrian men. Women face discrimination in the market place while shopping because of their clothes, because they are Syrian.

Until a week ago, we were 10 people in the house. Now, my brother moved to another place. The house is a three-bedroom apartment. My brothers got married here in Turkey but they married with Syrian women. One of them is our relative and the other is a friend. Both have two children. My mother wants me to get married with a Syrian. My relatives from Turkey also want to marry me but my mother does not allow that. Why? If we go back to Syria one day, he should not stay behind. He should come as well. That's why. Only for that reason...

The best part of being in Turkey is freedom. We were also free in Syria where we could go out, study and work. Yet, particularly because I came to a big city, I feel myself freer here. A woman can do anything. To some extent, it is like Europe.

If you ask me how I came to KAMER, one day I was in my sister's house and there were women from KAMER in her house. They were filling out some forms. One of them saw me. I could speak some Turkish then. She asked me if I was speaking Turkish and if I could understand well. I answered "yes." Then she asked me if I would like to work. I looked and said, "I don't know." There was another girl from KAMER, she said "I guess she doesn't want." The woman told me "No, no, it is obvious. She wants to." She took my phone number and told me that she would call back the next day. She called and said, "I am calling from KAMER, you were willing to work, if you like, come here." The next day, we went to KAMER together with my brother. I wasn't thinking of working at all. I had a school to go; I was thinking about work after I finish my school. My brother did not want, either. He would also want me to finish my school. We came with my brother and he said, "It is a clean place, if you like, you can start working." I agreed in order to improve my Turkish. It was my intention. But then, here I am and it has been 5 months since I started working. I am working as a health-care assistant now. I am filling out forms in household visits. I am doing translation for the women who come to the centre or to the doctor in the clinic. I also accompany patients to the hospitals.

I hadn't worked before I came here. And I wouldn't work anywhere except KAMER. KAMER changed my life. For instance, I call myself Syrian without any hesitation or a feeling of shame. It is the first thing KAMER changed. Second, I improved my Turkish. Third, it enhanced my self-confidence. One of my professors at the university did not help me at all. She asked me why I wasn't attending her classes, and I told her that I was exempt from that course and working somewhere else. She asked where I was working and I told her that it was a foundation but she didn't ask which foundation it was. Then,



one day while I was going to community health centre, I ran into her. I asked how she was doing and she was baffled to see me. She asked, "What are you doing here?" and I replied, "Well, I am working." Then, she asked where and I told her that I was working at KAMER. She couldn't believe and wanted to know which days I was at school. She told me to come and see her and I agreed. Then, I visited her in her room. She asked, "How did you learn about KAMER? How did you start working? Tell me." I recounted everything, told her that we met in the neighbourhood. She also wanted to know what we were doing. I mentioned about our work for supporting women. She asked how we reached women and I explained about our household visits in the neighbourhoods.

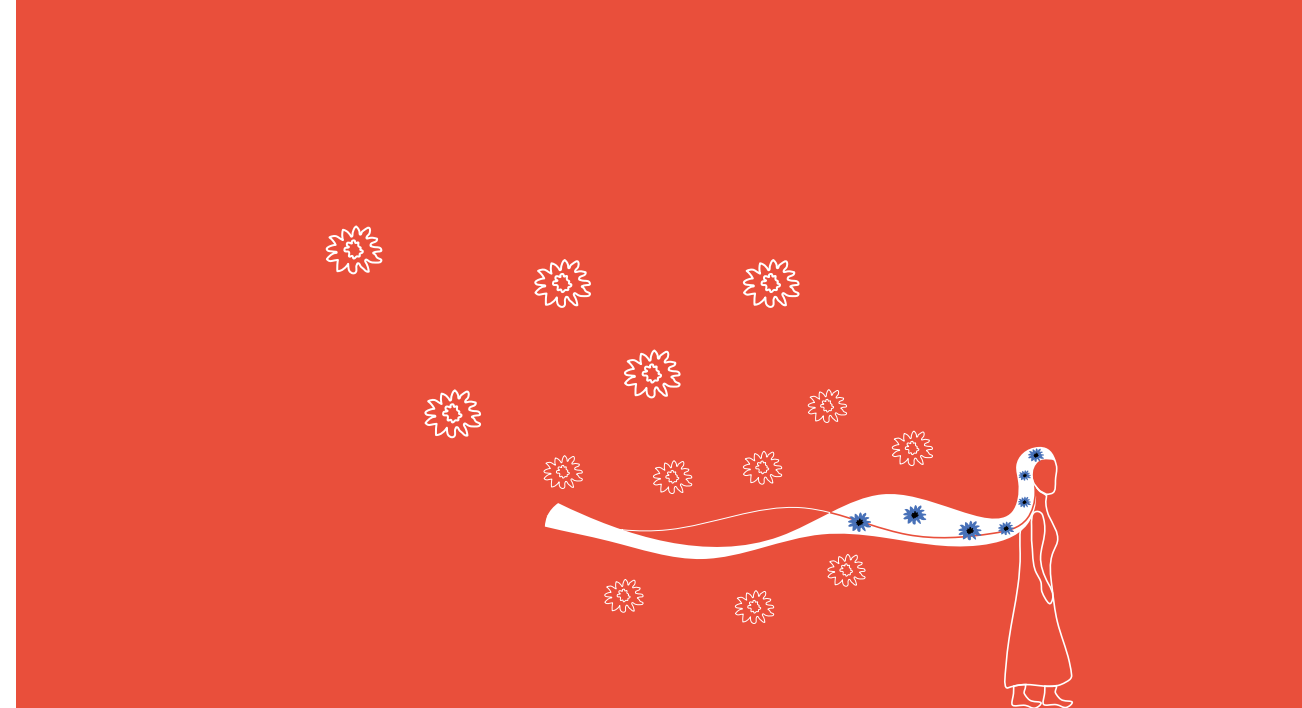
Women in the neighbourhoods ask me whether I am Syrian or Turkish when they see me. When I say I am Syrian, they want to know how I started to work here. I explain them I can work because I can speak Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish. Women from Syria and Turkey are not very much different from each other. They are alike because both societies are similar. However, the Turkish people have prejudice against Syrians. They see Syrians as dirty. They say, "You only take care of yourselves not your homes." They also don't know that we are well educated. Yet, I was able to change such impression. I can easily call myself Syrian now. I can easily raise my hand saying, "Professor, I am the girl from Syria and my name is this" now. Early on, I was very embarrassed to say that but now I can freely express that.

Do you know what KAMER taught me? You are a woman. You can easily stand up for your rights. There is nothing wrong with that. You are a woman and we are, too. You can easily say that. I have two brothers younger than me. My mother wants me to guide them. She says, "Tell them! You are a girl but you know better than they do. Help them in enrolling to the university, teach them!" That's a very good thing to hear. Besides, before I came to KAMER, I had never stayed away from home. Yet, after I started here, I stayed in Antep overnight for training. Now, I can also go to other cities to stay. I have also participated in awareness meetings

organized by KAMER. In these meetings, the most influential topic for me was the early and consanguineous marriages. In 2015, I was engaged to my uncle's son. He was the one who wanted to marry first and I told him to ask my family. My family did not want but he was my uncle's son and my two sisters were married to my other uncle's sons. He told me that he loved me. It didn't come from deep down my heart but I told that I loved him too. Back then; I wanted and said "yes," I cannot lie. I thought that I was not going to marry someone else. Nonetheless, neither his thinking nor his understanding was like mine. He told me not to go out or not to go to school. He wanted me to stay at home after I graduated my school. He also saw me preparing for the university but questioned if I would really go or asked if I was serious at this. I was telling him that I was serious. One day he told me to think carefully and I replied, "What should I think of?" I had to quit in Syria but I won't do that here again." In the end, I left him and he went to Germany. I broke off the engagement. I did this before I came to KAMER and yet I don't want to do a kin marriage now. In fact, I don't even want to marry at all.

I love the city I am in now and I don't want to live somewhere else. It is as if I was born here. I don't want to live in a country other than Turkey as well. I saw a dream. I was in Germany and I was crying so much. I did not want to leave even in my dreams. On the other hand, I wanted to go to Germany when I first came here but now I don't want anyway.

My biggest dream is to work in the field of counselling. I still want to study psychology but I don't want to move to another city via undergraduate transfer. Perhaps, I can do a master's degree. My biggest dream back in Syria was to work. I am working at KAMER now and studying at the same time. I have a work experience now for the future. If I explain about KAMER to someone who has no idea, I would say it is a respectable place. It is pure in heart... KAMER has a beautiful language that speaks to women and takes them out of their dark mood. I feel happy because I can support Syrian women here. You can see that, when that woman is happy, I feel happy, too.



## ✿ YAQÛTÊ

How happy am I these days? I am happy but I was very happy in Syria...

I studied English Literature in Syria. I was much happier there as I had many friends. We spoke the same language. I am Kurdish. I am 22 years old. We are 6 siblings. My father worked as a driver in Syria and he is doing the same job here. My mother is not working. My whole family came to Turkey. Now, 7 of us live in the same house. It is a large, 4-bedroom house but the cost of rent here is quite high. Our economic situation was better in Syria. Only my father worked and it was enough for us. Yet, here all of us are working now.

How did I experience the war? Actually, I did not see the bombs but heard them. How did the war affect me? First, I was scared. We could hear the sound of bombings and people were dying. What would happen to us? The future was uncertain. I was terrified. Thank God, I didn't lose any family member.

After the war started, the electricity and water

were cut off in our hometown. The economy got worse. We passed the border with our passports four years ago and settled here. I wouldn't go to another country; I want to stay in Turkey. I have relatives who migrated to other countries. They are in a good shape but I think we are much happier here because we live close to the border, close to our home country. Being close to the border makes us happy even if we can't go. For instance, I was able to go to bring my belongings once before the border gates were closed. After the war ends, I would like to go back to Syria. In fact, I don't have many friends left in Syria. Everybody scattered around the world, to Europe, to Iraq but it is our homeland.

We had a very good education in Syria. It is easier to study in Turkey. The lessons are easier. The doctors in Syria are also better because we could speak the same language, thus they could take care of us better. Actually, there are Arabic speaking doctors here but some doctors cannot speak the language and it becomes hard to com-

municate. When there isn't a language problem, they take care of us well. In other words, when you speak Turkish, the doctors become more interested in you.

In Syria, my family allowed me to go out. Yet, some men do not let women go out alone there. In my family, men and women are always equal. For instance, I can travel to Mersin on my own and it is not a problem for anyone. It was the same in Syria.

When I came to Turkey, I was extremely happy about being able to travel freely. I could also travel in Syria and yet I am more comfortable here. I am also happy to be working at KAMER. I came to KAMER thanks to a friend from the language course in public education centre. She told me that KAMER was looking for someone. I wanted to support my family because we are having financial problems here. Then, I started working. I learned a lot after I came to KAMER. For example, I learned how to knit. I can even do knitting patterns myself. Additionally, I also learned some medical knowledge here. Now, we are carrying out household visits to Syrian women.

We listen to them and distribute hygiene kits. We tell them that we have a literacy course as well as a doctor to get examined. I tell them to come here. When I talk about these in the visits, they come to the centre. They are impressed. Many of them come. The ones I know are pleased with the doctor and KAMER's support. Thanks to KAMER, I met many Syrian women in the household visits. Meeting Syrian women made me very happy. It is the same country, the same language and the same culture...

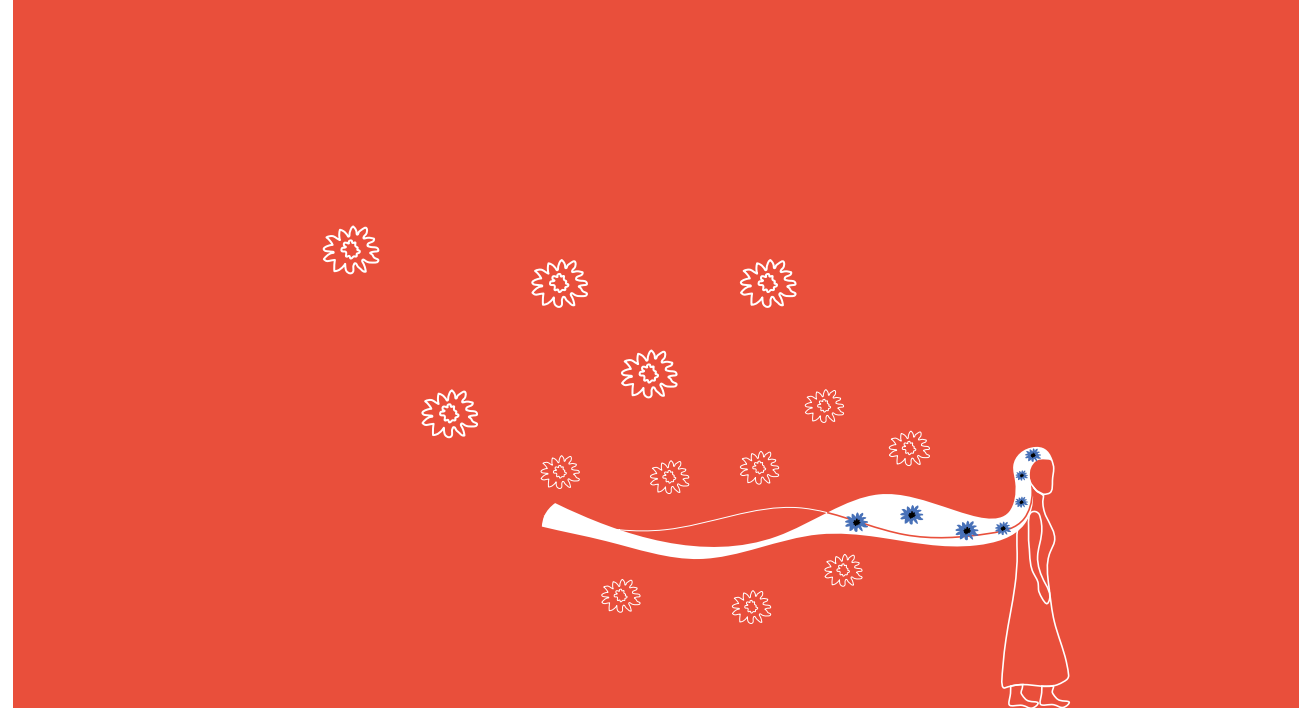
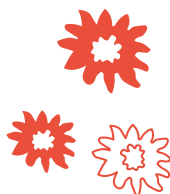
As a woman, it is very nice to work with women. We are young yet, but we are learning a lot of things here. Now, I call myself a feminist. I am a defender of women's rights. I participated in KAMER's awareness meetings. I was deeply affected by the issue of violence because many women are subjected to violence. I haven't seen an act of violence in my family and yet these meetings on violence taught me a lot. For instance, I will marry as a woman aware of women's rights. Women and men are equal. Women can

can do anything or practise any profession. I know that.

If one day comes and I go back to Syria, I would also like to establish a foundation like KAMER. I would want to put into practice everything I learned here. The first thing I would do with Syrian women is to organize awareness meetings. Besides, I would start knitting courses because they don't know that. Yet, my biggest dream is to finish university and work. I want to work in the field of my graduation. For instance, I applied to medical laboratory program at the university here.

The best part of being in Turkey is that it is much freer. It is nice to see that women can go out freely. I was free but it is nice to see that also other women can go out freely. Unfortunately, not all Syrian women become free when they come here. Men still do not let women go out.

I don't think I was subjected to discrimination in Turkey. Why wasn't I subjected to discrimination? Because I can speak Turkish. Before I learned Turkish, I didn't go out very often except for going to the market. Yet, after I learned how to speak, I started to go out freely.



## AQHAWAN

I am not happy these days. I was very happy back in Syria...

I am an Arab. My father was working in the constructions and my mother was at home. My mother and father loved each other so much that they had 5 boys and 4 girls. We lived in a very big house. It was our own property. We also had farmlands. I used to get on well with my siblings. I studied until secondary school and got married at the age of 13. I was forced into marriage with someone 12 years older than me. I am 37 years old now and have 5 children. My husband was a villager and I was an urbanite. His ideas and mentality was very conservative. My uncle's son wanted to marry me but if we got married, he would have a share in the inheritance of my family. Therefore, my family didn't want him to be a shareholder and forced me into marriage with my husband. However, I had serious problems with my husband. He resorted to violence during my marriage. He didn't understand me at all and walked out on us continuously. I used

to take refuge in my relatives. They used to take me under their wings. During my marriage, I took shelter in my relatives and my family. His opinions conflicted with mine. He didn't understand me, nor did I.

We came to Turkey 5 years ago. I witnessed the war when I was in Syria. We were living near the airport. One day, one of the fighter jets crashed and it brought our house down. I was in my family's house then. My parents did not want to let us go but my husband insisted on going to Turkey and we came here. My family is still in Syria. We crossed the border illegally. The gendarmerie in Syria did not allow us to leave. They were nervous. One of the soldiers there was a relative and he talked to the gendarmerie. He said, "It is a pity! These are just women and children, let them cross the border." That's how we went through the border. After we came here, we started to quarrel with my husband again. Then, one day, one and half years after our arrival, he left us and went back to Syria. In fact, his aim was to

leave us here in Turkey and return to Syria. I asked him why he was leaving us, what I was going to do with the children all by myself, and how he could leave us behind. My eldest son was 12 years old then. And he told me that he did not want me. He said, "Here is safer. What else do you want?" Then, he repeated, "I divorce you" three times and left. In fact, I was pregnant then. He knew that I was pregnant and yet he left me, us just like that. I gave birth to my child here by myself. I couldn't go back to Syria to my family since there was war. My parents are still alive but all of my sister's children and her husband died in a bombardment. She is still alive. My 3 brothers are still soldiers in Syria. One of my brothers is in jail. The others are living abroad.

After my husband had left us, my neighbours took care of us very well. They used to give me money and all of them were from Turkey. I was happy that violence in my life ended upon my husband's leave, yet I was sorry that people would approach to me differently as a divorced woman. Therefore, I never told anyone that my husband left and I got divorced, merely not to be ill-treated. On the other hand, after he was gone, my husband continuously sent messages for me to return to Syria. He not only divorced and left us but also told me to come back to Syria. He was even threatening me about taking away one of my children if I did not go.

The most difficult part of being in Turkey was language. Now, I want to learn Turkish very much. If I can speak the language, I will know what to say to the doctor, where to go, or I can read the signs on my own. In fact, I came to a different city first and gave birth to my child there. There was a translator who could speak Arabic in the hospital. My husband left me in the meantime. Then, in a sense I escaped from that city since my husband had relatives there and they wanted to take away my children. I ran away with my 5 kids and came here by myself. I found this city completely by coincidence.

I got to know KAMER in the household visits. They comforted me and gave confidence, thus I started to come to the centre. I have been coming

for six months. If I explain about KAMER to someone, I would say this: it is such a place that took me by my hand, supported me, and healed me. Actually, I don't have close friends because I have a disabled child and I don't want to cause trouble to anyone. He is very active and I don't want him to do harm. I don't believe that everybody can be tolerant towards my child. I don't think that they can understand him or me. I cannot be comfortable about that.

How do I spend a day? I take my disabled child outside or sometimes I take him to the doctor. As a matter of fact, I go out only for the sake of my child. Two of my sons are working; one of them is an ironer, the other is working in a phone store. I have five sons. The oldest is 15 years old, the disabled is 12, the other is 9, the fourth is 7 and the smallest is 3. My children are all male but they are not like their fathers. They know what their father did was wrong, thus they isolated him and now they are aware of their responsibilities. Besides, they can speak Turkish very well. They first worked in a restaurant and in a bakery, that's where they learned Turkish. I also want to work but I can't since I have a disabled child. My children work and take care of the house. Yet, unfortunately my children could not go to school.

Actually, I am Syrian but I don't feel like that. I belong here now. I don't want to live in a place other than Turkey. If I went somewhere else, I would feel out of place but I don't feel as a stranger here. If one day the war ends, I won't go back to Syria. My husband will try to take away my children; that's why I don't want to return. Women's rights do not exist there. All of the laws favour men in Syria. It is not like that here. Women have rights here.

My biggest dream is to see my children stand on their own feet. Maybe I would go to Syria only on one condition: only if the laws in Syria are like the laws in Turkey. Women are very strong here but not in Syria. Women in Syria are always oppressed; they are the victims. I haven't participated in awareness raising meetings yet, but women from KAMER mentioned a little bit in the household visits. And also, I am always making

observations. When women from KAMER came to the household visit for the first time, I felt like it was as if my sisters came to visit me. I tell everyone about the things I learned from KAMER. I know that if I was from Turkey and my husband left me, I would exercise all my rights but because I am Syrian, I cannot claim any rights. My dream only for myself is to be able to work. I would very much like to work and stand on my own feet. I would earn my money and spend it for my children. My children are taking care of me but I would like to earn that money. My elder son tells me that he would buy whatever I need, thus I needn't work but I want to work. I would also feel psychologically better.



**If the war ends one day and I return Syria, I would establish a women's organization just like KAMER there.**

## RUKH

Thank God, I am very happy these days but before the war, certainly I was much happier in Syria...

I am 37 years old. I was working as an officer in a telecommunications company in Syria, working like a supervisor. I am a university graduate. I studied economics. I used to live together with my parents, two sisters, an elder brother and a younger brother. In Syria, officers are usually well off. All my siblings are teachers. We are all university graduates. My father was a finance officer, but he retired. My mother was engaged in agriculture. She also had two stores. We were in a very good situation. In our family, both men and women equally received education and worked. I got married in 2008. My husband was working in Lebanon. I have three daughters; the oldest is 7, the youngest is 3.5 and the middle is 5. We came to Turkey because of the war in 2010. I was pregnant with my second child when we decided to come. I told to myself "when she is 40 days old, I will leave here."

Back then; the war was not intense. The bombardments did not started yet but I realized that things would get worse. Women were kidnapped, beaten and raped. The families kept silent, couldn't say anything. I realized that one day it would be our turn. We ran away when they came to our neighbourhood. Together with my parents and my siblings, we fled to Turkey. Only my brother stayed in order to fight but he fell as a martyr.

My husband stayed in Turkey for one year after we had arrived. Then, his mother got sick and I told him to go and see his mother. He said, "There is war," but I still wanted him to go. I wanted his mother to see his son even for one hour and then die. I wanted him to go merely to be able to say this. Then, he left and never came back. I haven't heard from him since then. He got lost somewhere between Aleppo and Qamishli road. I looked and looked for him. My family, my friends everybody looked for him but we couldn't find. Yet, he was able to see his mother.



I know that. When he got lost, I was pregnant with my third child but I didn't know that. I learned about my pregnancy 15 days after he left.

I didn't do anything for three and a half years after we arrived Turkey. I had been through difficult days but when I realized that I had to survive for my girls, I gathered strength. It was one winter night, I never forget. Winter nights are very long. My eldest daughter was 4 years old then. She woke up crying at 2.30 am. I asked what happened and she told me that she was hungry. I checked but there was nothing to eat at home. I was living in a workplace then. It was one room with a kitchen and a bathroom but it was very small. My neighbours gave me furniture and other necessary things. Yet, there was no food. She said, "Mommy, I am very hungry" and I checked again and said, "What can I do my girl, there is no food." I told her that I would go to the store in the morning and buy something. She said she didn't want it the next day because she was very hungry. They hadn't eaten anything for two days, only some chocolate or biscuits. The neighbours were giving candies, this and that. I tried to find a way out. There was stale bread in the kitchen. I sopped it in water, sprinkled some sugar on it and gave her. Yet, my three daughters and I cried together. That night I decided this was not going to work like this. Until then, I never told anyone that we were hungry. When they asked, I said, "Thank God, we have everything." But that day, I went to the mukhtar. I saw my daughter like that. God forbid that! Then, the mukhtar called the municipality for aid and they gave us two boxes. When I took those two boxes, it was as if I was in heaven. Later on, I worked as a translator for the mukhtar but didn't get any money for that. Until the mukhtar found me a job, I cleaned houses. In Syria, nobody from our family did cleaning but I had to do it for my girls. That night she woke up and cried, and then I said to myself that I would do even the most difficult jobs to be able to take care of my children. I did cleaning for a year. Then, I opened a hair styling saloon. Plus, I ran a bakery. The bakery is closed now but the hair styling saloon is still running.

Actually, we are partners with a woman also coming to KAMER.

After a while, the mukhtar sent me to KAMER as a translator. I also attended the Turkish course started here. I participated in awareness meetings, too. Do you know what would I tell about KAMER to other people? Most importantly, this place instils self-confidence in you. When my husband left, I felt like growing older and started to wear dresses. I was in deep mourning. I felt weak and didn't trust anyone. However, I found myself again with KAMER. Now, I feel like the same as in Syria. I never wore a dress in Syria. I used to wear tight clothes. I always wore trousers. I am almost the same person as I was in Syria now. The second most important thing is women's rights. As a word "rights" do exist but women's rights do really exist. I have my rights. I have the right to say "no" or "yes". Thirdly, it is chatting and friendship. When I first came here, my psychology was not good but my friends healed me. I looked at myself and said "I was strong once, why am I like this now?" and now I am slowly going back to who I was.

I have been working at KAMER for two years. We go to household visits. People are very fond of KAMER's work. I also introduced many of my friends to KAMER. If you like, I can invite 100 or 200 women here right now. I always tell them, "KAMER helps you grow self-confidence. There is no discrimination here, no discrimination between Turkish or Syrian people. You can converse with women and women have rights." When I say this, they believe in me because women trust me here. If the war ends one day and I return to Syria, I would establish a women's organization just like KAMER there. I would carry out activities for women from all ages. I would work on early marriages. Men can marry four women in Syria. It is the Sharia Law. There are polygamous marriages around me. Their husband died in the war and four women are living together now. If the war ended, I would go back to Syria but I would not also leave here. I would work in both places. I would set up two houses. I learned to speak Turkish from my neighbours. I had to. For example, my daughters got sick, I

had to ask help from my neighbours. I had to go to the hospital; I needed a man and a car to take me. I realized that I had to call people all the time to ask for help and understood that this was not going to work like that. I bought two books. For instance, if I were to go to the doctor, I opened up the book and found what was said in that situation. They cannot speak English but I can. I can speak Arabic, English and Turkish. I started to make myself understood like this. My daughters learned Turkish from their friends. Yet, the most difficult part of being in Turkey was men. I am a woman, all by myself; I don't have a husband. If a woman does not have a husband, men approach her to offer help. I never get any help from these men. They harass you.

I have relatives here but they did not support us much. When we first arrived, the whole family were staying in the same house. Then, when my brother fell a martyr and his children came to the house, it got too crowded. Everybody in the house was crying. Our neighbour had a one-room store. Its rent was 250 Turkish Liras. We moved to that store with my daughters. When I moved, the neighbours provided all our needs. Only my younger brother was working then. He was paying our rent. We were living in difficulty in the first years. However, the best part of living in Turkey is that there are many Muslims here. Our traditions are very similar to the ones in Turkey. It wouldn't be like this in Germany.

My biggest dream is to see that the war ends. People suffered enough. If the war ends, I can raise my daughters either in Turkey or in Syria. It doesn't matter. This place is just like Syria. I am the Syrian mukhtar here. The mukhtar here calls me when there is a problem with the Syrians. In fact, if I am out of town, the mukhtar calls me to ask questions about some Syrian people. If I say, "Yes, she/he is nice," I am usually right. I know everyone around here. A little while ago, a woman from Diyarbakır found my number and called me saying that she was having trouble and asked for help. I called the centre in Diyarbakır and directed her towards the centre. She received support. I understand women very well. I can feel the difficulties they go through in my heart. That's hard. Therefore, I am trying to support them.



**My biggest dream is to be “the president”. When I become the president, I will stop the tyrants. I will fix the injustice.**

## **BEHREM**

I am happy these days, but I was very happy in Syria before the war...

Before, there was no war but peace. I had my mother, my father and my friends. I had everyone. How could I not be happy? In Turkey, I have no one except for my husband and my children. I left all my relatives and my family behind. I am 32 years old. I have two daughters and a son. One of my children is 14, the other is 9 and the youngest is 7 years old. I got married at the age of 21. I am a high school graduate. I studied computer programming. I can speak Arabic and English. I worked for three months after I finished school. While I was working, I met my husband. Then, I got engaged. My father didn't want me to marry first. He wanted me to continue working. Then, when he understood that I was willing to get married, he accepted. When I married, I stopped working on my own will. My father was working in Lebanon. My mother was at home. I have 5 brothers and 3 sisters. My other siblings were also studying but all had to drop out school due

to the war and some of them started working.

We didn't witness the war for a long time. We left shortly after its outbreak. We crossed the border illegally six years ago. My family stayed in Syria and I came together with my husband and my children. While fleeing across the border, the police saw the children and let us go. The children were very small and they were crying. It was easier to cross. My husband was working as a driver in Syria. Now he is working in the industrial area, working with metal plates. I gave birth to my children in Syria. We are treated much better in Syrian hospitals. The doctors in Syria are more patient. The doctors here do not examine in detail usually.

The most difficult part of being in Turkey was facing discrimination. I am exposed to discrimination when I go to a supermarket, or at the market place, or at the bazaar. This happens to many Syrians. When we first came, many people loved Syrians in Turkey but now it has changed. For instance, I go to the market place here sometimes

and look for things to buy. The sellers say, "There is nothing here for you, Go away!" I will buy it but they don't sell. They tell us to go away. This has happened a few times. Once, I started to cry and people around looked at me trying to figure out why I was crying. I was very upset and ashamed. I still don't understand how they can do such a thing. Do you know winter squash? I asked something about that. I said, "Do you sell this in kilos or as a whole?" And the vendor asked whether I was Syrian. When I said yes, he said, "Okay! Go away, now!" I started to cry. He made me so upset. In fact, I spoke Turkish but he told me to go when he understood that I was Syrian. There are good as well as mean people among Syrians here. However, people usually generalize and when something happens, Syrians are blamed for it.

The best part of being in Turkey is that there is no war here. Everything is nice here. I won't go back to Syria now even if the war is over. There is no home or work left for us. My daughter is going to 9th grade now. My children started school here. I want them to continue their education. Our homes are all torn down. I saw the pictures from the Internet.

I met women from KAMER in the household visits. They came to get to know us and learn how many people were living in the house. I said to myself how nice women they were. The way they talked and behaved towards us was very nice. They came; we sat and had some coffee together. I decided to come to the centre for Turkish language courses. I attended the courses for two months. I also participated in the meetings. I am really willing to join the next meetings to be held here. I want that very much. Besides, I want to come here for the way they treat us. I come here to talk and to tell my problems. They listen and I feel relieved.

I explain about KAMER to my neighbours. I say, "This place makes you feel very comfortable. Everyone who comes feels relieved. There is a friendly conversation here." What's more, KAMER helped me to learn many things about Turkey. I learned what kind of food you cook, or how you get married. I love it here. I also learned

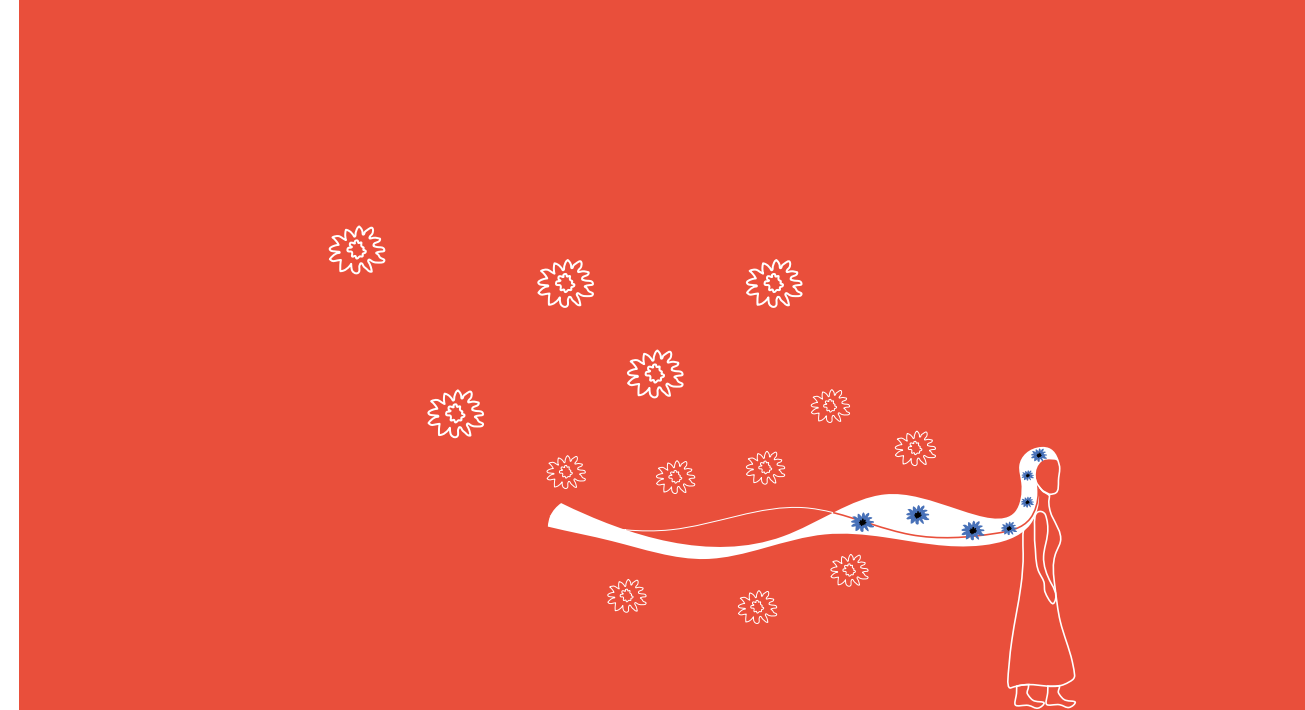
how to behave in relationships between men and women. I learned to be patient. I learned about different customs. For instance, we don't have henna night in Syria but we both have the folk dance "halay." We are on good terms with my husband but we can't see each other much. He goes in the morning and comes late at night. He doesn't want me to work. I do but he doesn't find it necessary. I obey him. Syrian husbands are different than yours. In our culture, the husband's words are the rule, but here, the wife's words are the rule. And yet, in Syria, we also took the decisions at home together but in terms of laws, men rule.

If one day I earned some money, I would first buy the needs of the house. I would probably buy a dress or shoes for myself. Thank God, I have all now. I also help the needy. Nobody should suffer from poverty wherever they are. I feel that my soul belongs to Syria despite my body being here. This is in our blood. Unfortunately, even if the war ends, I can't go back. Syria is in ruins. It is not possible to live in Syria now. I have to stay here for my children.

I have both male and female children. I treat them equally. If my daughters become successful businesswomen in the future, I will definitely support them.

My eldest daughter is 14 years old now and she is very beautiful. Both Syrian and Turkish men want to marry her even now. But neither she nor I want her to marry. I sometimes take her to KAMER. All my children can speak Turkish very well. In fact, they speak Turkish among themselves. My daughter wants to speak to me but I can't as I don't speak very well. My elder daughter learned Turkish from the neighbours, the others learned from school.

My biggest dream is to be "the president". I want to be the head of the state only for two days, not for a long time. When I become the president, I will stop the tyrants. I will fix the injustice. I will clear all the injustice off in two days. If I were the president of Syria for two days, I would end the war. I don't want the tyrants. Besides, I want to be a strong woman. A strong woman that can stand on her own feet...



## REBIYE

I am happy these days but I was very happy in Syria...

I am 27 years old. I wasn't born in Syria but I am Syrian. I am an Arab. In 2001, my mother, my siblings and I returned to Syria. My father neither came with us nor showed any concern for us later on. After the outbreak of war, we came to Turkey in 2013. We are 7 siblings in the family: 3 sisters and 4 brothers. I am the third sibling of 7. I have one elder sister and elder brother. I finished primary school in another country and then continued my education in Syria. I finished high school. I was about to go to the university but the war broke out. Before the war, many people such as Arabs, Kurds or Alawites lived together. They married with one another. But it is different here. For instance, Turkish people ask me a lot about whether I am Syrian or not. When I say "yes", they continue to ask whether I am a Kurd or an Arab? Yet, they don't ask one another.

I never worked in Syria because we were economically well off. Yet, after we arrived here, I

had to work. My elder brother came here with us but my elder sister stayed in Syria. Now, my elder brother returned to Syria. My younger brother was lost in Syria. He was sick and needed operation. In 2014, he went to see the doctor and got lost. We don't know what happened to him. We didn't hear from him then. We always pray for him to come back. We also don't see my father at all. He does not call, either. We moved to Syria because of my parents' problems. My mother couldn't stand my father anymore. My mother's family was in Syria. At the end of 10 years, my mother took all of us and we returned to Syria. My mother was working in Syria as an officer.

I learned English and French in Syria. My French was very good. The education here is easy unlike Syria. If a student goes to a medical school, then he or she will be a good doctor that is for sure. The medical schools in Syria are very qualified in terms of education. My aunt had a problem so she underwent a surgery here. However, until

the operation, the process took so long. She had to see 3 different doctors. One of them said, "There is nothing wrong with her, she is exaggerating." The other said, "I didn't notice anything serious." The third doctor was able to diagnose and took her under operation immediately. Such a problem exists in Turkey unfortunately.

And yet, we always loved Turkey very much. Before the war, my mother said, "If God lets, we can go to Turkey in the summer. I have a relative there, we can visit her." We were very happy to hear that. We were happy to go to a country other than Syria. Especially, I felt very excited. But then, the war started and we had to leave Syria and our homes behind. It was so difficult to leave Syria permanently. Three months after we came to Turkey, we returned to Syria to pack our belongings. It was hard. I opened my wardrobe, looked at my room. I felt so sorry about leaving my home again. I already missed it. I was thinking of when to come back again or when to lie down in my bed again. It is a really tough life. If the war ends and everything goes back to normal, I would love to go back home. Our house is rented now and may God bless our tenants, both them and our home.

In 2013, we came to Turkey and started to live here. Until then, we are in the same city. I haven't seen another city in Turkey but only here. Not even one week passed after I arrived here, I started to work. I worked in a patisserie as a salesperson. I was selling bread. In fact, I was working up until yesterday. I came here from the patisserie today. I was there to quit my job but my boss didn't come. We are underpaid. I have been working there for four years and they know me very well. I feel sorry to leave because it was a decent job. I also have friends there but my salary was very low. I talked to the manager but he didn't give me a raise. I told him that I would leave the job if he didn't increase my salary but he told me to leave. Yet, he didn't think that I would really quit. He will see now. I am leaving. He will be shocked.

I don't want to live anywhere else. I love my life here. I think the best country to live is Turkey. On

the other hand, there is something that really makes me sad. I had to drop out school in Syria but I would love to continue my education here. I wanted to go to university and become a teacher but I couldn't. I came here and started to work immediately. Right now, my brother and I are working. My mother is old and she cannot work. We don't want her to work anyway. My other siblings are young. My elder brother returned to Syria. My elder sister studied law in Syria. She is in a safe place now. In fact, I would like to go and study there but my mother would not let me. My mother doesn't want to go back to Syria. She is terrified of the war. She doesn't want us to go, either. She is worried that something would happen to us.

When I arrived Turkey, the most difficult problem I faced was to work. Sometimes, I went home at 10 pm. There were times when I even couldn't surf the Internet because of exhaustion. I would go to bed right away. Even if I had the energy to surf the Internet, I would check my Facebook account, talk to my friends or watch Turkish TV series for half an hour. In the mornings, I used to wake up and help my mother. Actually, that's still the same. I first do the cleaning and then go to work. Now I am leaving my job in the patisserie. From now on, I will start working at KAMER as a translator. I feel very happy about that.

I learned Turkish on my own while I was working. When I heard a new word, I used to note it down right away. As soon as I went home, I used to revise my notes. Some people talked to me in Arabic here, but I really wanted to learn Turkish. Later on, I attended the language course at KAMER. I could write in Turkish well but KAMER taught me a lot more about Turkish. In fact, people ask me whether I am from Turkey when they see my handwriting.

I couldn't attend all group meetings at KAMER as I was working. Yet, I was influenced the most by the meeting held on violence. I witnessed violence, yet, thank God, I wasn't subjected to it. However, the father of a friend does not let her go out. He doesn't let her work or use her phone, either. When she uses her phone, he wants to

check her messages. For me, this is violence. My mother used to restrict me but this changed when I started working. She is more relaxed now. Previously, when I wanted to go out with my friends, she would tell me to invite them to my place instead of going out. Actually, the reason she feels more secure now is that I have two close Syrian friends here. She knows them well, thus she feels fine now. My mother and my father had a very poor relationship. Sometimes, my father resorted to violence. He was cruel. He left us and never called again. We almost forgot him. Now, I don't want to marry since I am worried that my husband would look like my father.

If I were to tell KAMER to someone who has no idea, I would say KAMER support women subjected to violence. In fact, KAMER supports all women. KAMER is always there for women, and for me, the most important thing is to fight for women's rights. In Syria, some women had rights, some didn't. I love the freedom in this country.

Yet, life in Turkey is very expensive. The rents are so high unlike before. The rents were around 300 Turkish Liras when we first came but now it is almost 800 Turkish Liras. The rents soared after the Syrians arrived. People have to reside somewhere, that's why the rents are increasing. I think those who do this are heartless.

My biggest dream is to have children. If I have a daughter or a son, I will treat both equally. My mother always treated us equal. Sometimes, she doesn't say anything when my brother goes out alone. Then, I say, "Mother, you don't say anything to him but you do to me." I always claim my rights.



**I cry each time I think of how we crossed the border, carried our children and went through the barbed wires.**

## NERGÎZ

How happy am I these days? Actually, I am very happy right now because I am surrounded by women...

I have KAMER with me and I am in a safe place. If you remind me of 5 years ago, I would cry. I cry each time I think of how we crossed the border, carried our children and went through the barbed wires. After the war started, we continuously changed place in Syria like refugees. One day, when we left Aleppo, we heard a bombing. It wasn't close to us but we could hear people screaming. Those voices turn you upside down. Once, we were somewhere close to the border. A close city was bombed. We had cars so we went there to help as much as we could. We were in a pick-up, saved a woman. When she recovered, the first thing she asked was where her children were. She could get in but her children couldn't. During the bombings, those who are inside cannot dare to go out. There is nothing to do for the ones left outside. I can't forget about the sound of bullets or bazookas anyway. When the clashes

ended, we used to check the streets or call out to neighbours next door. One day, my neighbour asked some bulgur. I went out to the rooftop and told her to call out to me, and then I would give. I was wearing a green dress, looking at my neighbour and only my head could be seen. That moment, a bullet whistled past my ear. They placed a sniper on top of the minaret of the mosque and he was watching the neighbourhood. It was impossible to go out. We exchanged our needs with the neighbours through the windows. I used to send my children to school. In the mornings, the education was Kurdish and in the afternoons, it was Arabic. I sent my children to both so that they don't forget Arabic and fall behind, as things might get better. They were schooled 2-3 hours in the afternoons. I was waiting them in the backyard of the school so that I could safely take my children home. One day, on the way home, we saw an unexploded rocket on the road, left there surrounded by barricades. When things got this bad,

we decided to leave.

We came to Turkey in 2013. There were no schools left in Syria and I have 5 children: 3 girls and 2 boys. My eldest son is 18, my eldest daughter is 16, my other daughter is 12, other son is 8 and the youngest is 6. My husband is my aunt's son. Did I marry out of love? No. What does an 18 year-old girl know of love? My family wanted me to marry since they knew him. The marriages are all endogamous in our family. Thank God, my children are healthy. I didn't come to Turkey with my husband first. He thought that the war would end, thus stayed. He wanted me to take the children out. The moment ISIS came to our town, the women in the family immediately left. Men stayed to defend themselves. Fortunately, we didn't lose any family member since we left immediately.

I had hard times in my first years in Turkey. I could speak Kurdish but even if I could, my Kurdish was different. Kurdish language spoken in Syria is the real Kurdish. People used to ask me where I was from the moment they realized that my Kurdish was different than spoken here. I learned Turkish before I came here. I was watching Turkish TV channels. We had a satellite dish thus we could watch Turkish channels. I learned Latin alphabet on my own. I used to lie on the bed, visualize the letters. I used to read the stories until 2 or 3 am. I used to write Kurdish translations under the words. I have a neighbour, may God bless her, and she helped me learn the language. She also told her children to speak in Kurdish with me. She used to advise me to learn the language.

I use Turkish a lot now. I don't want people to understand that I am Syrian. People in Turkey do not like Syrians. They disturb or molest as they realize that you are Syrian. One day, I shed to tears the moment I entered my neighbour's house. I told her that if my husband learned about what happened to me that day, he would never let me stay even 2 more days, take me back right away. A man on the bus not only molested but also harassed while I was standing on the bus. I was so embarrassed to say something. I got off the bus earlier. This has never happened

to me in Syria. When we walked in the town, everyone knew us. We greeted at least 20 people. We could stay out until 3 am. However, it is different here. Therefore, I tend to talk in Turkish more, not to appear as a Syrian, not to be treated like this.

Do you know what was the most difficult part of being in Turkey? We first settled in a town close to the border so that we could go back when things got back to normal. I was discriminated there because of my clothes. People said, "Look how they dress even under these circumstances! They are not covering their heads." I heard this from local people in person. That's why, we moved from there. Then, we came here and it is much better since it is a big city. People do not gossip here. However, the worst discrimination was about employment. Nobody wants to employ Syrians.

Certainly, good things happened to me here. I didn't know this place well when we arrived. I didn't know many people but when they got to know me, they understood what kind of a person I was. Many people guided me here and we also helped each other. First, I settled in a house with a backyard. When the children got sick, I used to help them. One day, my neighbour's son got sick. I always carry a thermometer with me in my bag, which fell into a habit for me. I always have first aid stuff with me. I even had sphygmomanometer when I arrived. I saw the child's red face; he had fever. I told her to give me the child, took off his clothes and put him under the fountain in the backyard. I took his temperature; it was over 40 degrees. I mixed vinegar with some water and put a wet cloth over his forehead. His father came in the evening and I told him to take the child to the hospital even though his fever went down. She is from Turkey but cannot take her child to hospital without her husband's permission. Since that day, they know me very well. If they have a cut, they come to me right away. I always have tincture of iodine with me.

First, I didn't know of KAMER. I have a friend at the university. She told me about it. She directed me to KAMER for support in case I needed help.

Women here were preparing handiwork products. I am good at handiwork. We never get lazy at home. I used to knit waistcoat in Syria for my children when they were small. I used to make use of my spare time. Now, I do that for KAMER. I have been coming here for about 3 or 4 months. Meanwhile, I participated in KAMER's awareness meetings. I was touched by the issue of discrimination the most. Women are most affected by being discriminated. Everybody complains about that. We are discriminated because of our clothes.

Do you know how would I describe KAMER to someone who hasn't heard of? I would say to her, "Go there! You will not only live your childhood and your youth but also find employment and participate in social activities. That's to say, you will experience a rebirth." You will really be born again. The most influential thing about KAMER for me is that there is always someone to talk or pour your heart out. You can unburden yourself here via talking. It is sincere. If the person listens to you, she will understand you anyway. What's more, women help each other here. And even if you can't speak the language, there is always a translator for you. You can heal your soul here. The Foundation does whatever it can to support women. I can see that. Therefore, the happiest part of being in Turkey for me is coming to KAMER Foundation. I came and saw what kind of a place this was. Then, I started producing handiwork for KAMER. I feel relieved while I am doing the handiwork. Even if I started working, I am still coming to KAMER for handiwork. For the time being, I found a job in the organized industry zone. I am cleaning an office. It has been 10 days but I still continue to come here. I feel that I don't belong anywhere now. Certainly, the place you are born is different. I would surely go back to Syria if things got better. I would but how? My family fell apart. One of my sons is not with me. He is in Germany. We hoped that he could save us but it didn't happen. He couldn't take us with him. Now, he is left there all alone. He is very unhappy there because he is used to living in a crowded family. Europe is not like here. Things are complicated here.

After I came to Turkey, a coup was attempted. I went out in the streets unconsciously. I was crying. I was saying, "My God! Did I jump out of the frying pan into the fire?" The documents for my son were delayed because of the coup. All the procedures were halted. I used to buy our needs daily because we were waiting to leave any time. I used to buy two packages of pasta or one kilo of rice. That night my neighbour came and said, "There is an open store, let's go, you have children." At two o'clock in the morning, I bought some oil, a package of yeast and some flour. The men laughed at me saying, "My sister, you look experienced." I told him that only bread would suffice. You see, I witnessed those days here. As I experienced it in Syria, I was terrified here. I was sobbing and people were asking me why I was crying. I was crying because people left to buy bread but they didn't come back in Syria. I lived through these things. Young people left and didn't return.

My biggest dream, first of all, is to have my son with me or I should be with him. I should have all my children with me. Also, I don't want war or deaths anymore. I don't want to hear about war anymore. I want this for everyone. The war took place. It can happen anywhere. I wouldn't wish it on anyone. I don't know how these people who brought this on us would die and answer to God.





**KAMER taught me my rights  
as a refugee.**

## HÊVÎ

I am very happy these days. I wasn't happy at all in Syria before the war...

I come from an educated family. My father was a judge. When my mother met my father, she was studying architecture but she didn't finish her school because she got married to my father. I am the youngest of the family. I have 4 brothers and 2 sisters. The oldest was a computer engineer but we lost him to cancer. My other brother is a pharmacist; he is living in another city. He studied pharmaceutics here before the war but still he can't practise his profession since he is not a Turkish citizen. My third brother is a dentist. He studied in the USA. He is living in another country now where he established a company. He can't practise his profession either because he is a Syrian citizen. My fourth brother is living in Germany now as a refugee. He fled from the war. One of my sisters stayed in Syria. She wants to come but the gates are closed, thus she can't come. My other sister came to Turkey six months ago and leaving tomorrow because

her husband moved abroad 2 years ago and is now taking my sister with him.

I married 7 years ago when I was 18 years old. I went to university while I was married. First, my brother didn't let me study due to the war. He said, "It is too dangerous, thus you should stay at home." However, I had finished high school as the top student. Then, when I got married, my husband told me that I was very successful, so he would send me to the university. I chose teaching philosophy since it was a distant education. I even had three courses to finish. Yet, the war broke out and I couldn't graduate.

We came to Turkey in 2012. I worked at a Syrian school here as a volunteer for two years. I taught history and geography. Before I came here, I was living in another city and I was not happy at all because nothing has changed for me. There was war both in Syria and in that town. But then, when we came here, I realized that I came to Turkey. This place is safe. Thus, I don't want to live anywhere else now. I visited other

cities such as Istanbul but I always want to return here. I have a visa but I didn't want to live abroad.

I have a five-year-old daughter. I am studying Arabic Language and Literature now. My husband is studying Kurdish Language and Literature. Besides, he is working in an organization as a volunteer now. He was a computer engineer in Syria. Unfortunately, he can't practise his profession. Even if he wants to work, he is underpaid. He is not working right now, I do. We can manage with my salary from KAMER. Yet, in Syria, we were economically in a good shape. My family was well off, too.

One of the difficulties we faced here was discrimination. For instance, when you go to a doctor, you are discriminated. If they understand that you are Syrian, they don't examine in detail. Yet, I became more courageous after I started to work at KAMER. When I go to the doctor and talk them brave, they hold back and say, "Okay! Come in." That's not the only case though. I was also discriminated in other places. For instance, when we wanted to rent a place, the owner said that he didn't rent to Syrians because the Syrians ran away without paying their rent. Yet, when I tell people I work at KAMER, people know that we have a salary. KAMER is a key to many doors for me. When I was in Syria, there was also discrimination among Kurds or Arabs. Sometimes Kurds, sometimes Arabs discriminated. However, I never experienced discrimination in Syria. I only heard of it. It is weird that while entering Turkey, they asked me whether I was Kurdish or Arabic. I inquired why they were asking me this as it was never asked in Syria. Another difficulty was that I didn't know anything about here when we arrived. Thus, I rarely went out. I couldn't speak the language or even recognize the money. Then, slowly, women in KAMER taught me everything. They taught me how to go to the hospital, how to help; they taught me everything. For example, yesterday a Syrian man called me saying, "My wife is giving birth at home right now and I don't know what to do." I called the ambulance and sent there immediately.

I came to KAMER via a friend. One day I called my friend to ask how she was doing and she told me that she was in a meeting. I asked about the meeting and she said that she was in KAMER. She invited me to KAMER saying, "This is a women's centre, if you like, you can come too. You won't be lonely, you will be happy." I came to the centre. They were looking for someone, and then I applied and was accepted. I participated in some of the awareness meetings here. I was touched the most by the issue of harassment. Now, if a man tries to harass me, I will immediately call the police. I did this once. I have never been harassed in Syria. Yet, here they look at you and call you a Syrian woman right away. They see you in that way. Two days ago, I went to the hospital. There is a male nurse there. He asked me where I was working at, and I told him that I was working in a women's centre working on women's rights. He asked, "Where shall we look for our rights? What will happen to our rights?" and I said, "You have already enjoyed your rights, that's more than enough!" Actually, being a woman is not difficult in Turkey as we have KAMER.

Do you know how would I describe KAMER to people? First of all, KAMER teaches women their rights, then teaches the language and then gives support. For instance, if a woman is subjected violence and wants to divorce, women here provide you legal support. I didn't know before but KAMER taught me my rights as a refugee. To my surprise, I do have rights as a refugee. Before I came to KAMER, I was different. I used to ask my husband for permission to go out or did not talk much. But now, I only tell him that I am going. Secondly, I wasn't thinking of continuing my education, yet, I realized that I could after I came here. Thirdly, I didn't know anything about Turkey before. I couldn't go out on my own but now I can do anything. For instance, I wake up in the morning and I need to go to Diyarbakır. I write on a piece of newspaper that "I am in Diyarbakır." My husband liked the new me. He feels happy for me. He says, "If something happens to me one day, you can stand on your own feet now." I am teaching Turkish that I learned from KAMER

to my daughter. Before coming to KAMER, I wouldn't go out much but now I take my daughter with me to the park. I tell about KAMER to everyone. I talk about it in the household visits. I am working in the field, or going to the hospitals, I am doing everything.

My biggest dream is to become a rector. If God permits, I will become a rector one day. I want to be a rector in Turkey. Do you know why I want to be a rector? Because my brothers always told me that I was the laziest of all. I was a simple teacher but they were a doctor, a judge or an engineer. They usually look down on me. I will show them.





**I always say we need a world  
free of violence.**

## HAVLE

I am happy these days, however I was very happy in Syria...

I am 20 years old. I have 4 sisters and 2 brothers. I finished vocational school in Syria. Then, the war broke out and unfortunately; I couldn't go to university. Life in Syria was beautiful. My father was a merchant and my mother was a housewife. My father runs a market in Turkey now. My mother still does not work. We were well off in Syria. Now, we are trying to manage. One of my sisters graduated from university and became an engineer here. My other sister is at high school.

I experienced the war directly. Our homes were bombed. We lost our relatives living in other cities. The war affected me a lot especially psychologically. One day when I was going to school, an armed conflict occurred. They told us to lie down and crawl. Meanwhile, our teacher died right in front of our eyes. We crawled to home. I was shocked. I couldn't talk for a while. I was both crying and laughing at the same time.

We have never thought of experiencing something like this. We have never thought of occurrence of a war. One day before we came to Turkey, they raided our house. They took my father and put into jail. One day later, they released him. Then, my father told us that we were leaving and we came to Turkey. When we were crossing the border, we came under a hail of bullets. My mother was hit on her leg, yet thank God, we are all still alive. My grandfather was living here and he sent my father an invitation, so we came. My grandfather is from Turkey. I have two identity cards, both Turkish and Syrian.

My father was always a foresighted person. When I was in Syria, I could go out whenever I wanted. My father used to say, "You can stay as long as you like. You can call me whenever you want, then I can come and pick you up." In other words, I could go out on my own. Yet, not everybody was the same in Syria. Not every woman was free. For instance, we had a neighbour who had to hide her salary from his husband. The

husband used to beat her and take her money. I was lucky. I was working in a health care centre in Syria.

We came to Turkey four years ago. I couldn't stand here at the end of the first year. I was sick at heart. My friends and my relatives were in Syria. My uncle was like a father to me. I missed them very much. I went back to Syria. First, I was happy again, fulfilled my longing but then I witnessed the war again. I saw the bombings, guns and then I couldn't stand and returned to Turkey. My father also wanted me to come back. I have been in Turkey for 7 months now.

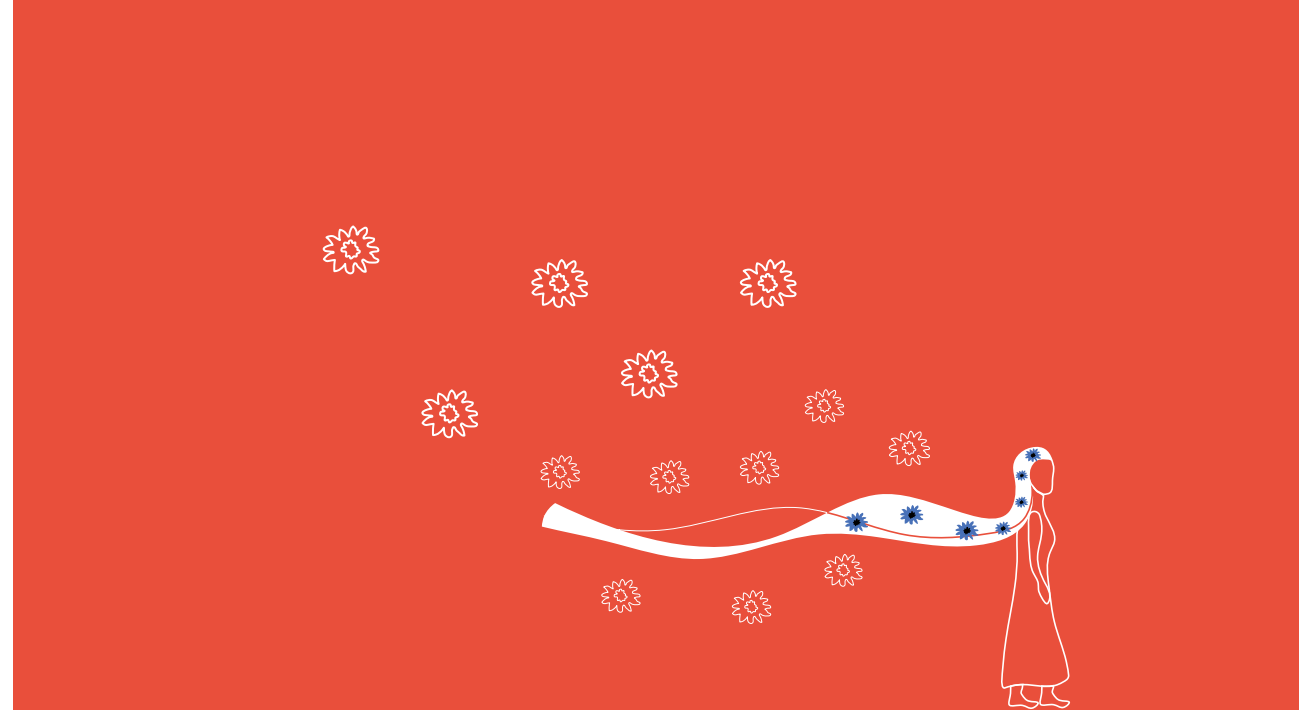
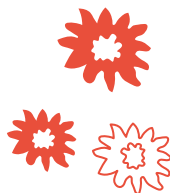
When we came to Turkey, we faced some difficulties. Crossing the border was tough already. Yet, the most difficult part was facing discrimination. People said, "The Syrians came and took our places." They tell me, "This girl is cultivated, and she doesn't look like Syrian." I heard these with my own ears. Yet, the best part of being in Turkey is my involvement in KAMER and my work in health care centre. I didn't go out much for a while after coming to Turkey. I was deeply influenced by the war, but then I stepped out of home for the first time for KAMER.

I heard about KAMER from my Turkish neighbour. They were looking for a health care assistant and I applied. And now, I am working here in the centre. We accompany women coming to the centre; we take them to the state or private hospitals for a spiral insertion. We also distribute contraceptive pills and hygiene kits. These kits include shampoo, soap, detergent, wet wipes, cotton and swab. In other words, they include everything a woman needs for basic hygiene. The health centre I worked in Syria was different from here. We used to inform people about a skin disease called leishmania. I also attended KAMER's meetings in other provinces. Even if the war ends and my hometown gets back to its old days, I don't want to go back to Syria anymore. I loved KAMER very much. I got to know people and saw the life here. Women have rights here. I also attended KAMER's awareness meetings. I was deeply influenced by sister Nebahat's speech saying, "Forget about the past! Turn over a new leaf in

your life." And I did that. I was empowered by sister Nebahat. Now, I am trying to share this power that I took from her with other women. I also want to comfort women coming out of war and violence. I want to become empowered together.

In the past 7 months, a lot has changed in me. For instance, I was shy and scared when I first came here. I was feeling alienated. I am not like that anymore. My life has changed. I am strong now. In fact, I was empowered not only with KAMER but also from my family. My grandfather was supportive of girls' going out and working. My grandmother is the opposite. She thought that the girls should stay at home. My grandfather and my father made me stronger. When my family met women from KAMER, everyone was relieved. I describe KAMER to my family. I say, "KAMER is working for women and human rights. It is promoting gender equality." There is no such a world where women stay at home and men work. I always say we need a world free of violence. In Syria, my father perpetrated violence against my mother. He was usually agitated by my grandmother's words. Yet now, things have changed. My father realized his wrongdoing. There is no violence at home anymore.

I can list three ways KAMER has enriched me: First, I became an empowered woman. Second, talking to Syrian women and supporting them makes me feel so good. Last, I learned about women's rights. I realized that I have rights. My only dream now is not going back to Syria. If I go back, I will witness the war and the bombs again and I don't want that. I don't want to return to Syria anymore.



## ZEMBEQ

I am not happy these days, yet I was very happy when I was in Syria...

I have 7 sisters and 1 brother. My mother was a housewife and my father was a merchant. Economically, we were able to stand on our own feet. I finished high school. I was planning to go to university; I even matriculated but couldn't go. I didn't have an ID in Syria. The Kurdish people were not considered as citizens for some time. They didn't give us identity cards for a while. Then, we got somehow. I got married at the age of 21. I am 30 years old now. My husband was an electrician. I never worked. My husband died in the war three years ago. He died in an explosion. While people were celebrating the Newroz Festival, a bomb exploded and my husband was killed. I wasn't there when he died. The bomb exploded a meter away from him.

I was living with my husband and my children before we came to Turkey but now, I am living with my children, my parents, my brother, his wife and his children, all together in one house.

My parents arrived one year before us and then they wanted me to come. I crossed the border with my children illegally. While we were passing, they were about to shoot us, thus I throw myself to the floor because of fear. They then let us go. My children were scared, too. My two paternal aunts also came with us and now they live in a close town. One of my maternal aunts is in Istanbul. I also have relatives in other cities. My three sisters are living abroad. I can rarely talk to them on the phone.

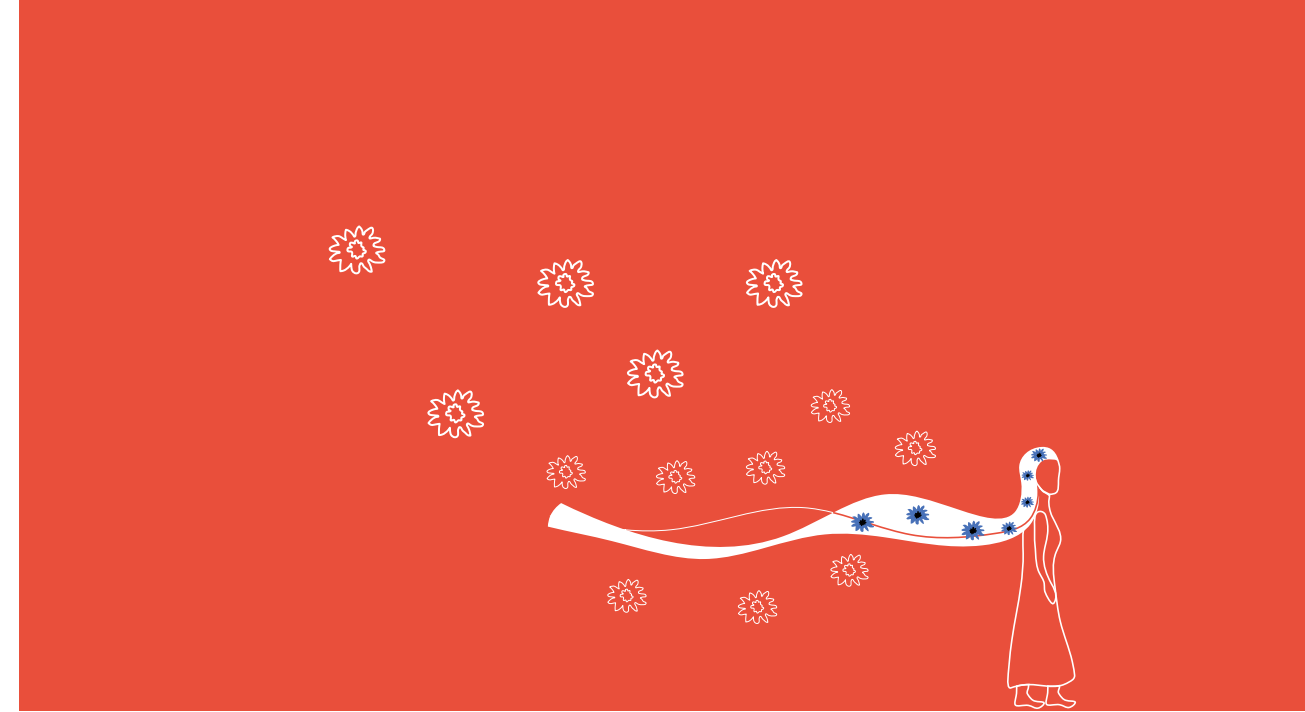
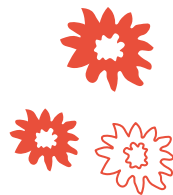
My father forced us to come to Turkey. I wanted to stay in Syria because my husband's grave is there. I always wanted to visit his grave. I loved him very much. I wedded him in an arranged marriage but we loved each other very much. We were at the same age. We had one daughter and one son. It has been three years since we came to Turkey. My son is 7 years old now and my daughter is 5. My children are going to school in Turkey and they are doing fine but I am not at ease. I always want to be near them.

Honestly, I didn't have much difficulty when I moved to Turkey but loneliness and homesickness exhausted me. My parents are here but my home fell apart. I don't have a family now. Besides, not being able to speak Turkish was a problem for me. I recently have a few Syrian friends but I don't know any Turkish friends.

The best part of being in Turkey is safety here. We didn't understand the war was coming in Syria. Yet, when the war approached, we witnessed its cruellest forms. We were waiting for ISIS to attack every day. The bombs were hitting our homes. We had neither electricity nor water. I came to KAMER upon hearing about the doctor here. The doctor is very nice, he comforts me and makes me feel good. I also heard about KAMER's work. They came to our house warmly in the household visits and were speaking our language. We felt very happy then. After meeting women from KAMER, I am not afraid of going out anymore. Now, I want to go abroad to live. I want to go near my sisters. When I talk to them, they say, "Your children's lives will be saved, come here, this is a country to live in." The state is taking care of them better and providing financial assistance to the refugees. My family didn't intervene in when my sisters decided to go. My elder sister was there and she sent an invitation letter and they left. However, they can't send invitations anymore. Unless the war ended, I would never return to Syria. I saw blood and death there and I don't want to go back anymore. I believe that my children might miss some opportunities here but they will be offered all the opportunities abroad. My family tells me that they can feed my children and me but they cannot promise a nice life. I want to work but my brother is oppressive. He is 23 years old. He oppresses me a lot but I don't want to talk about it in detail.

I can speak Turkish very little. If I learn Turkish, I can communicate with the doctor or with my children's teachers much better. Thus, I want to learn Turkish. In fact, I love Turkey but I don't think there is a future for my children here. I don't want to go to another city, either. Maybe, I will go abroad.

My biggest dream is to see my children growing up, finishing their school and standing on their own feet. I don't know where I see myself in the future. In Syria, there is my husband's grave; Turkey is safe; there is a future for us abroad. I am confused. Yet, I don't want anything for myself in this life. I am dead already. I only want my children's well-being.



## FIRUZE

I am happy these days but I was very happy before the war...

6 years ago, my mother died. I am 35 years old. We are 9 siblings: 4 boys and 5 girls. I am an Arab. Arabic is my mother tongue. I can speak Kurdish a little. I studied until 10th grade. Then, I got married. I come from a rich family in Syria. We were well off until ISIS came and stole all we had. We had a large house. I had golden jewelry. My husband was a clerk. I never worked. My children started school in Syria and now they continue in Turkey. They are having difficulty since they cannot speak Turkish.

We experienced the war very closely. We saw the bombings, fighter jets, all of them. We lost my uncle's son. ISIS killed him. ISIS did not harm me but one day, there was an old woman. She was sick and was going to see a doctor. ISIS came and beat her for not wearing gloves. My husband was a clerk in the courthouse in Syria. ISIS came and took our house and turned it into a court. They took my husband, tortured him

and released. Then, we decided to flee. If we hadn't run away, they would have jailed my husband.

We came to Turkey 2 years ago. We first settled into a different city. Then, my husband came to this city earlier. In the meantime, we went to my mother's place. Later on, we all moved here together with the children. My other relatives stayed in Syria. Only my brother is in Istanbul. He is commuting between work and home. I would love to live in Istanbul but it is an expensive city. In Syria, my husband was not oppressive but he didn't let me work. He wanted me to take care of the children. We were financially in a good shape. We even had a housemaid to help us. We were living comfortably. Yet, now we are in a desperate situation in Turkey because my husband cannot use his hands. He cannot work as his arm was crippled due to ISIS' torture. I don't work either. I go for temporary jobs. My husband now allows me to work. He has to. We have a card from the Red Crescent, that's how we get

by. One of my sons is 16 years old. He started working a month ago in a buffet. My daughter is 17. She is going to high school. My other children are 12, 10, 6 and 4 years old respectively. All of them are going to school. I want more children. I love children very much.

The best part of being in Turkey is having my husband with me. I love my husband very much. My husband is alive, that's what matters. He is 13 years older than me. Did I marry out of love? No, my family wanted me to marry. It was not a kin marriage. Yet, I loved my husband after we got married. What's more, I can go out or take my children to the parks freely in Turkey, which is very nice. If you ask me whether I faced discrimination in Turkey, I would say there are not only mean people but also good ones. For instance, in a street near our house, everyone greets one another; they don't discriminate. That's very nice. Yet, I have a neighbour upstairs. She throws her trash in my garden. Also, there is a market place in front of our house and a car is selling watermelons. One day, my husband asked the vendor to make room to pass but he replied, "I am Turkish and you are Syrian. You don't speak!" However, there are people treating me very nice. In my old neighbourhood, my neighbours used to say they wanted to visit me but couldn't as I couldn't speak Turkish and they couldn't speak Arabic. Yet, after a while, we started to communicate as such: She was asking me how I was doing in Turkish and I was saying that I was going to the market in Arabic. The most difficult part of being in Turkey was poverty. Being destitute is hard. The rents are high. All the Syrians complain about the same thing. I am living far from the city centre because the rents are very high. I will get a certificate soon. I will look after children in a Syrian school. I love taking care of children.

If we weren't in a financial difficulty and I earned my own money, do you know what would I buy for myself? Nothing! In Syria, I had everything. I had golden jewellery, I used to do make-up or go to the hairdresser; in other words, I could do everything I wanted. The only thing I want now is to lose weight. I put on too much weight here. In

two years, I gained 16 kilos. Well, if I earned my own money, I would probably go to a dietician. I came to KAMER because of my friends. One of my friends came to KAMER. She told me about it. She learned Turkish here. She invited me to the centre and then I started Turkish Language courses. Beforehand, I wouldn't understand when people say even 1 Turkish Lira. I couldn't speak a word in Turkish. Right now, I can understand Turkish.

My biggest dream is to go back to Syria. Right now, I feel that I belong to Turkey yet I want to return to Syria because I have my relatives there. I miss my former life there. I love it here also but my husband cannot work in Turkey. He is always at home. He wants to work but he can't. On the other hand, we had a very nice life in Syria before the war...

