



**STUDY - 2017**  
Advocacy

**HANDICAP  
INTERNATIONAL**



## **"Everywhere the bombing followed us"**

Forced displacement and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas

Perspectives of Syrian women refugees in Lebanon





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*Special thanks to Luc Lamprière, Handicap International, and Thaera Badran, who collected the testimonies of Syrian women, and to Benoît Almeras, for the photos illustrating the report.*

*We fervently hope that our message will be heard and will result in definitive changes regarding the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.*

*Aurélie Beaujolais, Information & Publications Advocacy Manager at Handicap International, coordinated the writing of this document.*



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## **“Each time the bombing escalates, people escape”**

*“[...] You see people from Homs migrate to Aleppo and people from Aleppo migrate to Homs. Each time the bombing escalates, people escape. It’s the same in each city. We were in a state of continual settlement and migration. For Syrian people, life and death take to the road.*

*Those who did not leave Syria have been displaced inside Syria thousands of times. There is no safe place, no prospect of tomorrow. We lived in a state of suspense, waiting in fear that someone would die in a bombing, a mine incident, or from sickness. Or they might die because we had no doctors and no hospitals to go to; several women died in childbirth, and several infants died because there were no hospitals nearby to take them to.*

*Forced migration is humiliating. Need is humiliating; living in a community that is not your own is also humiliating. We have a popular saying: those who leave their homes lose their worth. It is a suffering that cannot be described in words; words cannot describe the horror we have been through. War destroyed the best years of my life: it took my son,*

*my brothers, and my existence. It made me ill from fear and stress.*

*[...] Those who died went to God; may God have mercy on them. For those young people who remained, who missed out on their school years, I hope they will get their lives back, and love life away from war and death.”*

These are the words of Amira, 44. She used to live in a rural town of Syria, where she was a teacher. From 2012 to 2015, she witnessed bombing and shelling in her town before she could flee to Turkey, and then to Lebanon in 2016. One of her sons was killed during a bombing. She now lives alone with her younger son, and suffers from depression.

**Her testimony echoes the voices of the Syrian women we interviewed and the refugees we surveyed, as they explain how they had to flee several times from bombing and shelling in their hometowns and other cities or places they had believed would be safer.**

# INTRODUCTION

Since 2012 and the beginning of Handicap International's activities in response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria, we have been denouncing the appalling humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in Syria, especially those weapons with wide-area effects. As fighting escalated, our organisation repeatedly condemned this intolerable violence against civilian populations, documenting the devastating impacts through a series of reports looking at data on incidents caused by explosive weapons in Syria,<sup>1</sup> assessing weapons contamination,<sup>2</sup> studying injuries and traumas encountered among Syrians affected by the crisis,<sup>3</sup> and establishing a correlation between forced displacement and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.<sup>4</sup>

In 2016, we published "*Qasef: Escaping the bombing*", based on interviews with Syrian refugees carried out in Jordan. The report stressed that the main reason they left their homes was the use of explosive weapons in their villages, towns and cities. Interviewees repeatedly testified that they had been subject to multiple displacements.

With this new report, we aim to complement these previous findings with deeper insights on how Syrian refugees have been driven out of their homes due to the use of explosive weapons, and were compelled to escape multiple times until they reached a safer place. Specifically, the study shows how women, persons with disabilities and injuries, and the most vulnerable persons are particularly impacted by this multiple displacement pattern in terms of social and psychological consequences.

We hope that this study, carried out with the support of the Government of Ireland, the Government of Luxembourg, and the

Government of Switzerland, will help deepen the understanding of the link between forced displacement and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

**The correlation between multiple forced displacements and the use of the explosive weapons was highlighted through a collection of testimonies and a survey conducted with Syrian refugees in Lebanon.** Additional research includes an analysis of the vulnerability of the target environment and the civilian population in relation to explosive weapons.

Our study does not cover other violent methods of war that are currently used in Syria and likewise have a high humanitarian impact, notably outside urban areas. Our focus on explosive weapons in populated areas certainly does not indicate a willingness to ignore these other methods, but rather special attention to a particularly acute phenomenon that causes significant human suffering.

This report is meant as a contribution to the political process underway to address the harm caused to civilians by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. As a founding member of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), Handicap International is involved in an international advocacy campaign to reach an international political commitment to end the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Together we say: "Stop Bombing Civilians" (<http://stop-bombing-civilians.org>).

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1. Handicap International, "*The use of explosives in Syria: a time bomb in the making*", 2015.

2. Handicap International, "*Kobani: a city of rubble and unexploded devices*", 2015.

3. Handicap International, "*Syria, a mutilated future: a focus on persons with injuries*", 2016.

4. Handicap International, "*Qasef: Escaping the bombing*", 2016.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on a survey of 205 Syrian refugees in Lebanon and in-depth interviews with 14 Syrian women refugees<sup>5</sup> originally from different towns and cities in Syria, and additional research, this study confirms that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas drives multiple forced displacements and induces a pattern of displacement that increases the vulnerability of civilians.

Quantitative data collected during the survey confirms the correlation between multiple forced displacements and the use of the explosive weapons, as **almost half of all respondents had been internally displaced prior to seeking external refuge in Lebanon, with an average of 3 internal displacements within their own city.**

**In addition to displacement experienced within their own city, the majority (some 133 respondents) had been displaced between 1 to 3 different Syrian cities prior to seeking refuge in Lebanon.**

The women interviewed highlighted the deprivation induced by forced displacement. They described the loss of all their belongings, destroyed by the bombs or abandoned on their way to safety; how they had to flee, sometimes walking, in harsh weather conditions, wounded or ill and with no access to basic health care; the state of constant fear in which they moved from city to city.

**When asked about the catalyst for their forced displacements, the most common reply by men and women alike is bombing and shelling (36% of all respondents).** Among respondents with bombing-related disabilities, an even higher percentage (45%) identified bombing and shelling as the driver for their forced displacement.

The study also reflects the considerable harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in terms of socio-economic vulnerability, linked to the loss of livelihood and

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5. The testimonies are all available in full length on our blog: <http://blog.handicap-international.org/influenceandethics/>

the disruption of civilian infrastructure, as well as the long-term impact on mental health. Dire social impacts were emphasised by respondents, namely aid dependence and new restrictions encountered by people living with disabilities, along with a loss of personal dignity, as well as the loss of education for Syrian children.

- **44% of all respondents had their own homes destroyed due to the use of explosive weapons.**
- Disaggregated analyses show the specific impact on women due to damage to physical security measures (e.g. destruction of homes, breaches in walls/doors and windows, damage to perimeter barriers), increased challenges in resisting criminal perpetrators, and societal disarray in the aftermath of such events and during displacement.
- **36% of respondents directly linked the use of explosive weapons to the destruction of civilian property other than homes;** especially significant in collected testimonies was the destruction of health services. Women were also affected by the scarcity of reproductive and sexual health services.
- **83% of the respondents who sustained bombing-related injuries resulting in disability are men. Meanwhile, a higher percentage of female respondents (10% higher) referenced explosive violence causing injury to a family member or friend,** highlighting the higher probability of women taking up the role of caregivers for injured family members, especially in the absence of adequate health structures.
- **44% of all those surveyed asserted that they had their livelihoods destroyed because of explosive weapons use** and explosive remnants of war. It is worth mentioning that persons

displaced multiple times likewise experienced loss of properties and livelihood opportunities multiple times. Women were even more affected by the loss of livelihoods, with **54% of female respondents** reporting such a loss.

- **The combination of fear, stress, and distress was identified as the third most important collective effect of explosive weapons use in Syria. For women, it is the second most significant effect of explosive weapons use. Female interviewees also consistently mentioned the long-term impact of fear on themselves and their children.**

Findings from additional research based on case studies highlighted how the use of explosive weapons in populated areas drove forced displacements in different types of local contexts. In both instances, the case studies clearly show that **the use of explosive weapons in populated areas produces causal effects associated with forced displacement:**

- **Personal injury or death;**
- **Destruction of residences, which is particularly widespread in densely-populated semi-urban districts;**
- **Destruction and disruption of critical infrastructure and services,** with the destruction of health services and disruption of livelihood particularly significant in suburban areas.

The particular vulnerability of the previously displaced was clearly highlighted. Bombing and shelling of settlements of previously displaced persons were definitely a consistent aspect of the analysis, with stress on the need for civilians to relocate multiple times in search of safety.

**Handicap International calls on the international community to end the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas.**

**Protection and access to humanitarian assistance must be ensured to those affected by the crisis, including women, persons with injuries, persons with disabilities, and the most vulnerable.**

**The rights of all victims of explosive weapons from all impacted areas must be recognised.**

**Furthermore, all forcibly-displaced people must be given a haven, and in the long run, a durable solution that fully respects their dignity must be found.**





## BOMBING AND SHELLING IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF POPULATED AREAS

1.

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House under construction in Lebanon where a family of Syrian refugees has taken shelter.

To provide context for this report, background case studies were conducted, based on publicly available information and expert research, covering different types of populated areas with different local situations, between mid-2016 and June 2017.

The case studies looked at areas with mainly small towns and villages surrounding agricultural land-use patterns, as well as in densely populated semi-urban districts, highlighting how the use of explosive weapons drove forced displacement. Their focus, related to contextual conditions, was on air and ground-delivered explosive weapons.

Below are the key findings:

**The use of explosive weapons with wide area effects<sup>6</sup> in both above-mentioned types of contexts created each of the three causal effects associated with forced displacement:**

- Personal injury or death,
- Destruction of residential dwellings, and
- Destruction of critical infrastructure and services.

**Those effects shape the particular form that the displacement takes. Disruptions to civilian infrastructure emphasize the reverberating effects of explosive weapons.**

In areas outside of frontline combats and of bigger cities, damages linked to explosive weapons was essentially caused by airstrikes in the zone during the period studied.

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6. The wide area effects are described as “... primary and secondary effects well beyond the point of initiation, including by means of the large destructive radius of the individual munition(s) used, inaccuracy of the delivery system or munition, the use of multiple munitions, or a combination of these factors.” (GICHD, 2017).

The most significant effects likely to have a strong impact on forced displacement were linked to:

- The destruction of health services, including attacks on hospitals, international humanitarian assistance efforts, and local production of necessary medical goods.
- The disruption of income and livelihood in agricultural region, especially with the use of sub-munitions, with persistent area denial effects due to unexploded ordnances. Explosive weapons were also responsible for the loss of livestock illustrating the importance of material property to social and long-term well-being.
- Repeated strikes affecting street markets that sprawl through most populated areas, with severe negative impacts on food security.

**The previously-displaced constituted a particularly vulnerable group**, since explosive weapons caused widespread damage to vulnerable shelters, including secondary incendiary effects and damage to other property. Relative security away from the front lines had attracted a large number of previously-displaced persons from across the country, some of them settled in camps with tents as shelters or gathered in temporary settlements formed at transit points.

In the more densely populated semi-urban areas studied, regular artillery barrages, along with airstrikes, were the primary cause of:

- civilian deaths and injuries, and
- widespread destruction of civilian dwellings, with large swaths of residential blocks simply ceasing to exist after they were attacked.

Weapons with wide destructive radii that rely on blast rather than fragmentation for terminal effects were of particular concern. These include air-dropped ordnance and rocket artillery with over-calibre payloads.

This pattern of use constituted a most significant factor driving the displacements, including multiple waves of internal displacement, to seek safety from the highest intensity of explosive weapons use.

These findings, however, because of their contextual focus on air and ground-delivered explosive weapons, should not lead to underestimate the devastating consequences for civilians of other practices observed in the Syrian conflict, including the use of other indiscriminate weapons which can also cause wide area effects (such as victim-activated improvised devices, car bombs or suicide-bombers), or other violations of the laws and customs of war (such as the use of civilians as human shields, certain siege tactics, hindering civilians from fleeing and barring humanitarian access).

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## MULTIPLE FORCED DISPLACEMENT

2.

© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon. All the belongings that Nadia could save in her multiple forced displacements.

*“When we arrived in AS, we thought we had reached safety. We had not. It is like running away from death and arriving to find that death is waiting for you.”*

Hanan, 31 years old (p. 17).

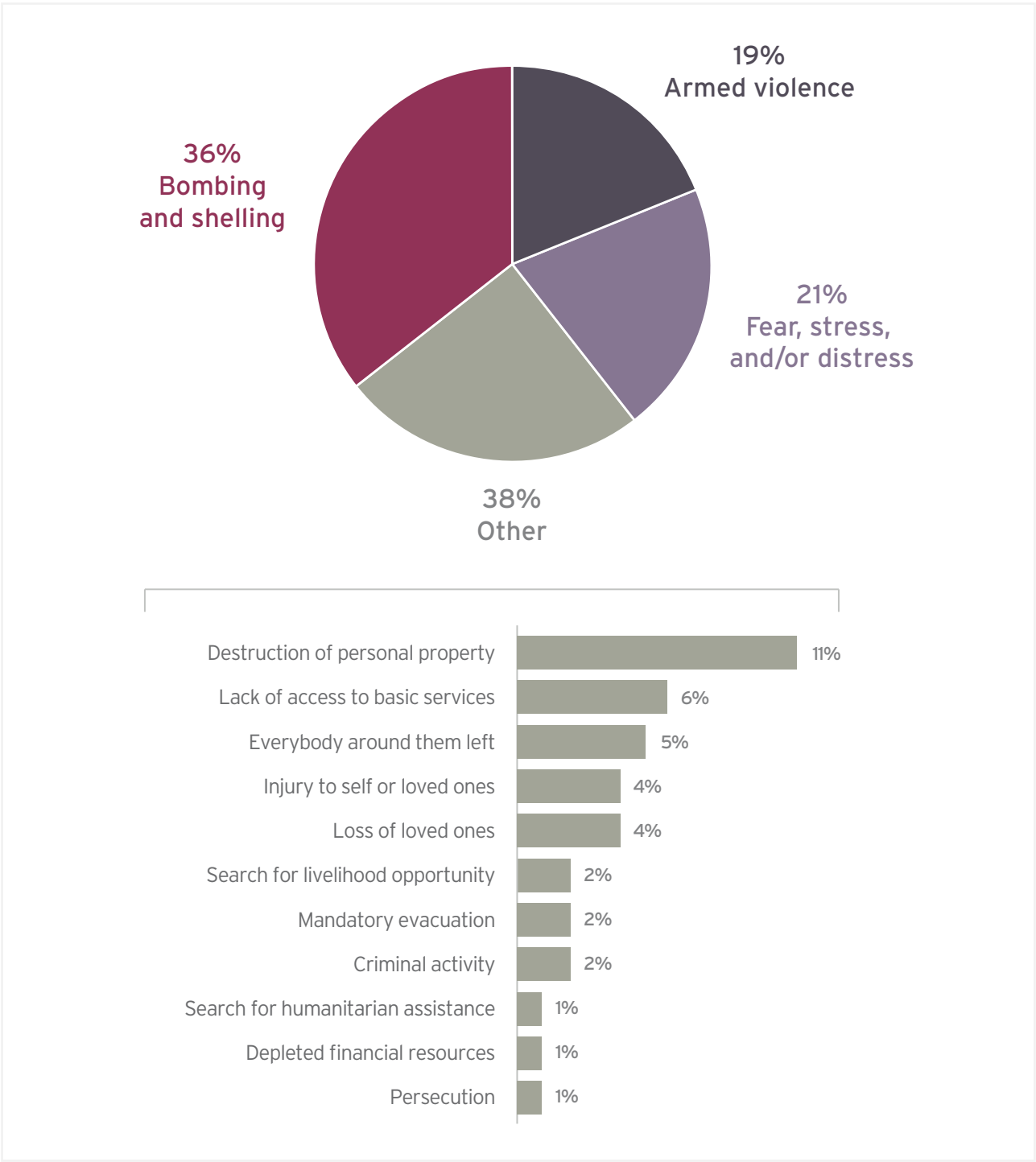
Almost half of all survey respondents had been internally displaced prior to seeking external refuge in Lebanon:

- Respondents experienced an average of 3 internal displacements within their own city, with some families being displaced up to 10 times.
- In addition to displacement experienced within their own city, the majority of them (133 respondents) had been displaced at least once from one Syrian city to another, while some respondents had been displaced to up to 3 different Syrian cities prior to seeking refuge in Lebanon.

The survey shows a pattern of multiple displacements, first starting within the city (3 times on average and up to 10 times for some families), then towards other towns in Syria (up to

3 different cities for some respondents), prior to seeking refuge in Lebanon.

When asked about the catalyst for their forced displacements, the top-ranking response for men and women alike was bombing and shelling, at 36% (see Fig. 1). Amongst the respondents who sustained disabilities due to the bombing, an even higher percentage (45%) identifies bombing and shelling as the main motivation to flee. This was a popular response category among all age ranges and sexes, but was most frequently referenced among the 18-39-year age bracket. Moreover, 32% of respondents stated that, in their opinion, the collective primary effect of explosive weapons use in Syria was displacement (see Fig. 3).



**Figure 1: Reasons of respondents for displacement within their city or for leaving their city.**



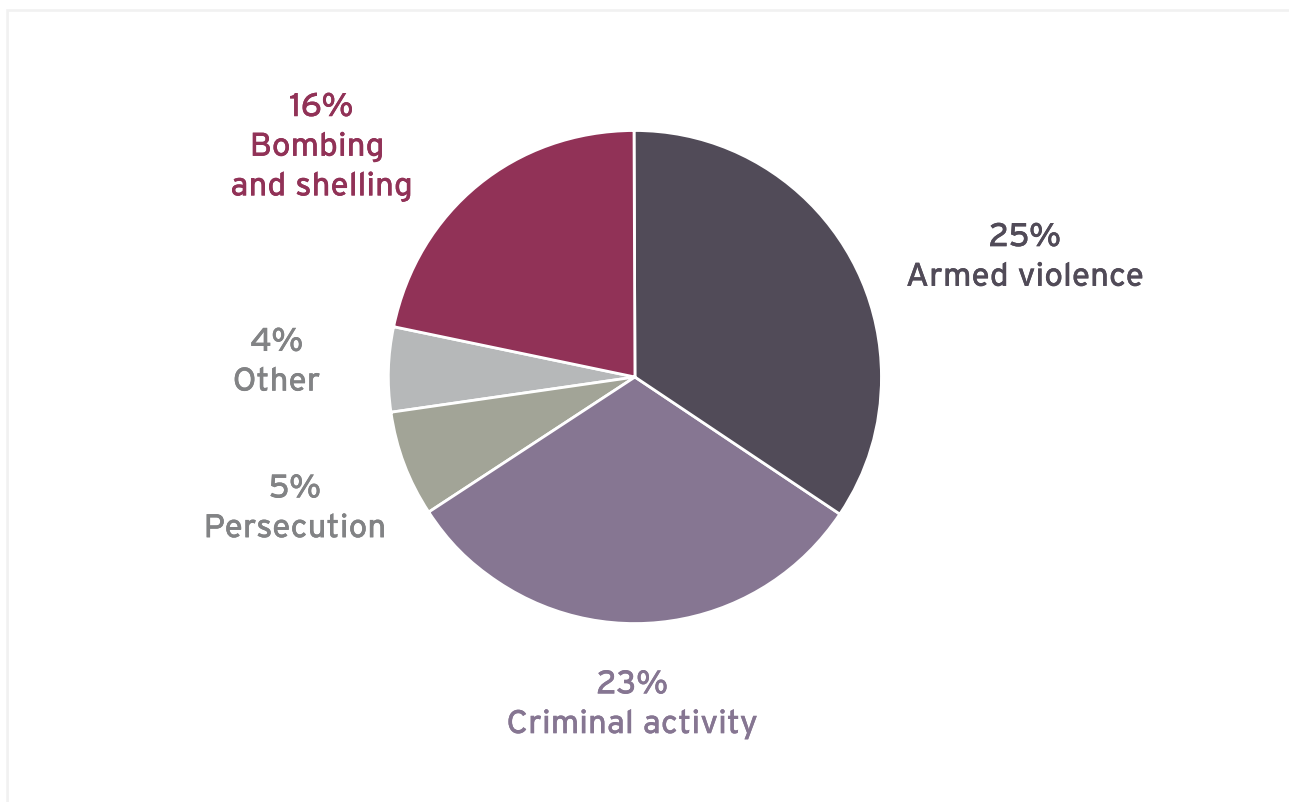
*“We would go back to our place after each bombing. After a year, we decided to leave for my brother and sister’s place, which we felt was safer. As the bombing escalated, we soon realized that it was not much safer, so we had to leave again.”*

**Nadia, 33 years old.**

Other most frequently cited reasons for fleeing were “fear, stress, and distress” (21%) and “armed violence” (19%) (see Fig. 1). 56% of respondents said that they decided to leave Syria because of fear for personal safety and a lack of safe alternative locations within Syria.

“Armed violence”, “bombing/shelling”, and “criminal activity” were the most frequently selected motivations for internal displacement, as well as for seeking refuge outside of Syria.

However, the ranking order of the driving factors is different for the motivations to seek refuge abroad rather than within Syria: bombing and shelling is cited as the first driver of internal displacement, but armed violence and criminal activity seem to be even more important factors when it comes to seeking refuge abroad. (see Fig. 2).



**Figure 2:** Reasons of respondents for leaving Syria, related to personal safety.



© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon. Afisa and her son.



## "The bombing followed us everywhere"

### Afisa

Afisa lives with her family on the ground floor of a small building, with everyone in one shared room. She is 55 years old. She has a total of 9 children and 8 grandchildren, but only two sons are with her in Lebanon. Her youngest son, 18, is lying on his bed. "He broke his legs and his back in an accident in Lebanon", she says.

Her other son, 26, was injured in Syria by shelling and bombings and became paralysed – "but he survived", she says.

#### *God used to watch over us and keep us safe*

*We lived in D, a few kilometres outside of Damascus. My husband was a government employee at the airport. I worked with children and did some farm work. God used to watch over our house and keep us safe.*

*It all started suddenly. There were tanks in the streets, and there was bombing, shooting, and*

*shelling everywhere. An armed group entered the city and hundreds of people were killed. We rushed out of the house. Only God saved my children.*

#### *I thought we would be back in a few days*

*One night, the bombing and shelling was very intense. My husband and I decided that it was time for us to leave. Some of the children were still sleeping through the noise. I woke up my daughter. We were out in ten minutes. We gathered only a few things. I did not want to take much with me. I thought we would be back in a few days, as soon as it was over. I took a few pots for cooking – women are practical. We left everything else inside, including our nice furniture. We had a brand new washing machine. We had nice new clothes, but I did not want to ruin them, so we took only old stuff. We left the house; we just closed the door. We did not even lock it. What for? The only thing that mattered to me at that moment was the safety of my children and my grandchildren. There was nothing more precious.*

### ***The bombing followed us everywhere***

*My husband had a small car. We all managed to fit inside and we hit the road, leaving the bombing behind us. That was scary, but we felt relieved as we drove away from the bombing. The feeling did not last long: the bombing followed us everywhere, until we came here to Lebanon.*

*We went to KA, a small town a one-hour drive to the west. Five days later, we went back to our home in D. It was horrible. Everything had been destroyed. **The truth is that when I think about it, I don't miss anything in the house. I only miss the peace we had. I have my children. Not everyone there was so fortunate.** I am grateful that my children were saved through God's mercy.*

### ***No place to hide***

*We returned to KA and stayed there a few months (five or six), but soon fighting started there as well. **There were explosions on all sides, it was coming from everywhere: rockets, bombing, shooting, airplanes, and fighting between groups all around us. We were caught in the middle of it all with no place to hide.***

*We then moved to another city, Z, and stayed there for a year or so, until the bombing and shelling started there, after which we had to move again, this time to KS.*

### ***We saw the bomb fall as we walked away***

*That was where my son was hit. We had to stay there. People who lived there welcomed the displaced. Five months later, KS was bombed and we moved again, just in time: the house we lived in was hit just as we left. We saw the bomb fall as we walked away. We then went to A, but we stayed there only a week, because we heard that there was a doctor in Lebanon who could treat our son.*

### ***In Lebanon***

*My husband is sick. He has diabetes and cannot work. My son is a painter, but he cannot work here. He could open his own business, but he does not have the necessary tools. I wish we could all go to Europe.*

© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon. The only belongings that Afisa could save when fleeing her house. "We gathered only a few things. I did not want to take much with me."



### 3.

## SPECIFIC IMPACT ON WOMEN



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**More frequently than men, female respondents attributed the cause of their displacement to armed violence”, “bombing/shelling”, and “criminal activity”, with criminality at an 11% higher response selection rate and bombing/shelling at a 12% higher response percentage than for male respondents.**

This demonstrates a specific impact due to certain factors – which may merit further research –, which may include:

- Damage to physical security measures (e.g. destruction of homes, breaches in walls, damage to doors and windows, damage to perimeter barriers),
- An increased challenge in resisting criminal perpetrators, and
- Societal disarray in the aftermath of such events and during displacement.

This was also clearly reflected in the collected testimonies:

*“But the worst was yet to come; that is when the misery started. For a full eight months, we lived a life of running and constant escape. We no longer had a home. We no longer had our family around us. We had no place to go. We were two women alone. We were left to ourselves, sleeping in the streets with total strangers, wherever we could find shelter. We had to beg. I was injured and very sick. We would move because people would tell us to go away. Not having a home was a very scary feeling for me, I felt lost. Your home is your dignity. Home is where your family is. On the road, I often thought that I should not have left. Even a tent next to my destroyed house would have been better. There was no destination. Damascus, where we went first, was not the destination. Lebanon, where we ended up, was not the destination.*

*The destination was safety and security. This is the only thing we were looking for but we did not know where it was. I did not find it.”*

**Asil, 55 years old (p. 38).**





**“As a woman, I had to cover my entire face and body for two years. But I still saw everything”**

## Hanan

Since they arrived in Lebanon two months ago, Hanan, 31, and her husband have lived in a small and very deprived refugee settlement. They have a daughter, 14, and a son, 10. *“We are all living in misery”, she says.*

We meet her inside the crowded family tent. It is not easy for her to share her story, as a group of a dozen persons (men, women, and children), are nearby and often interrupt.

### Smuggled

*We come from Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. I was working for a textile factory, but we were also farmers. Our land is mostly rural. Our land came under siege after the war started. Two years ago, we escaped to AS, more than 500 kilometers to the south.*

*We were a group of about 200 persons, escaping at the same time in 3 lorries. We thought we would be safer if we stayed together. We left our homes and our jobs. Reaching safety was the most important thing for us.*

*We left at midnight. It took four days to go from our city to AS; we had no water or food for four days. It was very difficult. We took dirt roads, avoiding the main roads, as we were always afraid that we would be caught.*

### We thought we had reached safety

*When we arrived in AS, we thought we had reached safety. We had not. **It is like running away from death and arriving to find that death is waiting for you.***

*Once in AS, we were besieged again. We were put in tents, small tents. The camp was huge; it felt like 2 million people were living there. We were not with any of the parties at war, but we still suffered from all kinds of weapons, from bombs coming from all sides. Explosions would happen all the time. Car bombs would explode all the time. Explosives were hidden in houses. There were so many kinds of devices that you never knew what would blow up next. Fridges were typical traps, but anything inside a house could be turned into a bomb. You would go to sleep and be woken up by an explosion in the middle of the*

© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon. Hanan and her family live in a very deprived refugee settlement in Lebanon.



*night. Or you would go to the market and hear that someone had been blown up.*

*Everyone has a different story about fridges. One person talked about a motor being removed from a fridge and turned into a detonator. Another said he had heard of a bomb inside a fridge in someone's kitchen. Someone else said he had heard of wires attached to a fridge door in such a way that if you opened it, the entire place would blow up. So many stories... You might come to think that this was the main purpose of a fridge that this object was meant as a weapon. We learnt that it was better not to touch it or even approach it.*

### ***You still had to do your daily chores***

*As a woman, I had to cover my entire face and body for two years. But I still saw everything. There is no horror that I did not see. I saw people dying, I saw children dying, I saw body parts cut from people and exposed for all to see. I have seen things that no human being should see, things that no human being might have seen before.*

*I still had to do daily chores such as going to the shops and finding basic necessities. My husband was still receiving his salary at that time.*

### ***The whole house was gone in one blast***

*One day, our neighbour's house was bombed; the whole house was gone in one blast. Three people died: a woman and her two children. Another house was hit another day. There was an old man standing on the balcony, with two children next to him. Bang, all gone. There were mines in the street. One man I knew drove over one. He lost an arm.*

*Those who could leave, did. Many could not. Others had relatives who had been kidnapped; they did not want to leave without them.*

### ***I hope I will be able to go back to peace and safety in my country***

*We fled to Damascus and had to pay to come to Lebanon. There was no other option. We now have a huge debt. I don't know how we will repay it. We could not bring anything. When we left, we only had the clothes we were wearing, and nothing else. All we could bring was our children. We had to throw away everything we had. The most important thing was to be safe. Our house? We don't even know if it is still standing.*

*I still hope that the situation in Syria will improve; I hope I will be able to go back to peace and safety in my country.*

© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon. Hanan and her family live in a very deprived refugee settlement in Lebanon.



## DESTRUCTION OF CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND LACK OF ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

4.



© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon. Syrian refugees' informal settlement in Lebanon.

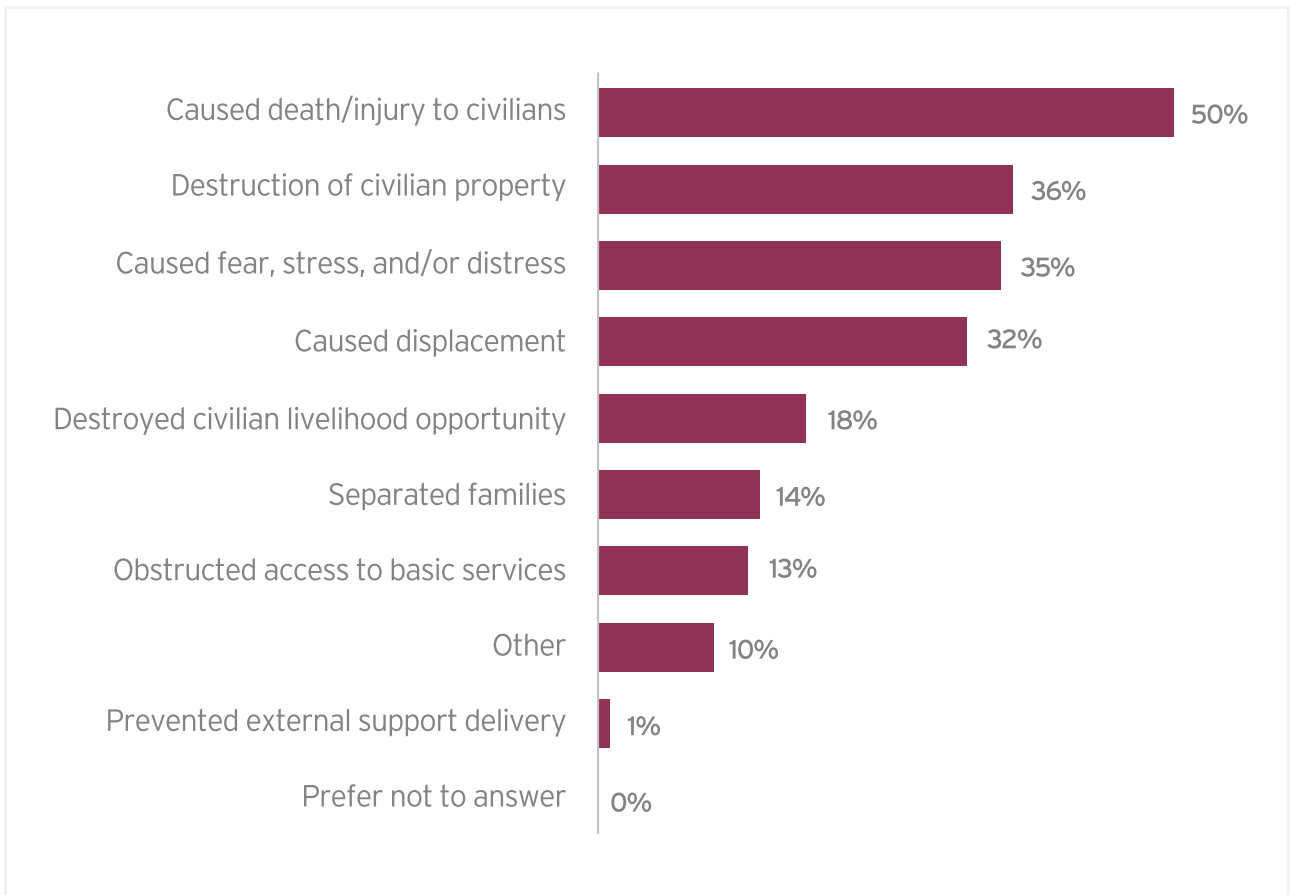
*"The situation in Z had become impossible. There was danger everywhere. Bombing, shelling, and fighting were constant. My son's wife and their children had moved to a slightly safer area, but one day their building was hit during shelling and the balcony collapsed. Another time, the fourth floor was hit and entirely destroyed, leaving a big hole in the building. Another time, three of the children were missing after a bombing. Two of them were found wandering around the building just afterward. It took another two days to find the third child."*

**Asil, 55 years old (p. 38).**

Across all age groups and genders, civilian death and injury is mentioned as the primary effect of explosive weapons use in Syria (Fig. 3).

The second most important effect (Fig. 3, effects of explosive weapons use within the community) was the destruction of civilian property. 44% had their own homes destroyed, while 36% mentioned the destruction of civilian property other than their residential homes.

Respondents who sustained injury due to the bombing have been confronted by the destruction of their homes (59%) or other civilian properties (44%) even more frequently. 37% of them were at home at the time the injury was sustained, highlighting the impact of bombing and shelling in populated areas – even when civilian buildings were not a target.



**Figure 3: Effects of explosive weapons use within the community.**

The destruction of civilian infrastructure and services is also a recurring topic in the testimonies collected, with the destruction of health services being especially significant. Most interviewees mentioned that medical care is severely disrupted due to the use of explosive weapons. Medical infrastructure has been destroyed or forced to relocate to safer places, it lacks medicine and doctors, and is often inaccessible due to fighting.

For women, the lack of access to health services is a particularly grave concern, as reproductive health services, including emergency obstetric care, is scarce or non-existent, making it impossible for them to receive pre- and post-natal care.



*“Several women died in childbirth, and several infants died because there were no hospitals nearby to take them to.”*

**Amira, 44 years old.**

*"The hospital where I was treated was far from a fully-equipped hospital; it was more like a dispensary. They could manage to do some emergency procedures, but they were not equipped with what I needed. Also, it was a scary place. It had been shelled many times. We were all in the basement so that the bombs would not reach us. It still did not feel safe. We knew that it was a target. All hospitals were."*

Layal, 23 years old (p. 22).

*"I clung to life because I loved myself; I loved my children; I loved my friends; I loved my students; I loved my house, the walls, and the olive trees. I lost my son – he died; my brother died; my student died; my neighbour died; my friend died; my cousin died. Death surrounds you. I am afraid of death and of the thought that at any moment I might lose my other son, my mother, or my loved ones."*

Amira, 44 years old.

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*"Our next destination was S in the Hama district, but two of my cousins were killed in the bombing of S. We went back to AZ after that happened. I gave birth to my daughter there. She was born at home with only the help of a midwife. We stayed in AZ up to one month. There was still bombing and shelling every now and then."*

Ranim, 31 years old.



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## "I left because I could not get treatment"

### Layal

Layal, 23, comes from Ghouta, an area located east of Damascus. She was a housewife who lived with her husband – a tailor – and her son before she was injured in a shelling incident.

#### *A rocket went through the front of the building*

*The area where we lived had been under siege for a long time. There was a lot of bombing and shelling, and it was getting very dangerous to live there. After a neighbour was killed, we decided to move to a rented apartment not far from our house, but in an area that we hoped would be safer. In April 2013, I was inside the apartment when a rocket went through the front of the building into the apartment. I was thrown by the blast, and something hit my head. I immediately lost consciousness.*

*I remained in a coma for 15 days in a small local hospital. Someone – I still don't know who it was – had taken me to that hospital. For days, nobody in my family knew where I was. My family had finally found me by the time I woke up.*

#### *The hospital had been shelled many times*

*My left eye was totally blind and I had a huge wound above the eye. All my teeth were broken. I had shrapnel in my head, along with a brain injury. I could not recognize anyone or anything, not even my own son. My right arm was badly injured, with multiple fractures. Even today, I can hardly do anything with that arm. It is too weak to carry anything and I am not able to use my right hand.*

*The hospital where I was treated was far from a fully-equipped hospital; it was more like a dispensary. They could manage to do some emergency procedures, but they were not equipped with what I needed. Also, it was a scary place. It had been shelled many times. We were all in the basement so that the bombs would not reach us. It still did not feel safe. We knew that it was a target. All hospitals were.*

#### *I left because I could not get treatment*

*A few months later, my family managed to get me to a hospital in Damascus, where I had surgery. Back then it was still possible to cross the line. It was difficult and dangerous, but possible. I left*

*because I could not get treatment where I was. Hospitals there could not treat me. In Damascus, they placed multiple metal rods to hold my broken bones together. I went back home, but when the time came to go back to Damascus for the metal rods to be removed, we were under siege and it was no longer possible to leave.*

*I went to another hospital and underwent another surgery, which failed. They did not have the right equipment. My situation deteriorated over two and a half years. We were not eating much. Often we had only enough bread for one meal. I was in constant pain. I had unbearable headaches. Once we were under siege, it became impossible to get my medicines. Even antiseptics and painkillers were hard to find. Because I was not able to clean my wounds properly, my arm got infected and was swollen from inflammation.*

### **The journey to recovery**

*There was no medicine, nothing. I felt my face was mutilated because of the wound over my eye would not heal. I did not want people to see me. I was ashamed. But I did not want to inspire pity. I wanted to recover my pride and my face. I knew a good surgeon could do that, which is why I left home again for Damascus. By then, the enclave had a network of tunnels.*



© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon.  
Layal showing pictures of life in Syria. She could only save these pictures and few things from her previous life.



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As a result of her injuries, Layal cannot use her arm anymore.

*In May 2015, I went through one of them, back to Damascus. This time, I had to undergo an entire series of reconstructive surgeries. The existing metal rods had to be removed and new ones put in place. Bone had to be taken from my leg. I was not able to walk for a while. At some point, half of my body was almost paralysed; there was something wrong with my brain and nervous system. I did not have to pay; a charity paid for the costs. In the end, the series of surgeries went on for close to a year.*

### **I was ready to leave after 16 operations**

*After a year there and multiple surgeries, I felt better. But I still have a lot of pain. The headaches are not completely gone. I have been through a lot; I have had enough. A lot of shelling and bombing. War everywhere. I have seen much more than anyone my age should have seen, much more than anyone my age can take.*

*I have a young son who is now 5, so I wanted us to be in a safe place. My in-laws were already in Lebanon. My mother-in-law lost a leg in a bombing, which killed one of her sons and her daughter. She was already here, so we came to live with her, with all of us in one room.*

***My feelings, my fears, my mood are all being projected onto my son. He has seen a lot; he sits by himself a lot. He is very introverted. I am young and I want to live. I am only 23. Enough is enough. I want to see an end to bombing in Syria with my own eyes.***

## 5.

## IMPACTS ON LIVELIHOOD



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*"We left in July 2012, during Ramadan, after the bombing escalated. Our house was destroyed. We lost everything. We had no time to get ready, so we could not save anything. When we left, our place was still veiled by dust from the blast, so we could not see much; we only saw that everything had been destroyed."*

**Sara, 35 years old (p. 28).**

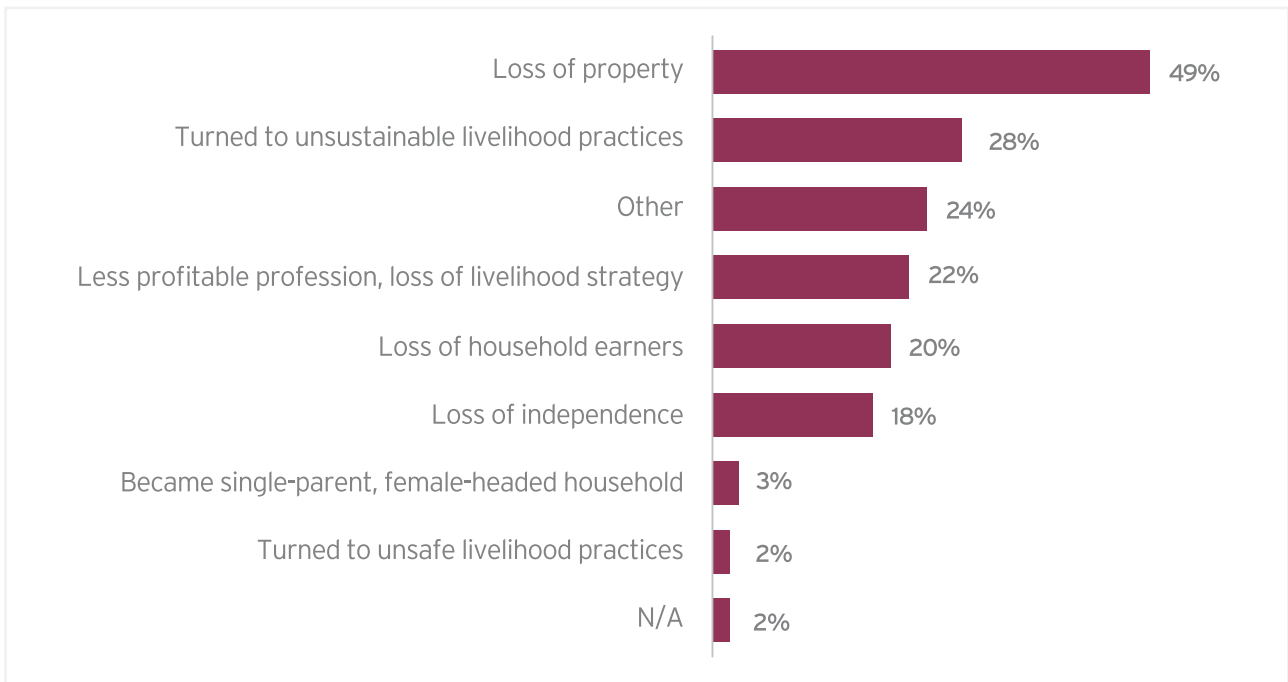
The loss of property is the most significant socio-economic effect of displacement (cited by 49% of respondents, Fig. 4).

A total of 90% of respondents experienced the destruction of either their homes or other assets. The response category "other" was reported several times for incidents unrelated to bombing and shelling, such as respondents who had assets stolen.

44% of respondents asserted that they had their livelihoods destroyed because of explosive weapons use and explosive remnants of war (Fig. 5).

Persons displaced multiple times also experienced loss of properties and livelihood opportunities multiple times, further depleting their assets.





**Figure 4: Socio-economic effects of displacement.**

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*“We were farmers and we had a lot of land there. We grew watermelon, eggplant, tomatoes, apples, onions, and other vegetables. We even had a few cows. My parents had land as well. For the most part, we had enough to feed ourselves. Everything was cheap. Before the war started, we had time to harvest the apples and the peaches. We did not grow anything after that. The apples went bad. We heard that it was due to some chemicals from bombs.”*

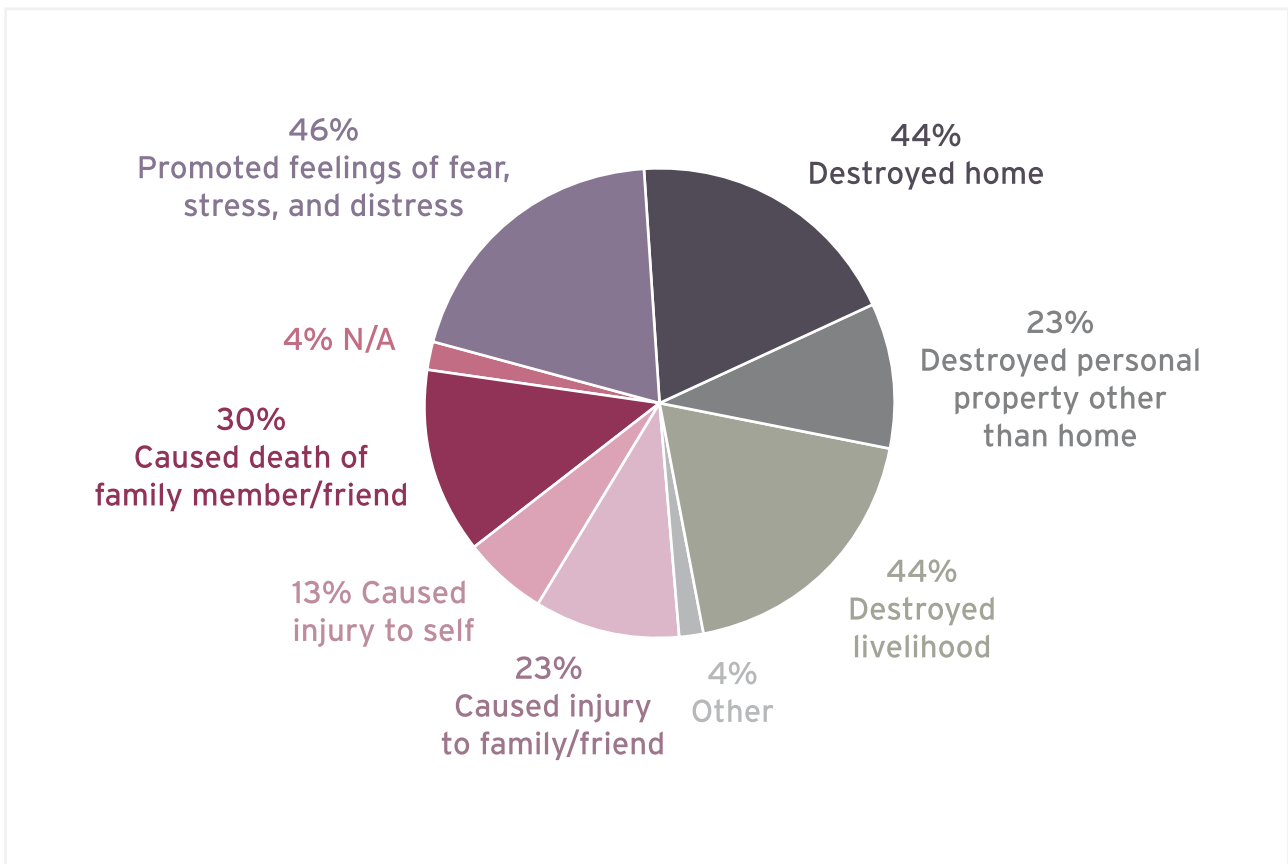
**Nadia, 33 years old.**

*“We stayed in AS for another 6 to 7 months. At first we stayed with my sister, and then we found a place of our own to rent. My husband had started a small business. Our life was getting better. He bought and sold children's clothes. He had a motorbike and drove around everywhere on it. As it was a bit calmer, he even managed to go to AZ to check on our house every now and then. But then fighting resumed and there were more planes dropping bombs.”*

**Ranim, 31 years old.**

The destruction of livelihood opportunities is especially worrisome, as most household members fall within the employable age range of 18-49 years. It is also important to mention the particular challenge faced by persons with newly-acquired impairments, as they have to adapt to

daily life with their disability while also seeking income-generating activities. The search for income-generating activities is also constrained by limited employment opportunities and the lack of accessible services.



**Figure 5: Personal impact of explosive weapon use.**

Loss of property is the principal effect of displacement for men and women alike. However, women have been more affected by the loss of livelihoods (54% compared to 38% of men).

Women also made more frequent mention of the loss of income earners (cited by 35% of women

compared to 12% of men surveyed). Indeed, the loss of income earners often means having to turn to less viable livelihood practices, as mentioned in the testimony below.

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*"After [he was injured in the bombing of our house], it took two months before my husband was able to start walking again slowly. People knew my husband could not work, so they would help us; they were wonderful. The war has brought us closer together. But in some other places we went to, there was a lot of fear; people did not trust each other. That made everything more difficult; even the bombing felt scarier. While he was at home, his brother helped to maintain my husband's children's clothing business, but it became too dangerous to move around, so he sold the stock of clothes. A neighbour had an olive orchard and he paid us to take care of it. We all worked in it: my husband would help with the watering and the children and I would do other things, like taking care of the trees."*

**Ranim, 31 years old.**



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As a result of her injuries and the lack of access to healthcare, Sara can barely walk now.



## "We had our own house and a car before the war"

### Sara

Sara, 35, comes from N, a town close to Daraa. From 2012 to 2015, her family was displaced from place to place inside Syria.

*We had our own house and a car before the war. We lived happily together with our six children.*

#### **Dust from the blast**

*There was a lot of bombing and shelling where we lived, so we moved to another area. But each time we arrived somewhere, it felt like the bombing was everywhere around us. We left in July 2012, during Ramadan, after the bombing escalated.*

*Our house was destroyed. We lost everything. We had no time to get ready, so we not could save anything. When we left, our place was still veiled by dust from the blast, so we could not see much; we only saw that everything had been destroyed.*

*I was injured when our house was bombed. My foot was swollen and I had open wounds on my leg. But I did not even have time to get shoes. I walked barefoot for eight hours straight on the*

*first day. We made a cane out of a piece of wood that we found along the way. When it was too difficult, my husband carried me. Occasionally, he would try to disinfect the wound as well as he could, but we only had water and salt. The infection grew worse during our travels, and now I can barely walk.*

*Once we started moving, life was very different. We did not always have food or water. We did not eat at all for days.*

#### **We spent two years on the road**

**We did not use cars to flee. Cars were targets of shelling and shooting, making it too dangerous. So we walked.** We avoided houses and buildings, instead walking across fields and through orchards and forests. Trees were our best protection; we would run from one tree to another for cover. We avoided the roads: they were the most dangerous. Every now and then, bombs and shells would hit the road. Of course, we would go the long way around to avoid armed men and check points, and stay as far away as we could from armed men barracks and anything related to the war, but even that did not keep us out of danger.

*Each time we saw planes or bombs, we would lie on the ground, or hide under trees, in bushes, in farm ditches, or in any natural holes in the ground where we could lie down. We waited for the bombing to subside. When we felt it was calm again, we would resume walking. We walked 45 kilometres to reach our first destination.*

*Walking at night felt safer, so sometimes we walked the whole night. We slept outside on the bare ground, in bushes, or under trees, without blankets or sheets, as we had none with us. **We did not see houses, storage sheds, or farms as shelter, but more as targets of bombing.***

### ***We were running away from the destruction and the danger***

*There were hundreds of people. Some had started with us. Others joined us on the way, because their own houses had been destroyed or because they were also afraid of bombing, or just because it felt safer to be together. None of us knew where we were going. We were running away from the destruction and the danger, hoping to reach a safer place, but we did not know where that would be. We walked blindly. We had no precise destination. Most of the time, we did not know for sure where the road we were taking would lead us, and we were uncertain of the exact destination we were trying to reach. That was not important. The only important questions were: Are we safe?; Are our children safe?; What is the safest way out of danger? We wanted to make sure we were as far as possible from danger; that was all we could think about.*

*So we carried on for a total of two years, a big part of it on the move in the hot Syrian summer, when the temperature reaches forty degrees, and in the freezing winter. I preferred walking in winter; it was cold, but my foot did not hurt as much.*

### ***The mines***

*And then, there were the landmines. They were everywhere, especially around the towns, the villages, around groups of houses, and farm buildings. There were mines in fields, in orchards, and on the sides of the roads. A lot of people died because of them. My husband's brother died and our nephew was injured in the explosion that killed his father.*

*To avoid the mines, we looked for footsteps, or car, lorry, tractor, or tank tracks, and we all tried to carefully walk in the tracks. We walked in a line, spaced 5 to 10 metres apart, with hundreds of people in one long line stretching as far as you could see. However, this did not always work. When someone stepped on a landmine and died, we all dove to the ground until there was no more noise. We had to abandon the bodies there, without interrupting our march. People would shout and many would cry, but we could not stop for long. With the mines, even a burial would be too dangerous to attempt.*

***The bombing and the shelling are still going on. The mines are there still, everything is still going on. Even if we wanted to go back to Syria, we would have no place to stay, no house. There is no life there anymore.***

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## 6.

### SOCIAL IMPACTS: LOST GENERATION AND LOSS OF DIGNITY

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*"I cannot go back to my town. Our country is gone; I want to die anywhere but Syria. I want to see the graves of my brothers, but I do not want to go back there to live."*

**Nadia, 33 years old.**

All respondents noted having a family member or friend killed due to explosive weapons violence. However, 83% of the respondents who sustained bombing-related injuries resulting in disability are men. Meanwhile, a higher percentage of female respondents (10% higher) referenced explosive

violence causing injury to a family member or friend (Fig. 5). This fact highlights the higher probability of women taking up the role of caregivers for injured family members, especially in the absence of adequate health structures.

*"Those who die are at peace, but those who are left behind and are disabled suffer. People could not help the wounded and the wounded suffered a lot."*

**Nadia, 33 years old.**

*"The road to Damascus was still open back then, but it was very dangerous, as there was bombing all the time. It was even more dangerous for men, but women could cross the line. So his wife, female family members and friends would take turns going there and buying serum, painkillers, cream, ointment, or whatever they could get on the other side. But it was very difficult to get medicines."*

Asil, 55 years old (p. 38).

For 30% of respondents with bombing-related disabilities, loss of independence is the primary effect of displacement (Fig. 4), and is most certainly caused by dependence on aid, disruptions in access to services, and restrictions in an unfamiliar environment.

The loss of children's education and the loss of personal dignity have also been prominently cited as effects linked to the displacements.

The loss of education reinforces the theme of the "Syrian lost generation", as the futures of young Syrians are likely to be most compromised as they mature during a prolonged crisis.

*"Why do you need to speak with me? I am ashamed of myself. Look at me. Has the world not seen enough? [...] My sons had to carry me; my children had to move me. I feel humiliated. I cannot go to the bathroom by myself. I stayed in Aleppo for 8 months; I was injured and they had to carry me."*

Nehad, 55 years old (p. 33).

The sheer loss of dignity was echoed by many respondents. People who once had viable sources of livelihoods have resorted to begging and handouts to sustain themselves and their families. Sadly, this response category was

selected by almost half (45%) of respondents who sustained injuries as a result of bombing during the Syrian crisis.

*"When he came back to AS, we told everyone that he just had a motorcycle accident. We did not want anyone to know that he was hit by a bomb. We did not dare say so. We were rather ashamed of it, as if it had been his fault somehow."*

Ranim, 31 years old.



*"My children have grown up amid war. The sort of travels they have been through, full of misery and death, have nothing to do with what I experienced as a child. They have seen people die. They have not been able to go to school. They do not know peace and safety. Their fear makes your heart ache. At the end of the journey, our situation is still miserable."*

**Ranim, 31 years old.**



© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon. Amira showing a picture of her sons. The elder was killed in a bombing.



*"Forced migration is humiliating. Need is humiliating; living in a community that is not your own is also humiliating. We have a popular saying: those who leave their homes lose their worth."*

**Amira, 44 years old.**





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Nehad is paralysed below the waist. She refused to be photographed but instead her son displays an X-Ray of her spine injury.



## "Pain and humiliation"

### Nehad

Nehad is 55. She is sitting on the bed in her third-floor apartment. She has four children: two sons and two daughters; and seven grandchildren. She can move only the upper part of her body, as she is paralysed below the waist. From her bed, she can see the city and the hills through the window. Her family lived in Aleppo. At first, she resists the idea of an interview: *"Why do you need to speak with me? I am ashamed of myself. Look at me. Has the world not seen enough?"*

She absolutely rejects the idea of being photographed. Instead, before we leave, her son pulls an X-Ray of her spine.

#### ***Bombing and shelling all the time***

*We lived in an apartment on the second floor of a five-storey building in Aleppo. The fourth and fifth floors were entirely destroyed. There were still people on the third floor. The two sides of our street were on opposite sides of the conflict. We*

*lived on the 'green line': there was bombing and shelling all the time.*

*Whenever there was an opportunity, we would try to go out. But when people went out, we would always be afraid that they might not come back. The street was dangerous. One day they killed an 11-year-old child two days before Eid. I saw it. I knew his mother; we tried to calm her down. How could she calm down? It breaks your heart.*

***Even in the house, we were always afraid of what might happen next. Children were always scared. They did not deserve this. We did not deserve this. Nobody deserved this.***

#### ***I was hit by a sniper***

*We had left Aleppo once already, two years before I was shot. But things had calmed down, so we went back.*

*I was shot by a sniper. It was the 22nd of February 2015. I was just leaving the apartment to go to the market. We felt like we were living in a prison, but still, you have to go to the market. I was shot*

*in the shoulder; the bullet went through my lung and lodged in my spine, in the spinal cord. I fell down immediately and remained in the street for one hour and a half or two hours. Nobody could come and rescue me. It was too dangerous for them to even try. They, too, would have been shot at. But they did come at some point. A group of neighbours gathered their courage and came down from the buildings to pick me up.*

### ***Pain and humiliation***

*My sons had to carry me; my children had to move me. I feel humiliated. I cannot go to the bathroom by myself. I stayed in Aleppo for 8 months; I was injured and they had to carry me.*

*I lived with my daughter in Aleppo. She is not recovering from the shocks of life there. She was treated for psychiatric disorders caused by the war. The fear is a burden we all carry. Enough. Enough blood. Enough war.*

### ***In Lebanon***

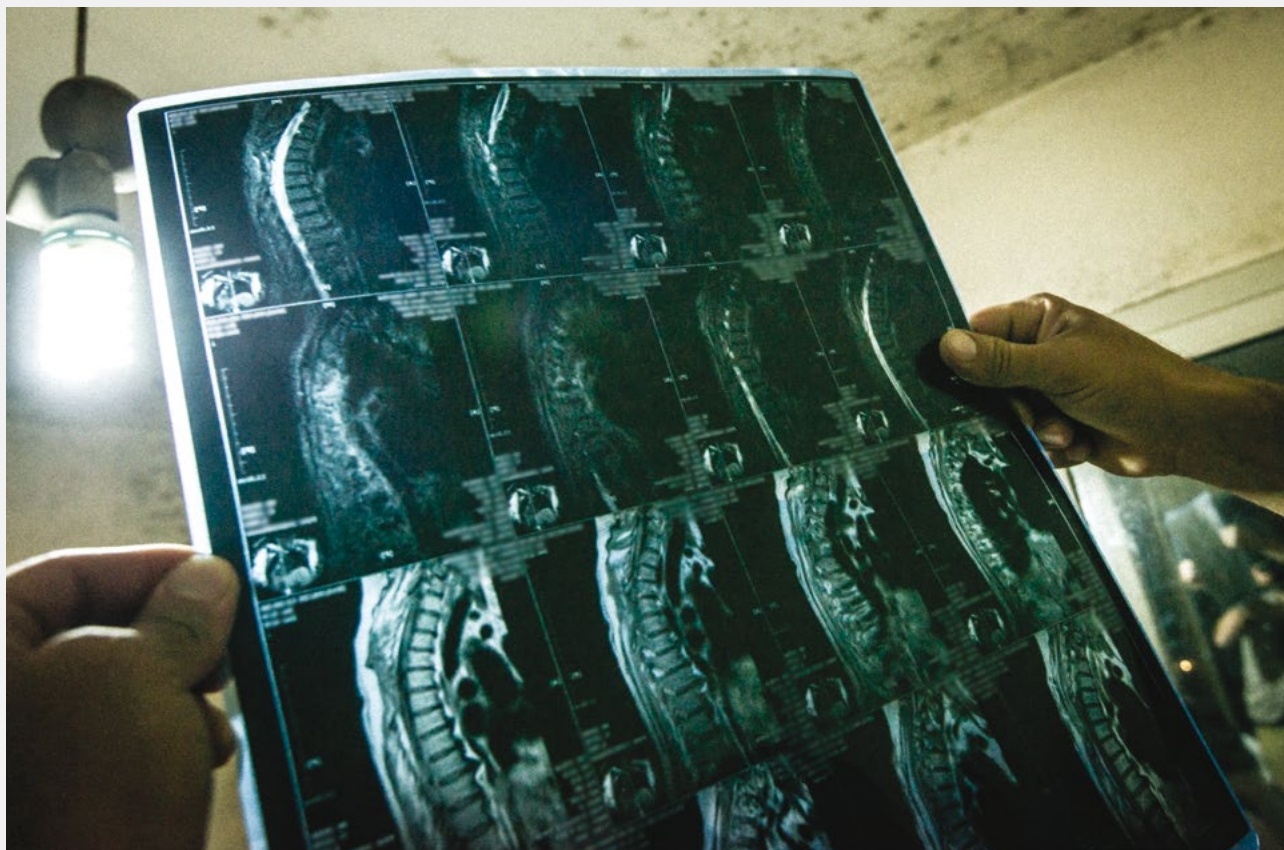
*Eight months after my injury, I crossed the border into Lebanon with the help of my sons.*

*Men and women, we are all suffering equally. Everybody is suffering. No one can live there without suffering. How can you bear it when you see what we have seen? Just looking at it sears one's eyeballs. **How can humans bear it when even the stones are melting?***

*My wounds are not healing.  
They are very deep.*

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Nehad is paralysed below the waist. She refused to be photographed but instead her son displays an X-ray of her spine injury.





## LONG-TERM MENTAL IMPACTS

7.

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*"Everybody is suffering. No one can live there without suffering. How can you bear it when you see what we have seen? Just looking at it sears one's eyeballs. How can humans bear it when even the stones are melting? My wounds are not healing. They are very deep."*

**Nehad, 55 years old (p. 33).**

When asked about the collective effects of explosive weapons use in Syria, both men and women cite "fear, stress, and distress". It was the third most frequently mentioned impact (Fig. 3, effects of explosive weapons use within the community).

42% of respondents personally witnessed the use of explosive weapons. **Many respondents repeatedly stated that they were not involved with any of the parties to the conflict or weapons, thereby conveying their anxiety about the subject matter.**

**30% of the entire sample and 48% of the respondents with bombing-related disabilities reported the death of a family member or friend due to explosive weapons use, while 23% of the entire sample and 27% of those injured in bombing reported having a family member or friend injured due to explosive weapons use.**

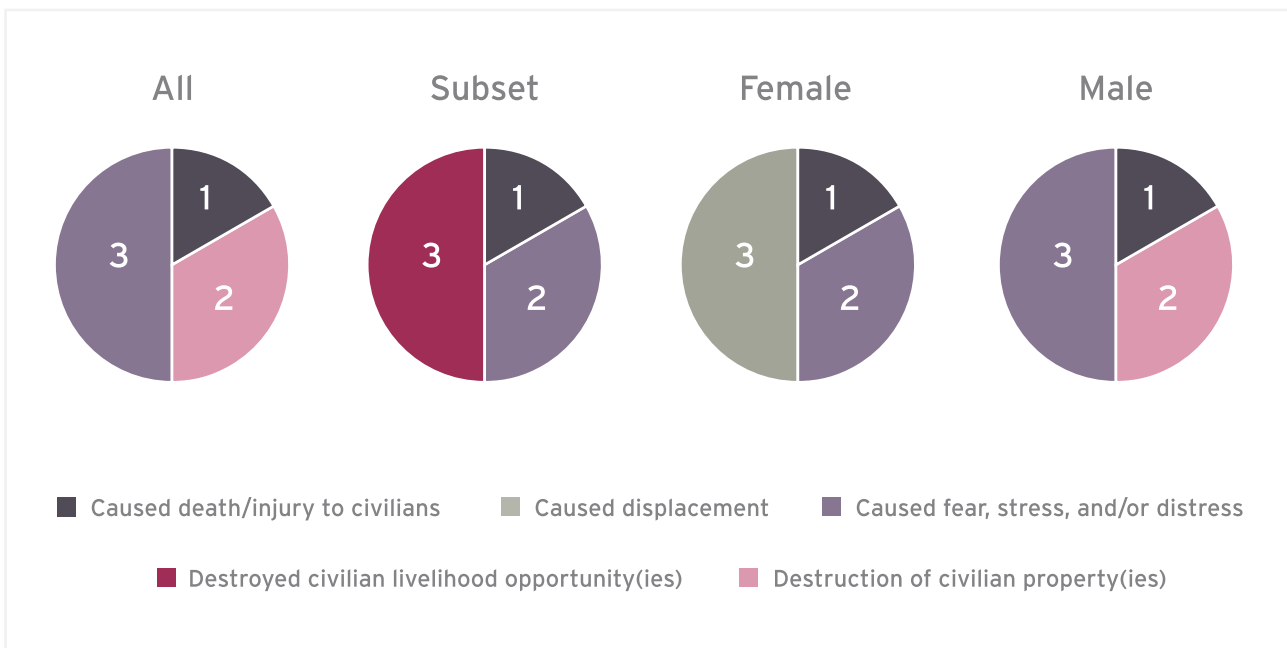
*"In the old days, when we heard that someone had died, we would keep track of the date. Now, death is becoming repetitive. Death is becoming something almost banal, we grew accustomed to death. But it is still painful. I learnt patience and I learnt endurance, but it still pains me when I lose someone, as if it were the first time I had experienced death. I lost my son and I was in pain, and when I lost my brother, I should have been in less pain, but no, death continued to be painful. The war had consequences. We will never forget death."*

Amira, 44 years old.

46% of respondents and over half of those with disabilities state that, in their own experience, the most significant effect of explosive weapons use is the development of feelings of fear, stress, and distress. Although it is difficult to quantify, the survey and testimonies brought to the fore a recurring theme of the guilt felt by respondents who sustained disabilities resulting from the bombing, since providing them with healthcare is an added economic burden, and they have fewer opportunities to contribute financially to their own care.

It appears that fear, stress, and distress are the second most significant effects of explosive weapons use for women (see Fig. 6). 61% of them cite fear as the primary effect, whereas for men, this percentage falls to 37%.

Female respondents also frequently mentioned the long-term impact of fear on their children.



**Figure 6:** The most significant effects of explosive weapons ranked from 1 to 3 and disaggregated by gender. Subset refers to respondents having sustained disabilities resulting from the bombing.

*"When the plane came the first time, I was praying. Prayer is a strong spiritual relationship with God; it is not easily interrupted. Fear interrupted my prayer. I ran out of my house; I ran to my cousin's, as if seeking a man to protect me from the plane, as if my cousin could keep death away from me. I ran to him and held on to him as I trembled. Despite the fear, I was thinking of my sons. I had two sons before I lost the older one. When I hear planes now, I am gripped with fear. I cannot not look up at the plane."*

**Amira, 44 years old.**

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*"My daughter was always afraid. She wet the bed out of fear and she also often peed her pants. She would then take a shower by herself. She was always looking for me and asking to sleep on my lap."*

**Nadia, 33 years old.**



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## "We only want to live in security and peace, to feel safe"

### Asil

Asil has just turned 55. Her son and daughter-in-law are with her, along with their four little girls, who are playing nearby. They came from J, in the governorate of Damascus.

*"She does not hear well because of the bombing", her son says. And he apologises: "She is confused; she has been under a lot of stress".*

Asil speaks as if recalling moments of a nightmare. At times she mixes up the dates, or confuses places and people. She refuses to be photographed: *"I am too afraid"*.

#### *When our house was destroyed*

*The town where I come from has been totally destroyed. There was bombing, there was shelling, there was fighting on all sides. Bombs came from everywhere. We were trapped in the middle. People everywhere around us were losing their lives.*

*In June 2013, during Ramadan, our house was hit by a bomb. It was 1:15 in the morning; I was reading the Quran when our house was destroyed.*

*When I regained consciousness, I was in the toilet. I had not been there when the bomb fell.*

*The blast had jumbled everything. The walls collapsed and we were thrown around. My hair was on fire, and I had a lot of metal in my body, but I did not feel it at the time; I did not think of the pain, as I was looking for my son.*

#### *Where is my son?*

*At first, I could not see him." Where is my son?" I shouted with all the strength I had left, but I could not hear my own voice.*

*My son was also injured. I finally saw him, a shape in the dust, a shadow. The shadow of my son. I was crying. His head was actually inside the TV set. It must have fallen down during the blast. Retrospectively, everyone laughs when recalling the comical absurdity of the scene. Not me. I was so worried. His jaw was broken – his mouth had been deformed by the explosion. It was horrible, but I knew he was alive. Then I fainted.*

*"We were under the rubble for six hours", she recalls. Then I saw him being carried away by rescuers; they also carried me. They took us to a local dispensary in Z – there was nothing much there, but they could provide first aid. I kept fainting. When I woke up there, I was in shock and totally confused. My grand-children were not with us at the time of the bombing, but we didn't remember that so we asked after the children;*

We asked people to go back to our building to look for the children. They did go. We sent those people to a very dangerous area because we had forgotten that the children were safe.

### **The hospital had nothing**

Then they moved me to another place where I could have surgery, a makeshift hospital in a basement. Meanwhile, doctors came to check on my son. They said that he needed a scan, but they did not have the necessary equipment. They just stitched his wounds without removing the shrapnel inside. It is not their fault; they had no equipment and there were a lot of injured persons.

They said that he was bleeding inside, and he overheard them saying, "He will die, but slowly". There was nothing they could do. They took him back to his wife. She was crying and the children were also crying.

### **Something incredible happened**

Then something incredible happened. Two men came to the house, saying that they could help; they did not ask for anything. They were nurses: they took out the stitches and cleaned the wounds, removing the shrapnel they could reach. This did all this without any anaesthesia. My son was screaming so loudly, recalls his wife, that people could hear him all the way to another neighbourhood. They came often to clean the wounds and redo the stitches, little by little, over 15 days. The road to Damascus was still open back then, but it was very dangerous, as there was bombing all the time. It was even more dangerous for men, but women could cross the line. So his wife, other women in the family, and friends would take turns going there and buying serum, painkiller, cream, ointments, or whatever they could get on the other side. But it was very difficult to get medicines.

### **Bombing, shelling, and fighting were constant**

As for me, I recovered slowly in the hospital. I stayed there around 2 or 3 months, and almost completely lost my hearing. Then one day, my husband and son told me that a group of people was planning to leave the city in search of safety, and that my daughter and I should join them. The situation in Z had become impossible. There was danger everywhere. Bombing, shelling, and fighting were constant.

My son's wife and their children had moved to a

slightly safer area, but one day their building was hit during shelling and the balcony collapsed. Another time, the fourth floor was hit and entirely destroyed, leaving a big hole in the building. Another time, three of the children went missing after a bombing. Two of them were found wandering around the building just afterward. It took another two days to find the third child.

But the worst was yet to come; that is when the misery began.

### **The destination was safety**

For a full eight months, we lived a life of running and constant escape. We no longer had a home. We no longer had our family around us. We had no place to go. We were two women alone. We were left to ourselves, sleeping in the streets with total strangers, wherever we could find shelter. We had to beg. I was injured and very sick. We would move because people would tell us to go away. Not having a home was a very scary feeling for me, I felt lost. Your home is your dignity. Home is where your family is. On the road, I often thought that I should not have left. Even a tent next to my destroyed house would have been better. **There was no destination. Damascus, where we went first, was not the destination. Lebanon, where we ended up, was not the destination.**

The destination was safety and security. This is the only thing we were looking for, but we did not know where it was. I did not find it. When I got to those places, I never felt I had arrived. My family was not there. There was no safety there.

### **Life in Lebanon**

When we reached Lebanon on the other side, we tried to help my son and my husband by sending them whatever money we could collect. It was not a lot (maybe 25 dollars at a time), but at least they could buy bread. My son and his family finally came here in September 2016. They waited at the border for one month, as they did not have papers.

The children are afraid all the time. They jump when a door slams. They wet their beds every night. We only want to live in security and peace, to feel safe. All we want is safety for the children, and some food on the table. That's all we need.

She looks at one of her granddaughters, a smiling little girl. She, too, has shrapnel in her head and pieces of metal in her body, she says.



## 8.

# CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Handicap International calls on the international community to end the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. Protection and access to humanitarian assistance must be ensured to those affected by the crisis, including women, persons with injuries, persons

with disabilities and the most vulnerable. The rights of all victims of explosive weapons, from all impacted areas must be recognised. Furthermore, all forcibly-displaced people must be given a haven, and in the long run, a durable solution that fully respects their dignity.

### **Warring parties must abide by International Humanitarian Law, and:**

- Immediately end the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, particularly the use of banned weapons such as cluster munitions and landmines;
- Immediately cease attacks on civilians and civilian facilities including hospitals, health structures and schools;
- Ensure and be accountable for effective precautionary measures in the conduct of hostilities, in order to avoid further damage to civilians;
- Comply with the provisions of UN Security Council resolutions 2139, 2165, 2191, 2254, 2258 and 2332 without delay so that all those in need of aid and protection can access it fully and safely, without any impediments, and so that all humanitarian actors – including local staff – regardless of their origin or point of access, can work free from fear of arrest, detention, loss of property, retaliation, persecution, or interference from all parties;
- Ensure unhindered and safe opportunities for all civilians who wish to flee to leave conflict zones;
- Ensure communication with affected populations and raise their awareness about the risks posed by the use of conventional weapons, including unexploded ordnance.



## The international community should:

### About the use of explosive weapons in populated areas:

- Call for investigation on attacks against civilians by all parties to the conflict;
- Strongly condemn the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, particularly the use of banned weapons such as cluster munitions and landmines in Syria;
- Support the development of an international commitment to end the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas;
- Acknowledge that humanitarian mine action is essential and support the implementation of risk education and clearance efforts in Syria in the short- and long-term;
- In particular, donors should commit to funding risk education, survey, and clearance of mines and explosive remnants of war, and support Syrian response capacity to effectively respond to these threats.

### About the impact on civilians and victim assistance:

- Ensure that the rights of survivors of explosive weapons, the families of those killed and injured, and affected communities from all impacted areas and wherever they are, are recognised and that:
  - Their basic needs, including safety, protection, shelter, food, water, hygiene and sanitation, are met in a timely manner;
  - They have safe and timely access to mainstream personal support services and gender and disability-specific services, including emergency and long-term medical care, rehabilitation, psychological and psychosocial support, education, work, employment, social protection, and social inclusion;
  - They receive assistance to compensate for the loss of their homes and/or livelihoods due to explosive weapons;
  - Donors should commit to providing adequate, long-term and coordinated support in the form of earmarked funding or by ensuring development, human rights and humanitarian initiatives count victims of explosive weapons amongst their beneficiaries.

### About protection and the respect for the right to flee:

- Ensure that the borders of Syria are open to all those fleeing the conflict, respect refugees' right to freedom of movement, and refrain from *refoulement*;
- Promote and protect the human rights of all refugees and asylum seekers, wherever they are, without any discrimination and with particular attention to gender, age and disability;
- Ensure that internal displacement is also tackled as a major issue in ongoing international political debates – such as the Global Compact on Refugees.

## Handicap International's activity in response to the needs of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees

Since early 2013, Handicap International and its partners have deployed rehabilitation teams in Syria, where they have provided physical therapy to the injured and people with disabilities, and ensured that the most vulnerable people are included in the humanitarian response.

The organisation has worked with injured Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon since the summer of 2012. In the summer of 2014, Handicap International extended its operations to include Syrian refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan. Handicap International currently employs more than 500 national and expatriate staff to aid refugees and internally-displaced persons affected by the Syrian conflict: more than 555,000 people (individuals and their families) since the beginning of the crisis.

### ACCESSIBILITY

Handicap International works in close collaboration with local and international organisations to ensure that services for refugees and displaced people are accessible to people with reduced mobility.

### AID DISTRIBUTION

The organisation supports vulnerable and displaced families through the distribution of food and hygiene items.

### REHABILITATION

Handicap International helps hospitals and clinics care for injured refugees by supplying rehabilitation equipment and organising physical therapy sessions for patients. The rehabilitation team provides physical therapy to people who have had limbs amputated and need to learn to use artificial limbs, as well as to people with injuries such as complex fractures that could result in a permanent disability due to prolonged periods of inactivity.

### RISK EDUCATION

Risk education teams visit displaced people in camps and urban areas to educate them about the dangers posed by explosive remnants of war. In particular, children are taught how to identify and avoid ordnance. More than 71,500 Syrians have been educated so far.

© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon. Handicap International's staff interviewing a Syrian woman.



## METHODOLOGY

The study aims at building on previous findings and extending the analysis of the correlation between forced displacement and the use of explosive weapons in populated area, both geographically and thematically, with a focus on specific types of vulnerabilities, as well as on the gender dimension. The aim is therefore to answer the following questions:

- How does the use of explosive weapons in populated areas impact the displacement pattern of Syrian refugees in Lebanon?
- What is the impact of this pattern of violence on the personal trajectories of Syrian families with a focus on women, persons with injuries, and disabilities?

### Survey and collection of testimonies

The survey was conducted by telephone with adult<sup>7</sup>, Syrian refugees who now reside in the following Lebanese districts: Akkar, Baalbek, Bcharre, El Batroun, El Hermel, El Koura, El Minieh Dennie, Rachaya, Tripoli, West Bekaa, Zahle, and Zgharta. A total of 205 surveys were completed. Interviews were administered in Arabic by Arabic-English bilingual, experienced surveyors under the direction of a Survey Coordinator from 20-26 July 2017.

Ages of respondents ranged from 19-87 years, with a high standard deviation indicating a wide measure of dispersion among the ages of respondents surveyed. The mode or most frequently surveyed age of respondent was 39 years. 135 respondents were male, and 72 were female. 14 testimonies were collected by HI among women of the sample, from 4-10 August 2017. Interviews for the testimonies were carried out in Arabic by an Arabic-English bilingual, in the presence of HI staff. Interviewed women were from the Aleppo, Damascus, and Homs governorates. Homs, followed by Damascus

and Aleppo, were the cities men and women surveyed most frequently cited as being forcibly displaced from. Ages of respondents ranged from 23-70 years old.

The survey was conducted with individuals, and most of the survey questions pertained to their individual experiences. However, many of the findings also reflect the family's experience more broadly. The average family size of respondents was 5, with roughly equal numbers of males and females per household.

### Survey Design

Using the HI Lebanon programme's beneficiary list of 1909 Syrian refugees as a sample frame, a random selection of beneficiary identification codes were selected using an atmospheric noise, random numbers generator<sup>8</sup> to ensure equal probability of selection. Specific interest in the displacement experience of the 107 beneficiaries within the HI Lebanon sample frame who sustained disabilities from the bombing warranted stratifying the sample to increase the incidence of surveys with these respondents. The research population was divided into non-overlapping strata, and samples selected from each stratum independently. Using a 95% confidence level and margin of error of 8, it was determined that 140 surveyed respondents would provide a statistically representative sample from the general sample frame, along with 63 surveys from the subset strata of interest. A total of 205<sup>9</sup> surveys were completed. The survey included a split-form design whereby people who sustained disabilities because of bombing during the crisis were asked additional questions. All interviews were conducted using the UN OCHA Kobo Toolbox<sup>10</sup> application.

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7. 18 years of age or older.

8. Built by Dr Mads Haahr of the School of Computer Science and Statistics at Trinity College, Dublin in Ireland. Today, RANDOM.ORG is operated by Randomness and Integrity Services Ltd. Random.org.

9. 1 additional survey was administered than was statistically required.

10. Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, KoBoToolbox, <http://www.kobotoolbox.org>, 2017.

The survey consisted of closed questions that were informed by the HI qualitative survey report entitled *Qasef: Escaping the Bombing* (HI, 2016<sup>11</sup>). The survey was pretested by phone and in-person with 10 randomly-selected Syrian refugees. Respondents were contacted by telephone and briefed on the purpose of the survey. There was an 83% positive response rate when surveyors requested survey participation. Oral consent was obtained before proceeding with survey administration.

### Survey analysis and limitations

Survey responses have been analysed in isolation and presented within a designated section of the report, as well as triangulated with secondary source information and integrated, where relevant, throughout the report. All responses have been disaggregated by the age bracket and sex of the respondent.

All survey questions were disaggregated and analysed from the weighted population sample with regards to the age and sex of the respondent and respondents with disabilities sustained from the bombing. Proportional percentages, according to the 72:134 gender breakdown of the respondents, were calculated to account for the difference in the ratio of male to female responses. Only statistically significant findings determined through disaggregated analysis were noted. Because the sample was drawn from the HI Lebanon beneficiary database, respondents' individual experiences may not adequately reflect those of Syrian refugees living without disabilities.

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11. Handicap International. *Qasef: Escaping the Bombing – The use of explosive weapons in populated areas and forced displacement: perspectives from Syrian Refugees*. 2016.

© B. Almeras/Handicap International - 2017 - Lebanon. Handicap International's staff interviewing a Syrian woman.





# ANNEX

## DEFINITIONS

### What are explosive weapons?<sup>12</sup>

Explosive weapons are those weapons that use a chemical reaction to cause a high-explosive charge to detonate and damage or destroy a target. The primary damage mechanisms of such weapons are blast, fragmentation, and thermal effects. Explosive weapons may be fired singly, as in an aerial bomb, or in salvos of many dozens, such as rocket artillery. Weapons that deflagrate, or burn through a low-explosive charge, are considered incendiary weapons and are not covered here.

This pattern of explosive violence, particularly when these weapons have wide-area effects, is of grave concern, as it tends to cause harm beyond the targeted area.<sup>13</sup>

There are numerous technical and targeting decisions militaries employ to minimise civilian harm in conflict, particularly when employing explosive weapons. However, there are inherent features in explosive weapons, particularly those with wide-area effects, when used in populated areas, which make them inherently prone to causing civilian harm. These inherent features include, but are not limited to:

- Their large destructive radius,
- Their inaccurate delivery systems, and
- The design for area effect, as in barrage weapons.<sup>14</sup>

The potential for civilian harm is magnified when numerous inherent features combine.

### Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

By *refugee* we refer to “a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”<sup>15</sup>

We also use the term refugee to refer to asylum seekers whose protection status has not been defined yet or whose cases have been refused.

By *Internally Displaced Person (IDP)*, we refer to “people or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”<sup>16</sup>

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12. For a full analysis of the technical aspects of explosive weapons in populated areas and the potential for harm to civilians from explosive weapons with wide-area effects, see the following report commissioned by the ICRC: “*ARES Special Report: Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas*”, 2016, available at <http://armamentresearch.com/ares-special-report-explosive-weapons-in-populated-areas/>

13. Include, but are not limited to, collateral damage estimates, patterns of life, and weaponeering where the correct munition is chosen for the target, and the warhead, fuze, angle of attack, and other technical decisions are made.

14. Barrage weapons fire in salvos and use massive numbers to overcome inherent inaccuracies. These include weapons commonly used in Syria such as rocket artillery.

15. Article 1, Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951.

16. United Nations, “*Guiding principles on internal displacement*,” 2004.



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