

## TAIMAA



"When I was young, I expected to have a happy life, with a nice house, and to get an education," says Taimaa, who worries that her 2-year-old son is starting to think that a tent is his real home. "I didn't expect any of the things that are happening to me. It's an ugly life."

Think of a refugee, and you might picture someone destitute, living on the fringes of an already disorganized society, perhaps someone who was homeless or even stateless to begin with. But the Syrian refugees in Greece are by and large middle-class and well educated. They're accustomed to first-world medical care. Many had good jobs and nice homes before war tore their country apart, sending them fleeing.

Taimaa Abazli, a former music teacher, is so defeated by what appears to be postpartum depression that she says she doesn't even care where she goes, as long as "it's not here." Greece, already one of Europe's poorest countries, has some 60,000 refugees now awaiting settlement.

## NOUR



Nour has been dreaming of having children ever since she was a child. When she met her husband, Yousef Alarsan, in college, she knew they were meant to be together when they realized they had the same favorite name for a future daughter: Rahaf. War put their plans for marriage and family on hold, however. In 2014, Yousef left their school in Deir ez-Zor and fled to a small nearby town so he wouldn't have to join Assad's army. [Note: Bashar Al-Assad is the president of Syria.] No sooner did he get there than ISIS took over...Fearing for his life, Yousef fled in late 2015. He and Nour had a quick wedding in Deir ez-Zor, then started their journey to Europe, via Turkey.

Nour realized she was pregnant the day they arrived in Greece, on the 29th of February. "When I found out, I was very happy at first, because I wanted a baby," she says. "But I didn't have my mom by my side, so my happiness was incomplete."

"The closer she gets to giving birth, the more anxious Nour becomes. She obsessively watches birth videos on YouTube and looks to Facebook groups for guidance. What she really wants is to speak to her mother. "In Syria, you have

your mother to look after you," she says. "She shows you how to take care of your baby.

"As is the case for most refugees, her smartphone, brought over from Syria, is a lifeline. The camps offer free wi-fi, and residents, who don't even have heat, spend precious euros buying battery packs to keep their devices going when the power is out."

"A few days before she gives birth, Nour holds up a tiny ruffled dress she crafted out of red wool from a pattern she saw on the Internet. "I make things because I don't want my baby to lack for anything. Later I can show her the pictures and say, 'I made this for you.'"

## ILLHAM



Illham Alarabi, who just gave birth to her fifth son, is torn. On the one hand, she's desperate to move her family out of their 100-sq.-ft. tent in a Greek refugee camp. But she also fears leaving the tight community of neighbors that have made the camp feel like home for the past seven months.

After years on the run, first in Syria and then in Turkey, Illham, pregnant with her fifth son, arrived at Oreokastro Camp in June. She quickly fell into a routine, keeping her tent (and her kids) scrupulously clean despite the lack of running water. She annexed part of a refuse-filled alley next to the warehouse for an all-purpose cooking, laundry and play area, and formed a tight-knit community with the neighboring women.

That easy camaraderie all fell apart when Illham's family was moved to a hotel in a mountain resort town four hours away. She says she cried for the first three days. "It's hard to be with friends, to meet new people, and then leave. You move from one place to the other, one stage to the next. You meet new people and think that you've finally settled down, but then you [have to] walk away." Illham's new

hotel is comfortable. It has heat, en-suite bathrooms and a well-appointed dining room that serves a set meal three times a day. But with no friends, no more shop for her husband, and nothing to do, Illham finds herself sinking deeper into depression.

“I want to have important things to do. But right now I am not doing anything. The cleaners come to clean the rooms, but I tell them that I will sweep the floor, that I will clean the toilet, that I will change the sheets. It keeps me entertained.”