

REFUGEES *Written by Virginia White*

Home.

A place that is our own. Where we feel safe and secure. Where we can rest, recharge, and refuel. A place of refuge.

When war strikes, homes are threatened and people may be forced to leave them behind. People become refugees as they seek safety and security in new and often distant lands.

Today we face one of the largest refugee crises in history: over 11 million Syrians have been displaced by the violent Civil War raging in their country. For these refugees, much more has been lost than brick and mortar.

When we gather with family and loved ones in our homes, how often do we find ourselves not lounging on comfy couches in living rooms, or seated around tables, but, instead, leaning against counters in kitchens? For many, quite often. Yet, the majority of Syrian refugees no longer have access to a kitchen—this cherished space of sustenance, comfort and human connection.



Six mornings a week, three Lebanese women and two Syrian refugee women gather in the Akkar community kitchen to prepare a hot and hearty soup or stew that will feed 240 Syrian refugee families in the Miniara area of northern Lebanon. *Photo: IOCC*

Mission MOMENTS

Week of Compassion partners in the Miniara region of Lebanon are working to restore a sense of home, a place of gathering, and a source of nutrition and health, through the Akkar community kitchen. Here, Syrian women have been hired and trained as cooks to prepare community meals. The daily menu, which includes many traditional Syrian dishes, is overseen by nutrition experts to ensure that the meals provide refugees with a balanced diet.

Amid the bustle of the kitchen, Samar, 40, a Syrian refugee who fled Homs with her husband and six children, reflects on arriving in Lebanon with no belongings and very little money. "My husband used to work as an employee in a company and we had a decent life in our own home in Homs. But then war came and took everything." The community kitchen not only helps nourish Samar's children, the wages she receives for working there also help sustain the family with desperately needed income.

Samar's Lebanese coworker, Zeina, 40, understands her pain, having experienced war firsthand during decades of conflict in Lebanon. "We endured war for 30 years here in Lebanon," said Zeina. "Our own homes were destroyed and we became refugees too, just like these families now. I know what they are going through, and I want to help. I want them to have hope and not to lose faith in humanity."

Zeina's hospitality and empathy are vital to the well-being of Syrian refugees who have arrived in Lebanon, providing emotional and spiritual support to people who have faced much violence and trauma. Working together, Samar, Zeina, and the other cooks at the Akkar community kitchen ladle the hot meals into more than 100 covered metal pots which will be delivered by van to Syrian refugee families in the area.

Thanks to your support, the life-giving relationships being built and life-sustaining food being prepared in the Akkar Community kitchen are made possible.