

Stories of migrants and refugees
in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Book of Life

TURNING A NEW PAGE



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the European Union



Some names in this publication have been changed in order to protect the identity of person/s involved. These names are indicated with an asterisk (*) in each individual story.

All photos were taken by UNFPA BiH's humanitarian team members using non-professional equipment and real-life conditions. Photos do not necessarily represent the person in the story.

Every person has the right to express their opinion, have access to vital essential services, sexual health and reproductive healthcare and protection from all forms of violence. UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is the lead UN agency for delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. In collaboration with several partners, we implement adapted strategies in order to ensure improved living standards for migrant and refugee men and women as well as communities in their host country, Bosnia and Herzegovina. This involves empowering education and services and projects that advocate for global gender equality and human rights.

This pictorial book was developed by the
Bosnia and Herzegovina Humanitarian Response Team

This pictorial book was developed by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Humanitarian Response Team within the project "EU Support to the BiH Refugee and Migration Response" funded by the European Union through an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) special measure and is implemented by the IOM in partnership with UNFPA.





Foreword

The Book of Life takes us through an illustrative journey into the lives of refugee, migrant and asylum seeking women, girls, boys and young men in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This book is a reflection of the successful partnership between EU and UNFPA and their joint commitment to human rights. Each story is a true testimony to the strength, resilience and power of the storytellers and it celebrates their courage and determination to find their own path and to transform their lives.

The Book of Life stands as a tribute to the joint objectives of EU and UNFPA to promote gender equality, empowerment of women and participation of youth, address Gender based violence and ensure access to quality sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning.

We sincerely hope that you find inspiration in these stories.

John Kennedy Mosoti

UNFPA Representative
in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Johann Sattler

Head of the Delegation
of the European Union to
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Introduction

Some stories, like the ones below, should be given wings.

Since the beginning of our involvement in the mixed-migrations humanitarian response, with steadfast support of the European Union, UNFPA Bosnia and Herzegovina has put vulnerable affected populations at the center of its response effort.

The risk of gender-based violence (GBV) significantly increases in emergencies and women, girls and boys are at a greater risk of sexual abuse, rape, human trafficking and other forms of violence, therefore it was crucial to set up a humanitarian response. When the number of refugees/migrants soared across Bosnia and Herzegovina to the highest level ever during the current humanitarian situation, three Women and Girls Centers and five Boys and Young Men Centers were already in place, all supported by UNFPA and EU. With the great support and recognition of BiH authorities, the centers were able to run and provide support to the most vulnerable ones from the very beginning.

First Centers to be established were Women and Girls Safe Spaces where comprehensive support is provided through psychosocial and gynaecological services and empowerment activities, all with a view to ensuring that the most vulnerable ones are not left behind and that the stigma that

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WOMEN AND GIRLS CENTER

خواتین اور لڑکیوں کے لئے مرکز

مرکز زنان و دختران

مرکز النساء والفتيات

surrounds violence through claims such as violence happens to somebody else is addressed.

A particularly vulnerable category are young men and boys on the move who are at heightened risk of abuse, neglect, violence and sexual and labour exploitation as well as other dangers associated with unsafe migration and specific risks associated with youth on the move. Since adolescent and young men who had been exposed to various risks related to their journey accounted for a significant portion of the migrant population, UNFPA and the EU shortly afterwards began to set up safe spaces for men and boys. These spaces are called Boys and Young Men Centers and ensure access to psychosocial, sexual and reproductive health, life skills and empowerment services.

At the peak of the response, our centers employed around 35 experts in the fields of social labour, psychotherapy and psychology, gynaecology, urology and gender and cultural sensitivity. Over 7,000 women and girls have passed through these centers since the opening of the first Women and Girls Centers in early 2019 and over 9,500 boys and young men have passed through the Boys and Young Men Centers since the opening of the first such centers in 2020.

Why is this important?

To survive violence, no matter its form, length or who perpetrated it, requires an act of human strength in order to survive. To talk about violence and struggle with its consequences, to live it day and night, is another form of human power, both of body and mind, to be able to move on.

To emerge empowered from a story that destroyed the very last ounce of will to live, to love, to touch again, to smile again demonstrates the human inner struggle and inherent resilience. It requires time, love, a supportive environment, supportive partner and happy children. It requires support, but what happens when there is no support? What happens when survivors of violence have never shared their experiences and when they talk about it for the first time ever at our centers?

This is why it is important to tell this story. To give them a choice, which is something that they have been deprived of in their lives. To give them a choice to tell their story the way they see, hear and experience it. To justify the trust of a person whose eyes say: "I can do this, but I cannot do it on my own."

This is precisely where our role comes into play and this is precisely why we have a duty to do what we were entrusted with, because nobody should walk alone.

The human struggle for survival is reflected in human vulnerability.

Being vulnerable doesn't mean being weak.

To be vulnerable is to be brave.

My sincere admiration for all girls, boys, women and young men we worked with is something I carry from this story. That the sun comes out after the rain is the lesson they taught me.

This is why I would like to finish with a statement that one woman made at the beginning of her conversation with a psychologist:

*"I will leave this story here, to you.
It was inside me for too long,
in all places I go, in all people I've met.
I want that story to stay here so that I can go on."*

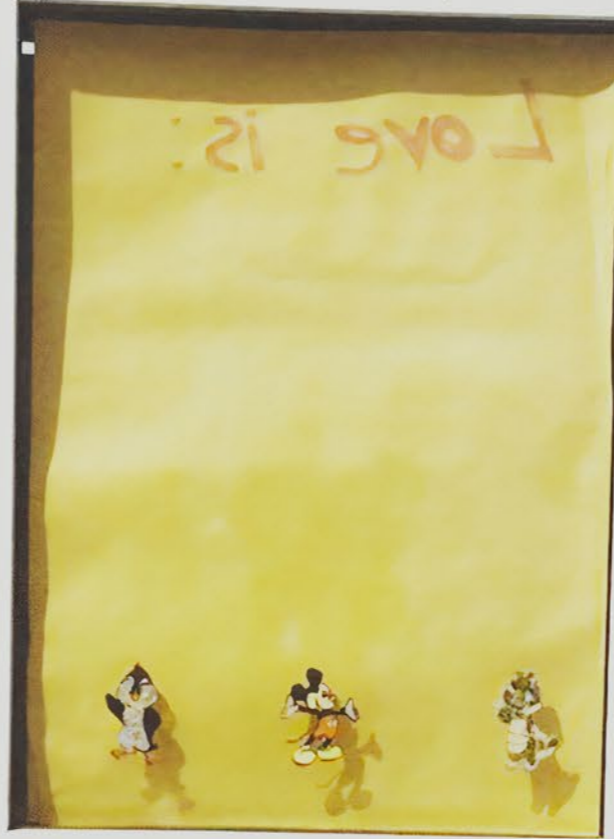


Alma Pezerović, GBViE Project Manager



CENTER FOR BOYS AND YOUNG MEN

مرکز الشباب والأولاد
مرکز برای پسران و مردان جوان
جوان اور لڑکوں کے لئے مرکز
د جوان او ہلکانو مرکز



Desolate.

Ayna

I will never forget what happened in that forest.

Ayna, aged 20, comes from a small country in West Africa. She began her story with tears in her eyes, by recalling her childhood.

"I was only nine when my parents died of Ebola. My uncle took me to live with him; however, I would not call that life living at all, rather slavery."

Ayna states that her story is just one in a series of many women from rural areas from where she comes. Namely, because she had to do forced labour for her uncle's family she did not have the opportunity to go to school or make friends and enjoy her childhood. She was forced to grow up. The years passed and she decided to run away, to freedom.

"I just had hope. Hope for a better future and that kept me from giving up on that journey."

She said that the journey was extremely difficult, especially for a young 'solitary confinement' and that she encountered many obstacles. One night in a forest in an unknown country she was the target of sexual assault by another migrant. She was saved by her shouts and her quick reaction. She had not told anyone about this before. She said that fear of stigma and shame accompanied her all the way.

Ayna met the Women and Girls Center team after arriving in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As part of its activities the team provides psychosocial support services that Ayna reluctantly accepted. She did so in order to work on her daily stress and reduce the consequences that traumatic experiences have had on her mental health.



"I blossomed here. I finally got out of my cocoon in which I had been trapped for a long time. I am glad that I was respected and heard. Individual conversations with a psychologist helped me get rid of all the negative emotions I have been accumulating for years and just now I am letting them out."



Over the past four years, UNFPA teams have recorded more than 22,500 participations of women and girls at empowerment sessions run in the Temporary Reception Centers.

Fayaz

Prayer beads kept me alive.

Three years and four months have passed since 14-year-old Fayaz said goodbye to his family and home.

“I did not want to leave my homeland. I was forced to make a decision between life and death” said the young boy, his gleaming eyes reflecting the deep sorrow inside his heart.

Fayaz did not live a typical childhood. Instead of going to school and playing with his friends he had to work to help feed his family.

“My first job was as a construction worker. After the company I worked for got involved in a conflict against the Taliban, everything became extremely challenging. One day the Taliban came and took me to jail, threatening me with my life.”

While in jail Fayaz recognised a childhood friend from his village who would help him escape.

“He said he would help me escape if I promised never to return. I had to leave my homeland to save my life and so I did. Without my UNFPA friends, every step would be filled with pain. There would be no laughter, no guidance.”

On his journey to safety Fayaz was faced with uncertainty, grief and more imprisonment, causing his health to deteriorate. Yet in spite of all he went through he never lost faith in God.

“You know, during my stay in prison I made wonderful prayer



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beads. I made them from olive stones, the ones we received in meals every day. I would take the pips and shape them, one by one. I still have them.”

Fayaz has been living in a reception facility in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the past ten months and is a regular visitor at the Boys and Young Men Center. He enjoys sports activities and his health has improved greatly thanks to the comprehensive sexual health and reproductive health services offered by the urologist at the center.

“When I arrived in the Temporary Reception Center in Bosnia and Herzegovina the UNFPA team recognised that I was in need of help. I was very shy to talk about my health problems with the urologist, but the urologist and the empowerment officers reassured me and helped me get the medical help I needed. Now I can live my life in dignity, pain free. I can even play sports with my peers. The kind people in the Center make sure that I regularly visit the urologist and are always ready to offer a shoulder to cry on and words of advice when times get hard, which I am very thankful for!”



Every individual's needs are valued and 67,820 participations have been recorded with respect to useful and helpful information on all of the available services for members of the vulnerable population and the ways to acquire and/or participate in those services.

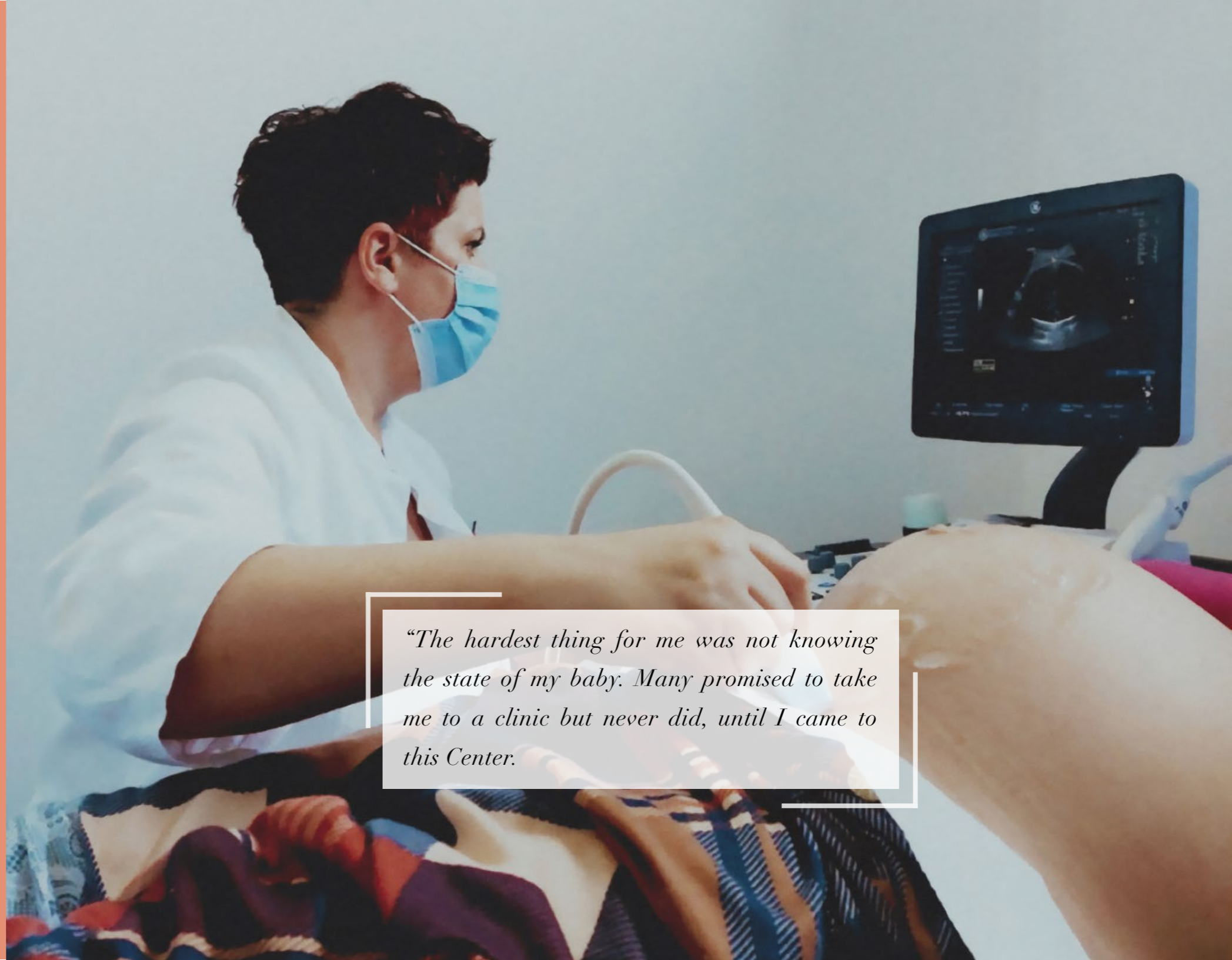
Mariam

Our lives were hanging by a thread.

Mariam, aged 29, a mother of two, agreed to share her life story on behalf of all women on the move, especially expectant mothers. Wiping her tears away, Mariam described how she had studied biology with dreams of becoming a professor. Yet her culture forced her to marry at only 17 years-of-age.

Luckily, she said with a faint smile, her husband treated her well. This was up until her husband's father and brother were killed because of political disagreements. With their lives in danger, they decided to look for a safer haven where they could protect their family.

Placing a hand on her seven-month pregnant belly Mariam recalled, "The hardest thing for me was not knowing the state of my baby. Previously I have only had the opportunity to go for a gynaecological examination once. Many promised to take me to a clinic but never did, until I came to this Center. I've regained trust in people here and opened up to communication, because it did not take long for me to realise people here were honest with good intentions. I'm beyond grateful that I've met the UNFPA team and for all the projects that are now a part of my life."

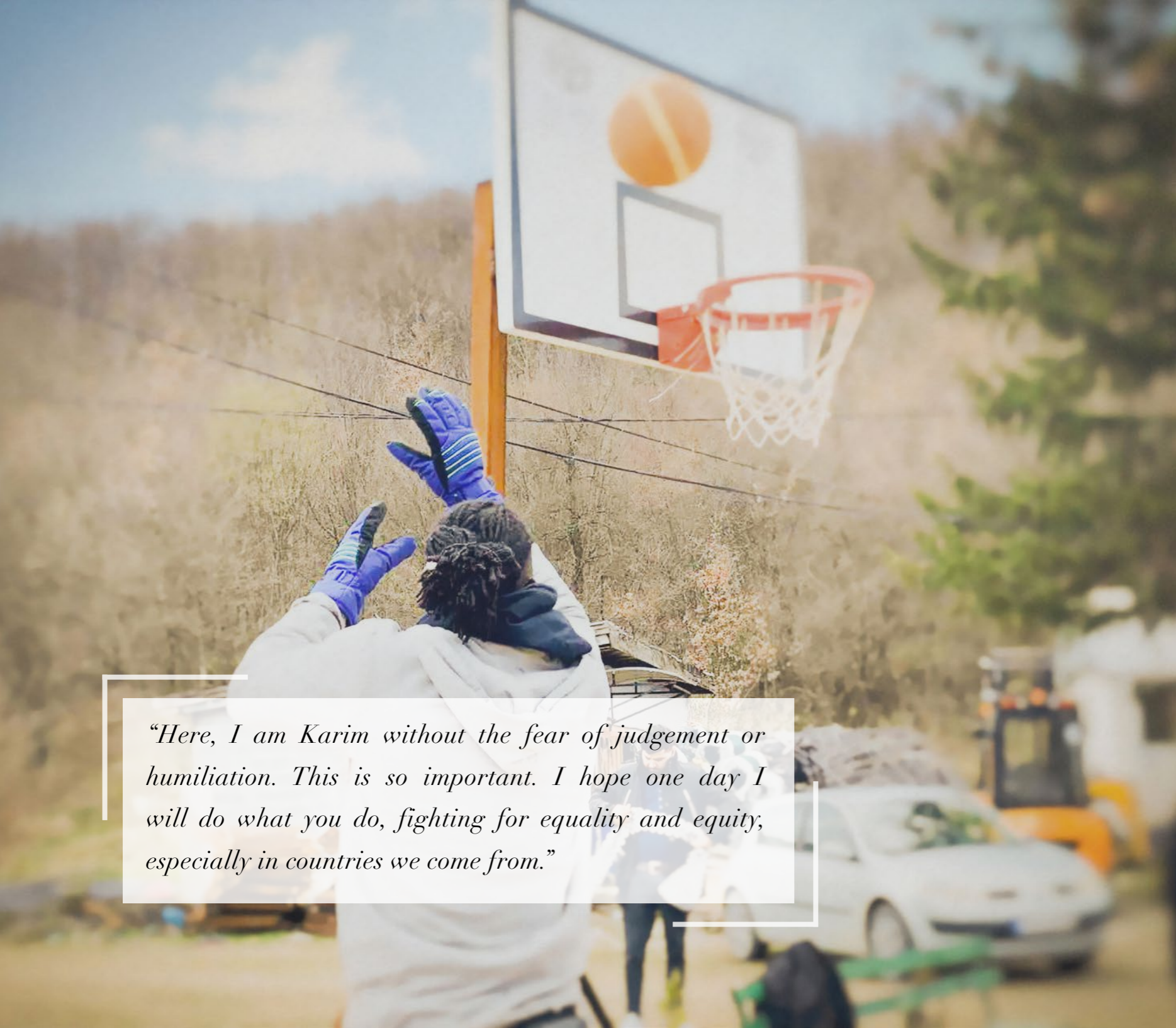


"The hardest thing for me was not knowing the state of my baby. Many promised to take me to a clinic but never did, until I came to this Center."



Movement and GBV trauma have degrading mental health implications. Psychological assistance provided by our mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) experts includes individual support for people in need, group support, assistance during crisis interventions and psychoeducational sessions. To date, UNFPA has provided 11,641 psychosocial assistance to both males and females.

Lost.



Karim

I was confused in my own body.

Karim, aged 25, was born and raised in a respectable family in a small village. As a child he spent his play time with his friends. However, as Karim flourished into a young man he sensed something 'different' about himself; the way he walked, spoke and dressed, he just did not seem to fit in with what his society considered 'a man'.

At the age of twelve, Karim's life would change forever. Karim was sexually assaulted by an adult street vendor. He never spoke of it to anyone, instead Karim suffered in silence overwhelmed by shame and fear.


Upon disclosing his sexual orientation to his parents he was met with more abuse, physical violence and as a 'correction' measure Karim's parents locked him up in a room for six months.

"My parents were very ashamed of me and feared that other villagers would find out my secret."

Karim, although visibly mentally scarred, managed to flee the grip of his abusive family. Today, Karim, like many individuals, identifying as part of the LGBT population and now he enjoys the support and care of gender-based violence and empowerment officers.

"The Boys and Young Men Center is a safe place for me and I feel very welcome and protected. I am understood here. I am my true self. Here, I am Karim without the fear of judgement or humiliation. This is so important. I hope one day I will do what you do, fighting for equality and equity, especially in countries we come from."

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Members of Boys and Young Men Center working on renovating the new protection sensitive accommodation, so called “Green zone”, intended for accommodation of vulnerable young men. On a monthly basis, UNFPA supports and provide protection services to about 230 young men in the Green zone.

Dina

I had to marry at the age of ten.

Dina took a deep breath and with a trembling voice continued her tragic story. At a very young age Dina was left orphaned after both her parents passed away in quick succession. Left alone and afraid she was taken in by an abusive adoptive family.

Dina explained, “They refused me the chance to look for my relatives. I was devastated.”

The family also took full control over her life.

“They changed my real name. When I was ten years old my mother forced me to marry a man who was much older than me.”

As a child bride Dina suffered daily physical abuse at the hands of her husband.

“He was physically abusive towards me on a daily basis. I managed to flee, to a different country.”

Dina continued by describing how after she had fled she lived in the courtyard of a mosque. One day a woman noticed her and took her in. Helpless and alone Dina agreed to marry the woman’s son, hoping that he would provide safety and shelter. After several months, Dina discovered she was pregnant. Her troubles were further deepened by her husband’s substance addiction problem. On one occasion her husband wanted to sell their five-month old son, throwing him against the wall when she refused. She said that this unfortunate event was a turning point in her son’s life. Dina had to sell her eggs thirty times to earn enough money to survive.



Upon learning of her story, an UNFPA social worker ensured that Dina was assisted by the gynaecologist and psychologist. Dina is now looked after by the staff at the Center. Thanks to the various therapeutic and supportive psychological and social services available to her she has come to terms with her past, regained her strength and is now looking forward to a better future.

“I finally found peace here in the Center. Any kind of help I needed, especially for my son, was provided here. When I thought there is no one to trust anymore I met people in the Women and Girls Center. I feel heard, valued and respected. I get a sense of security and tremendous support here.”

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During COVID-19, UNFPA and EU ensured availability of crucial services, including empowerment activities for both males and females, as well as access to psychosocial support in addition to our regular, continuous sexual and reproductive health services. During health awareness educational sessions, more than 10,800 participations by people on the move were recorded.



Ahmad

A lost childhood.

“All children should be with their parents and have the opportunity to go to school.”

This is how fifteen-year-old Ahmad* began his story.

“My father made the tough decision that my brother and I, being the oldest amongst our siblings, should journey to Europe in search of a brighter future.”

Ahmed, his brother and cousin set out from their homeland a year ago.

“It was not easy, we travelled through many countries.”

During the journey, Ahmad and his brother were held in detention for one month upon arrival. Crowded into a small room the food and water they received were just enough to survive.

“We were locked in a small room from which we were not allowed to leave and we received little food and water per day, just enough to survive. It was very difficult there.”

Ahmad, just like so many of his peers, continues to bear the trauma of a lost childhood, grieving for his country and family.



“I miss my parents and my siblings the most, but I had to leave because of war and poverty. When I talk to my family I avoid complaining about how hard it is for me and how sad I am. I know that I have to endure in order to achieve everything my parents sent me and my brother on this journey for.”

Through its empowerment programmes the Boys and Young Men Centers continue to provide tremendous support to adolescent boys like Ahmad.

“The Center is my favourite place because they teach us many useful things. The team makes me feel welcome and safe and I have an opportunity to create amazing things with my hands, which is great as I want to become an engineer.”

“The team makes me feel welcome and safe and I have an opportunity to create amazing things with my hands, which is great as I want to become an engineer.”



Hope.



TOGETHER
WE ARE
STRONGER!

WOMEN

WOMEN

WOMEN

WE HAVE
THE RIGHT
TO BE
HEARD

Girls
support
girls

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“Now, for the first time, I can ask someone questions that trouble every woman, without shame or embarrassment.”

Selam

After the darkness comes the light.

Life was very hard and dangerous for Selam,* aged 23, and her family in their home country.

“My father was killed when I was only five years old. Whoever doesn’t agree with the government, they kill them. It can happen on the street, in front of everyone.”

Fear was a constant under her country’s dictatorial regime. More than 10 per cent of the country’s entire population fled as a result of these conditions, including Selam and her aunt. They left when Selam was only nine. In Bosnia she found a place where migrant and refugee women and girls were given appropriate psychosocial support, hygiene and dignity kits and access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Selam said, “Thanks to Women and Girls Center my very good friend, who is pregnant and is travelling with me, finally had the opportunity to go to the gynaecologist. Now, for the first time, I can ask someone questions that trouble every woman, without shame or embarrassment.”

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Selam is one of thousands of women who have found a safe haven in the Women and Girls Centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Services and sessions aimed at the health and safety of migrant and refugee women and girls have been one of the focal points of our humanitarian response in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To date, over 9,631 dignity kits have been distributed to the vulnerable population of migrants and refugees.





Hamr

One day I will sing a song about love and hope.

Despite the faint smile on his face, Hamr's optimistic attitude hides many troublesome thoughts and experiences. Hamr was considered talented and was a well-known pop star in his homeland. He spent many days bringing other people joy through music and dance. But a series of unfortunate events led him to embark on a dangerous journey, all because of his sexual orientation.

His family turned away from him and society accused him of promoting immorality and LGBT+ communities through his songs, which is why Hamr faced various forms of discrimination and violations of his basic human rights.


Understanding as the greatest gift

Many cases of violence against the male population remain unreported because of fear and shame, especially when it comes to men who are part of the LGBT+ population. The Boys and Young Men Center represents their safe space. It is a place where they can be themselves, free and where understanding is implied. Hamr uses the universal language of music as his way to convey emotion, which spreads beyond the Boys and Young Men Center.

"Language is very important. It connects us and opens a window to the world. I am happy for the opportunity to empower myself in this field as well as connect with people of different cultures that I met at the Boys and Young Men Center. I believe that they are friends for life, because we are all here with the same goal: the search for ourselves, for our full potential that we could not develop in the countries we come from."



"We are all here with the same goal: the search for ourselves, for our full potential that we could not develop in the countries we come from."



Boys and Young Men on the Move, the life skills programme regularly implemented at Boys and Young Men Centers, provides potentially life-saving information and builds competencies in boys and young men experiencing changing and challenging circumstances. To date, over 44,500 participations of boys and young men were recorded during BOTM activities.

WOMEN AND GIRLS CENTER

“It is my pleasure to be a member of the Women and Girls Committee. In a lot of countries women don’t have the right to vote, they don’t decide much and they can’t give their opinion. ...Now, I know that I have rights and that my opinion is respected and changes are made.”

Santi

No love should be forbidden.

Santi’s journey was not easy. Growing up in a remote country, she started helping her family with farming and mushroom picking at an early age in order to provide food for her siblings.

“I grew up in a family of ten siblings. Times were hard and our parents did not have enough money to send us all to school.”

Then Santi, a Buddhist, fell in love with her Hindu husband. Aware that their families would never agree to their love, they set out for a better future leaving everything behind.

“We packed our lives in two suitcases and left our homes.”

Today, Santi, a new mother, lives with her small family at a temporary reception facility in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women and Girls Center ensures that Santi enjoys motherhood in good health and has access to vital prenatal and antenatal healthcare.

“My first ever gynaecological examination was realised thanks to UNFPA. They have ensured I have regular consultations and check-ups with the gynaecologist. They have helped me immensely throughout my pregnancy. There is nothing I cannot do and would not do to secure a better life for my child.”

It is my pleasure to be a member of the Women and Girls Committee. In a lot of countries women don’t have the right to vote, they don’t decide much and they can’t give their opinion. It was very unusual for me when I got the opportunity, together with other women and the UNFPA team, to contribute to raising the voice of women and the decisions and new ideas we create in our center. Now, I know that I have rights and that my opinion is respected and changes are made.”





Safe.



Murad

I finally found my safe place.

Murad's story starts with a single wish to live a fulfilled life, free of violence and pain. Born and raised in a small village in an African country where non-indigenous communities are subjected to hard labour, exploitation and violence Murad, like his father who sadly passed away, was forced to work long hours often in dehumanising conditions, without pay and without a familiar face nearby.

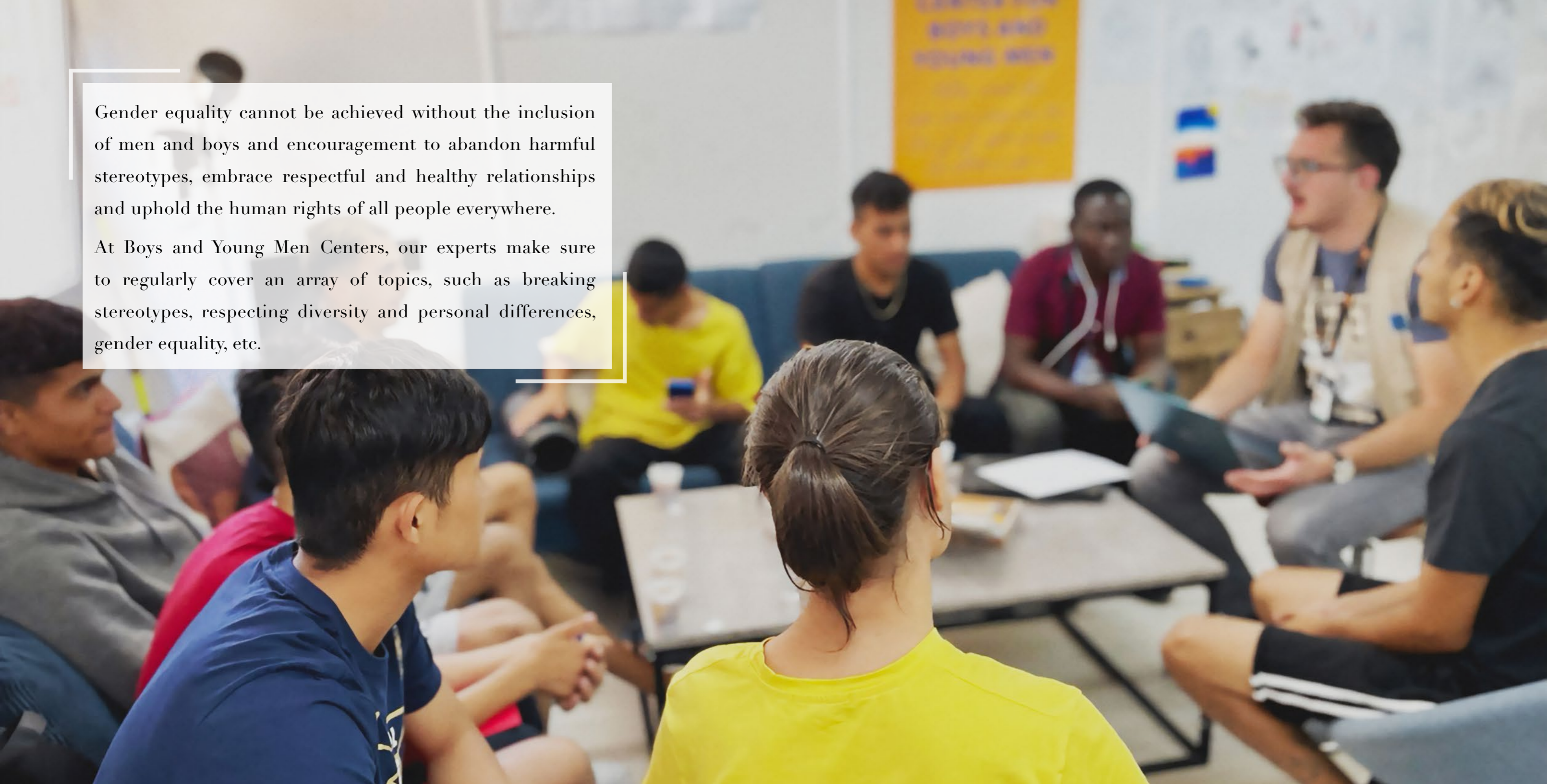
Murad overcame many difficulties both before and during his arduous journey until through Boys and Young Men Center educational sessions he discovered his passion for human rights advocacy. He is now an avid advocate of equality and human rights within his community and invests time in raising awareness against human exploitation amongst the migrant population.

“Without respect we are not human beings. I am very grateful to all UNFPA teams who have shown me that there is a different, better world than the one I knew before. I gladly come to the Boys and Young Men Center to learn new things. In that way I improve the life skills I already have as well as learn new ones that I can use in the future!”



Gender equality cannot be achieved without the inclusion of men and boys and encouragement to abandon harmful stereotypes, embrace respectful and healthy relationships and uphold the human rights of all people everywhere.

At Boys and Young Men Centers, our experts make sure to regularly cover an array of topics, such as breaking stereotypes, respecting diversity and personal differences, gender equality, etc.



Veronica

My daughters are my world.

“This journey has been extremely difficult for me and my family”, Veronica* starts her extraordinary story. Elisa*, her daughter, is bound to a wheelchair with cerebral palsy and needs constant assistance and support to perform even the most basic human activities. „I bathe her, feed her, dress her and help her with everything she needs to get through the day.”

Getting to Bosnia and Herzegovina was an arduous journey for them. From Serbia, Veronica’s family came to BiH solely on foot, pushing Elisa in her wheelchair the whole way. When they finally got to the camp, they settled in and were provided accommodation to best suit their needs, and at the Women and Girls Center were given everything they might need.

Leaving no one behind is one of the main principles behind UNFPA’s work. Though Veronica’s situation is certainly different than most of the cases the teams encounter on a daily basis, they were provided all expertise and support they required.

“When I told the psychologist how much my daughter screamed and cried, and refused to eat, I got a lot of help. She explained to me what trauma is, what to do and how to help my daughter. She came to us every day to talk to my daughter, to laugh, to say hello. Elisa felt that she was loved and that she was in a safe place.”

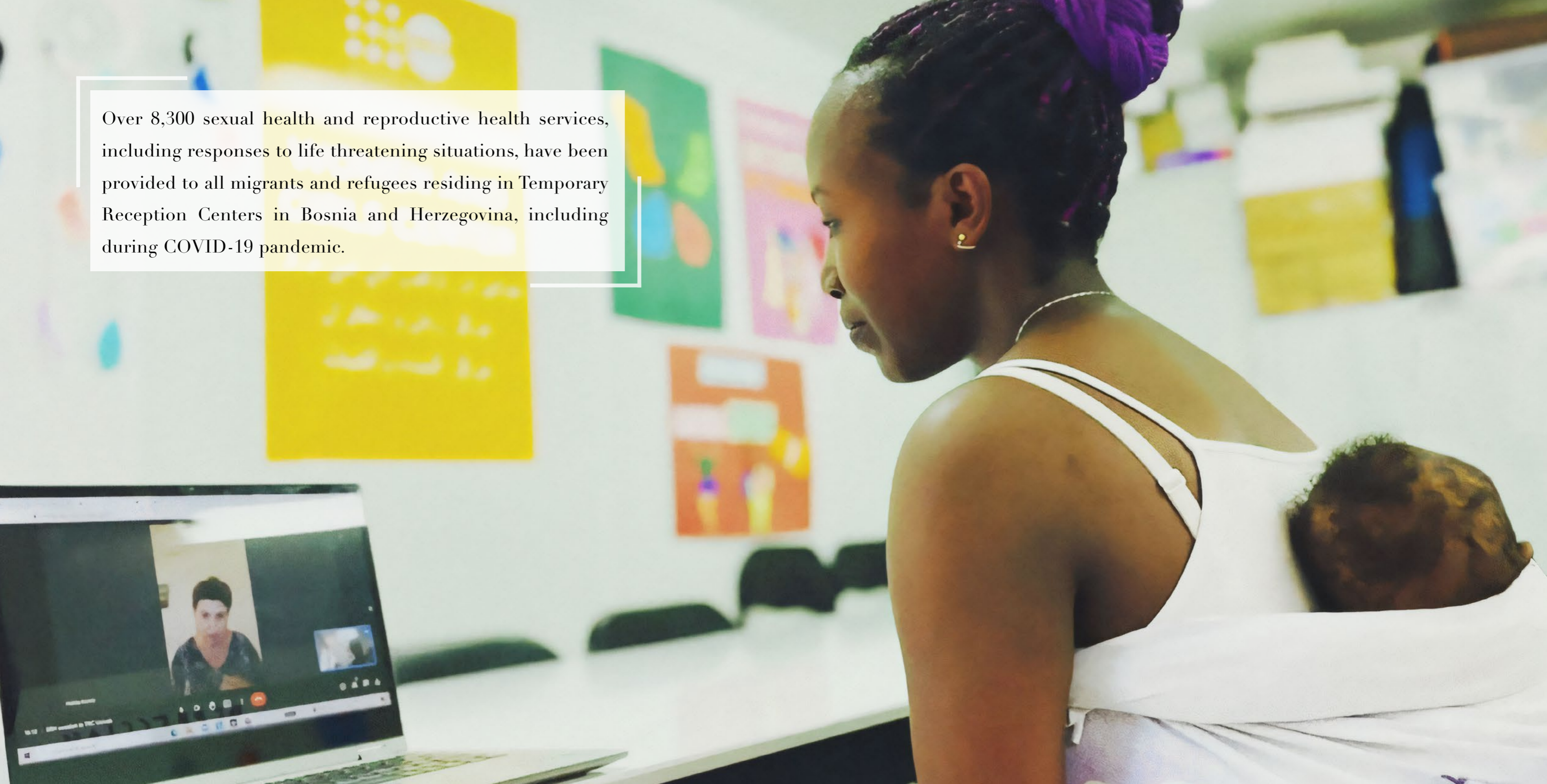
At the Center, Veronica and her daughters also found a safe haven – a place where they could talk to a psychologist, deal with any challenges they face, or simply come for coffee and a chat when they need an escape.

“If you ask me what more or better you could give us, I have no answer for that. It is very emotional for me when I watch how you try to establish contact with Elisa, try to understand what she is telling you. I can see how happy she is when you give her a bracelet that you make together, when you hold her hand or we just drink coffee together. And that makes me happy.”



“If you ask me what more or better you could give us, I have no answer for that. It is very emotional for me when I watch how you try to establish contact with Elisa, try to understand what she is telling you. I can see how happy she is... And that makes me happy.”

Over 8,300 sexual health and reproductive health services, including responses to life threatening situations, have been provided to all migrants and refugees residing in Temporary Reception Centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including during COVID-19 pandemic.



Leyla

Teen's Club is the place to be.

At first glance Leyla is a carefree fifteen-year-old who spends time with her peers playing and exploring everything that attracts young people of her age. However, Leyla's life is far from carefree, even from what she remembers of her early life in Syria. She was six when she left Syria with her mother and younger sister.

She recalled in a trembling voice, "My memory is vague, but I know I did not fully understand what was happening around me and why we were leaving until the moment when the boat in which we were travelling capsized. I will never forget it. It's stuck in my memory forever."

Leyla has spent most of her childhood living in different refugee camps, far from the privileges that her peers enjoy outside the camp's fence. The psychological scars carved by her many journeys continue to be present in Leyla's life. Psychological support is an imperative in providing girls like Leyla with a brighter and healthier future. Our Center's mental health and psychosocial experts helped Leyla overcome her fears and anxieties and eased her transition from childhood into adolescence.

Today, Leyla is a frequent visitor at the Women and Girls Center and benefits greatly from the many age



"My favourite is the Teen's Club, just for us girls, because it is easier for me to ask for advice from a gynaecologist than to come to a group with other women."

appropriate empowerment and psychosocial sessions and educational activities organised for girls within the center.

Leyla said, "My favourite is the Teen's Club, just for us girls, because it is easier for me to ask for advice from a gynaecologist than to come to a group with other women, that would be uncomfortable for me. What I like most is that the UNFPA team do their job with a smile on their face."



Shiraz

No one can hurt me here.

The life story and problems that Shiraz experienced before leaving his homeland would certainly mark a person's life and unfortunately this left indelible consequences on Shiraz. His only 'sin' was that he belonged to a minority group that was subjected to various forms of torture by a majority extremist group.

Because of the horrific practice of killing male family members when they are caught that is perpetrated by violent extremist groups there are almost no more men in his village. They are no less violent towards male children and he himself witnessed the monstrous murder of one of his younger relatives.


"They killed him just because he was a male child and we later picked up and buried his dismembered remains. About 80 houses were burned along with the occupants and several dozen bodies of those killed were never found. Women who remain widows after the death of their husbands sometimes decide to commit suicide to avoid abuse and shame."

Three years ago, his uncle and aunt were killed and Shiraz's parents took care of their children. Shortly after his father own was killed. After strangers came firing rifles and forcing them to leave their house, Shiraz along with the rest of the family fled and sought safety in a mountain village during the night. He set off two years ago in order to reach the Temporary Reception Center at Blazuj in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"I love coming to the Center because I can talk about things that help me forget my fears and traumas I survived, at least for a moment. It means a lot to me to be in such a safe environment and to talk to the UNFPA team as well as other people who come here. I am not a minority here."



"It means a lot to me to be in such a safe environment and to talk to the UNFPA team as well as other people who come here. I am not a minority here."



In order to achieve zero unmet need for family planning, it is crucial that everyone is provided comprehensive sexuality education and access to modern contraceptives. To date, more than 7,000 contraceptives were distributed through our Centers for both men and women.

Maria

My baby is my reason to survive.

Maria* is HIV positive, seven months into her pregnancy, and living proof of the tremendous power of will to survive, - the illness, the poverty, the political turmoil that depleted her of her life.

“My mother worked as a nurse, while treating a HIV positive patient, she became infected with the virus herself. So I am also HIV positive, but I regularly use antiretroviral treatment and I do not have any health issues. When I planned my pregnancy, my husband also used the antiretroviral therapy as a form of prevention.”

For the past three months Maria has made the arduous journey alone. Forced to leave behind her husband, her work and her home, she had set off into the unknown, moving forward for the sake of her and her unborn baby’s life.

“What made this journey even more agonizing for me is the fact that I fled under immense dread and fear, as my life was under immediate danger. I have to keep surviving for my baby. If they find me, they will kill me.”

Maria says that she feels warmly welcomed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. “During my journey, I did not have access to medicines, or any form of support. Here I feel good, safe, supported and empowered. I am planning to seek asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

Maria is accommodated in a TRC for families in Bosnia and Herzegovina. With the support of EU and UNFPA, she is able to benefit from the many supportive services available within the Women and Girls Center, including regular psychosocial support (PSS) sessions with the psychotherapist and crucial SRH assistance with the gynaecologist, ensuring that she can enjoy a healthy pregnancy.



“I feel a great sense of relief after having the opportunity to speak with a gynaecologist and undergo gynaecological examinations. I am beyond happy that my baby is doing well, despite all hardships.”

“I feel a great sense of relief after having the opportunity to speak with a gynaecologist and undergo gynaecological examinations. I am beyond happy that my baby is doing well, despite all hardships. The Center has given me a different perspective on life and my possibilities. I am now aware that women can be respected, educated, as well as have the right to speak and choose. This is a place where I can just chill, have tea and relax.”

The United Nations Population Fund

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Join us in helping the migrant and refugee population, because without exception they deserve a chance to live and have their human rights respected.

*Help us create and guide them
towards a new and equitable world.*

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of UNFPA in Bosnia and Herzegovina and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Sarajevo, 2022



