

Refugee Week Ambassador: **Rnita Dachó**

I arrived in Sydney in June 2015, after my family and I were forced to leave Syria because of the war. We were part of the revolution against the Bashar Assad regime, which meant we lived in constant fear. It was commonplace for people like us to be harassed, arrested or simply disappear.

I was working as a teacher, preparing for my Masters degree and mentoring in the community. Every morning, I left the house, not knowing if I'd come back. One spring day, I was in the city doing paperwork, when a big bomb exploded—just like that. I wasn't hurt, but it was shocking to see, first-hand, how a split second can change your life.

As the war wore on, we didn't have electricity for days and didn't know when we would next see light. There was no phone coverage. I now look at the Syrian people as 18 million heroes, for having lived like this, day in, day out.

To make matters worse, my father went to prison, where he was beaten and tortured. Today, he suffers from a bad back, as a long lasting reminder. My brother was also at risk of imprisonment because he was an activist. We desperately needed to leave.

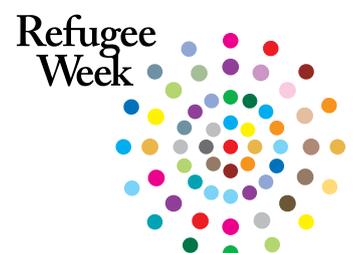


Photo: Camille Nuttall

First, Lebanon

First, we moved to Lebanon. But the people didn't accept us as refugees and treated us badly. We had to work very hard for long hours, so we could afford basic life needs. We registered with the UNHCR, then applied to many countries,

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Refugee Facts - Syria

- Syrians continued to be the largest forcibly displaced population in the world, with 12 million people as at April 2019. That's more than half of the Syrian population.
- More than 5.6 million people have fled Syria seeking safety in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and beyond. In Lebanon, where more than 1 million Syrian refugees reside, there are no formal refugee camps and approximately 70 percent of Syrian refugees live below the poverty line.
- Two-thirds of all refugees worldwide come from just five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia.

Source: UNHCR and Refugee Council of Australia

including America, European nations and Australia, where we had extended family.

After months of waiting, we were accepted by Australia. The day we found out, I wept for joy. Then, I held on to my phone all day, waiting for a call about the next stage of the process! It sounds extreme, but, at that time, a phone call could be life changing.

Then, Australia

We landed in Sydney on 18 June 2015 at 7:00 am. Coincidentally, the city was celebrating Refugee Week. It was helpful that I already spoke two languages: Arabic, Assyrian.

The Australian people welcomed us with open arms. We felt blessed. I couldn't wait to get a job and start paying taxes, to repay their hospitality.

Making a difference

I'm now working for the Refugee Council of Australia in a communications role. I've also volunteered in community organisations, including Auburn Diversity Service, Settlement Service International (SSI) and Sydney Alliance, where I've helped refugees to transition to life in Australia and engage with their communities.

To progress my career, I'm studying Business Studies at Swinburne University. I plan to continue sharing my knowledge and experiences with 'newly arrived' families, to help them realise their potential.

Through my journey, I've learnt to be strong and resilient. I'm forever grateful for the love the Australian people have shown me. I truly hope that the future holds positive change for refugees and people seeking asylum—people just like me.



Visit the Refugee Week website for recipe ideas for your 'Share a Meal, Share a Story' event.



Refugee Council
of Australia