



## Meet a unique group of Syrian-Armenian artisans

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Since 2011, when conflict broke out in Syria, approximately 22,000 Syrian citizens of Armenian descent found refuge in Armenia. Most of these Syrian-Armenians live in rented apartments in the capital Yerevan and nearby towns. Though their Armenian heritage helps them feel at home, they still face displacement-related challenges and must navigate the harsh economic environment and the Armenian society and culture that is both familiar and unfamiliar to them.

One group of Syrian-Armenian women have found opportunity and connection through artisan work. The group works with a local social enterprise, HDIF, which is a partner in MADE51. The artisans specialize in Armenian embroidery techniques that many of them learned while growing up in Syria – traditions that were passed to them by previous generations who sought to maintain their connection to Armenia. One of those techniques is Marash embroidery, a beautiful, intricate pattern that is used to this day to decorate dresses, curtains and tablecloths, accessories, and souvenirs.

We asked some of the women in this unique group to share their stories with us and tell us a little bit about their work. Keep reading to meet some of the artisans who keep this beautiful tradition of Marash embroidery alive.



### Maral

Maral is a master artisan specializing in Armenian embroidery, felting, knitting and sewing. Since arriving in Armenia she has become an entrepreneur, renowned for her craftsmanship. In 2017, she was granted “The best woman entrepreneur” award by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and received national master diploma by the Ministry of Culture. Maral is leader of the artisan group that works on MADE51 products with HDIF, a local social enterprise in Armenia.

“I treasure our group of women artisans. Each and every one of them is valuable. Our group has now grown bigger and stronger. The women enjoy their handicraft and the ambience of harmony and joy which they have crafted themselves - with the warmth coming from their hearts.” - Maral



### Lousin

Lousin was born in Aleppo, where she got married and raised her two daughters – one of whom is Maral. Lousin worked as a teacher in Zavarian Armenian primary school for decades. She was also the founder and director of an inclusive school for children with disabilities and specific needs. In 2015 Lousin and her family made the decision to leave Syria after their house was damaged by a missile.

“Traditions and customs unite people around shared values, good thoughts and actions. The Armenian traditional embroidery helps us create stronger bonds with the new society, and thanks to UNHCR and MADE51 to feel appreciated and proud for promoting the Armenian traditions and culture around the world.” - Lousin



### Houri and Salpi

Houri and Salpi are twins that were born and raised in Aleppo. In 2015 the conflict in Syria forced them from their homes. Together, they fled to Armenia, where they knew they would be welcomed, settling in Yerevan.

Needlework and embroidery is their profession and hobby. They have dedicated their lives to creating traditional Armenian ornaments, unfolding their talents, and developing new skills. In Aleppo they were known as the 'Queens of Embroidery', a nickname that followed them to their new home in Armenia.

"When Maral said to me - come help me do felting, I said I had never done that before, I would not handle felting, but I was keen on embroidery. Maral said to me: "Yes, you can. Come, we are starting tomorrow." So, here I am, and I am so happy!" -Houri

"It's so nice to work in a group. We learn from and encourage each other...I love that feeling of being connected with the world. We create in Armenia, but our products reach people on the other side of the globe. MADE51 is making magic." -Salpi



### Koharig

Koharig was born in Aleppo. In 2016, together with her husband and daughter, she fled the war in Syria and came to Armenia, leaving behind her relatives and friends, and her home. Koharig lives in a rented apartment, looking after her husband who is very ill. She has two grandsons. The youngest one was born in Armenia. Koharig had never worked before. Doing craft work has opened a new door for her. It has created opportunities to socialize and, most importantly, to earn income that allows her to help support her family.

“It was not easy when we first arrived. I was constantly thinking about how one can ever start something from nothing... I was struggling to make ends meet and look after my husband who was seriously ill. I was searching for a job, but no luck, it was difficult to find anything suitable, especially at my age. But sometime after I was invited to join this wonderful group of Syrian-Armenian women engaged in felt work and embroidery for MADE51.” - Koharig

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About Made51- MADE51 is brought to life by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

For more details on MADE51's strategic partners, wholesale orders, and how to get involved, please visit: [www.made51.org](http://www.made51.org)

For questions about wholesale orders, please email: [sales@made51.org](mailto:sales@made51.org).