

I am a person







This is Valeri's\* story,  
told in her own words.

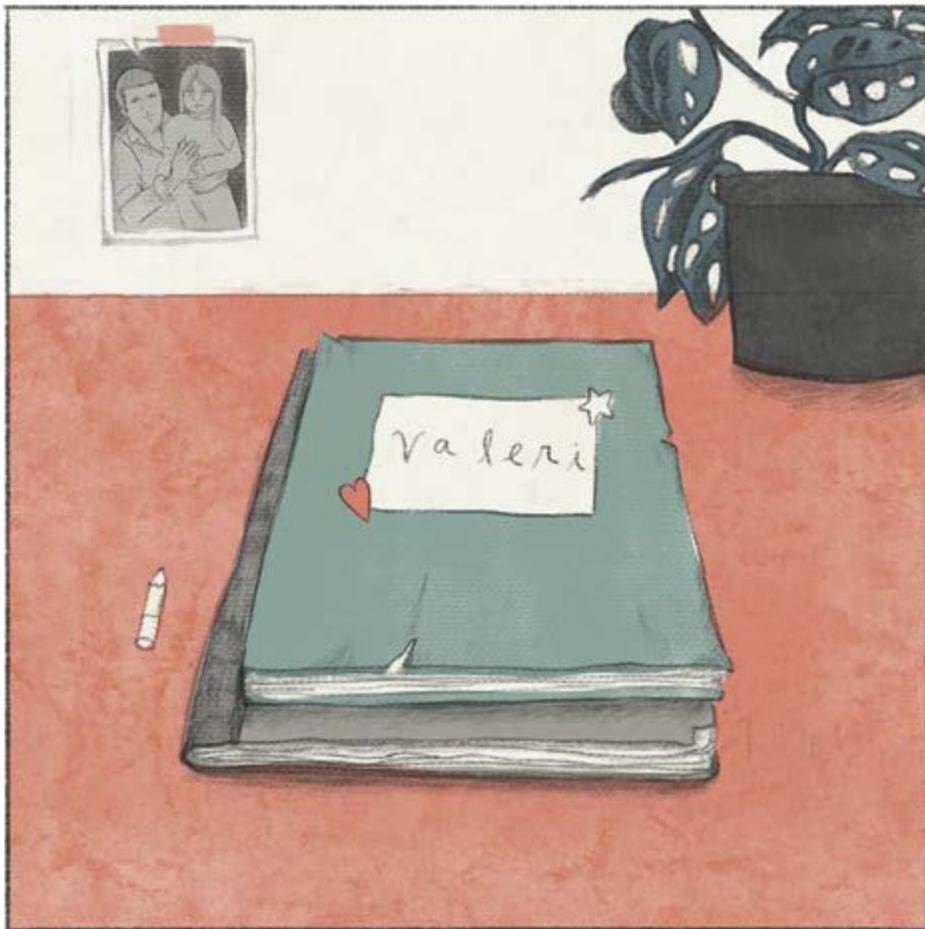
\*Name changed to protect her identity.



My name is Valeri. I have four little brothers and sisters and Mum works hard to feed us. Dad walked off to Colombia and we never saw him again.



My country is beautiful but in deep crisis.



Sometimes we have no food and can't pay the water. We don't have money for school.



When I turned 12, an uncle came to the house.  
“This is your husband,” Mum explained, “I can’t look after  
you anymore.”



I was scared, but thought he might take me to see my Dad.  
I crossed the border into Colombia with him. We walked for days and  
days without stopping.



One day, we got to a town and he shut me in a garage with lots of other girls.



For months, he made us do awful things with men who came and abused us.



Finally, I ran away from that nightmare and came back to my country, to my old life. But now I needed more. I didn't want to be shut up looking after my siblings and doing housework.



That's when I heard about HIAS, who were doing community work in my neighbourhood. I built up my confidence with them, and one day I broke my silence and told my story.



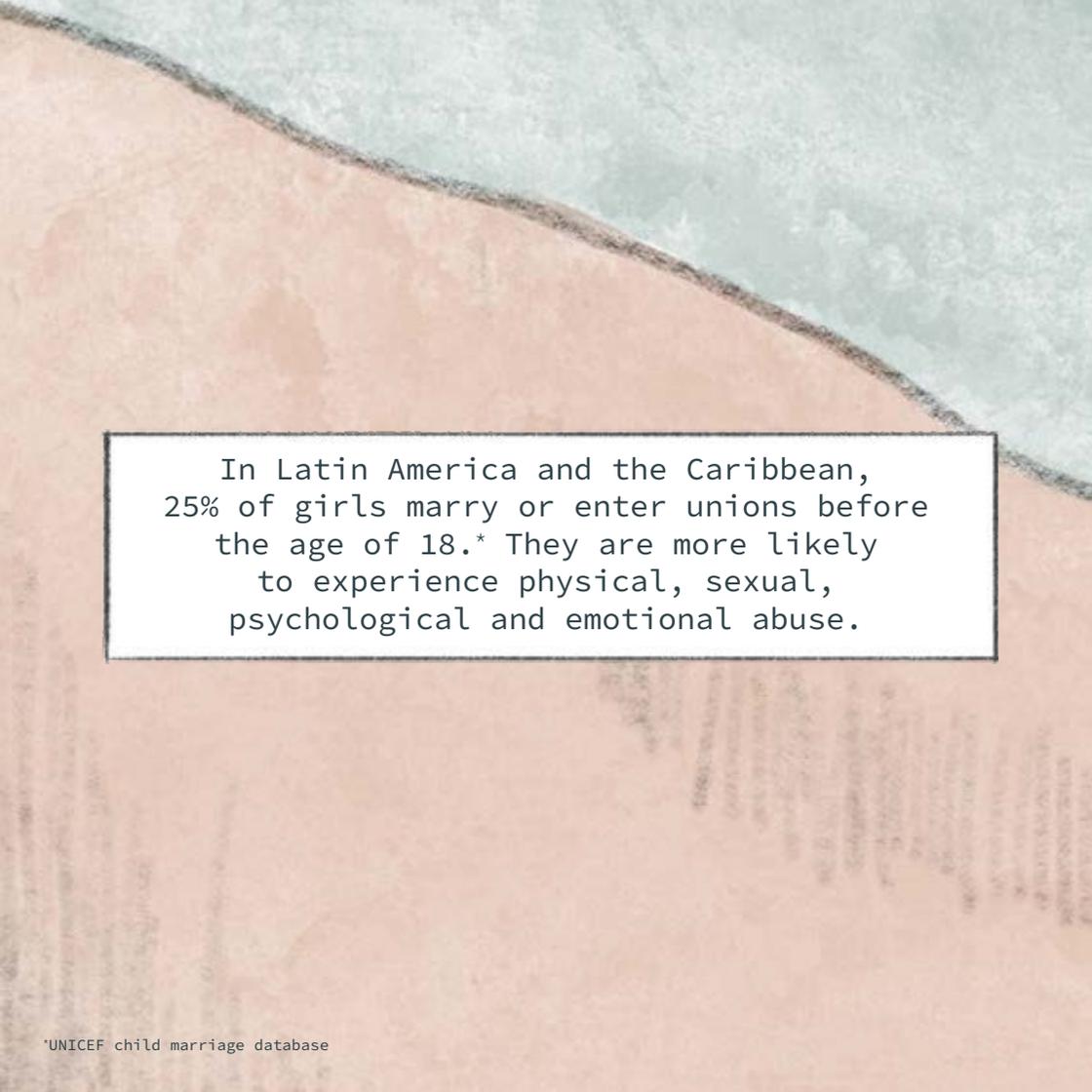
That day, I realised that my experience could help other girls to protect themselves, to learn about their rights.



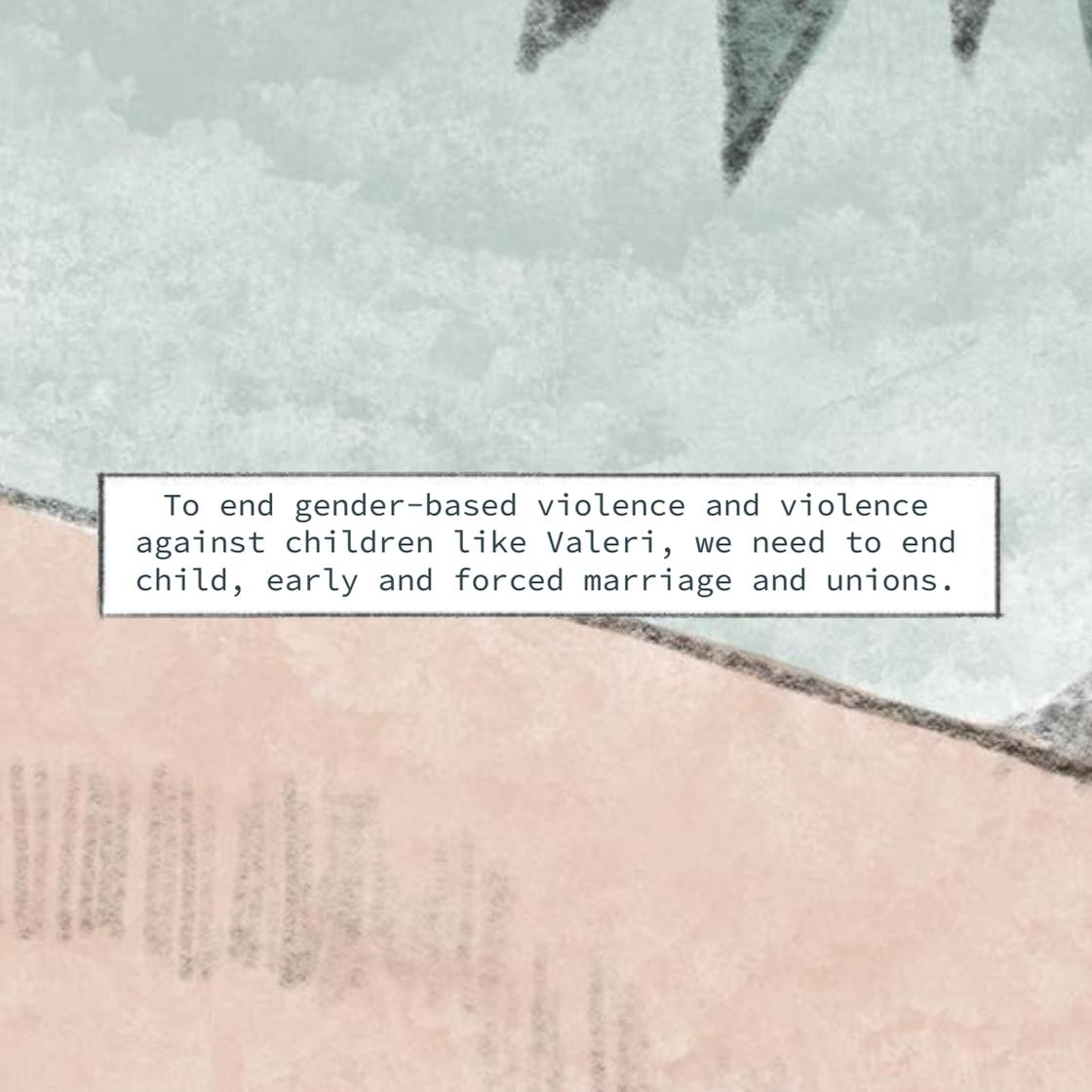
To feel that - whatever happens - we are still people.



I became the leader of my community youth group, and work with HIAS to make sure no girl has to go through what I went through.

The background of the slide is a watercolor-style illustration of a beach. The top portion is a light teal color representing the ocean, with a dark, textured line indicating the shoreline. The bottom portion is a light brown color representing the sand, with faint, vertical, textured lines suggesting ripples or footprints. A white rectangular box with a thin black border is centered on the sand area, containing the main text.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, 25% of girls marry or enter unions before the age of 18.\* They are more likely to experience physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse.



To end gender-based violence and violence against children like Valeri, we need to end child, early and forced marriage and unions.

Published in July 2020 by *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*.

This illustrated story was produced by *Girls Not Brides*, in partnership with HIAS in Venezuela and the [Out of the shadows Index](#): Shining light on the response to child sexual abuse and exploitation.



Seventh Floor  
65 Leadenhall Street  
London  
EC3A 2AD  
United Kingdom

☎ +44 (0)203 725 5858  
☎ +44 (0)207 603 7811  
🌐 [www.GirlsNotBrides.org](http://www.GirlsNotBrides.org)  
✉ [info@GirlsNotBrides.org](mailto:info@GirlsNotBrides.org)  
🐦 [GirlsNotBrides](https://www.twitter.com/GirlsNotBrides)  
📘 [www.facebook.com/GirlsNotBrides](https://www.facebook.com/GirlsNotBrides)

*Girls Not Brides* is a global partnership made up of over 1,400 civil society organisations from over 100 countries, committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their potential.



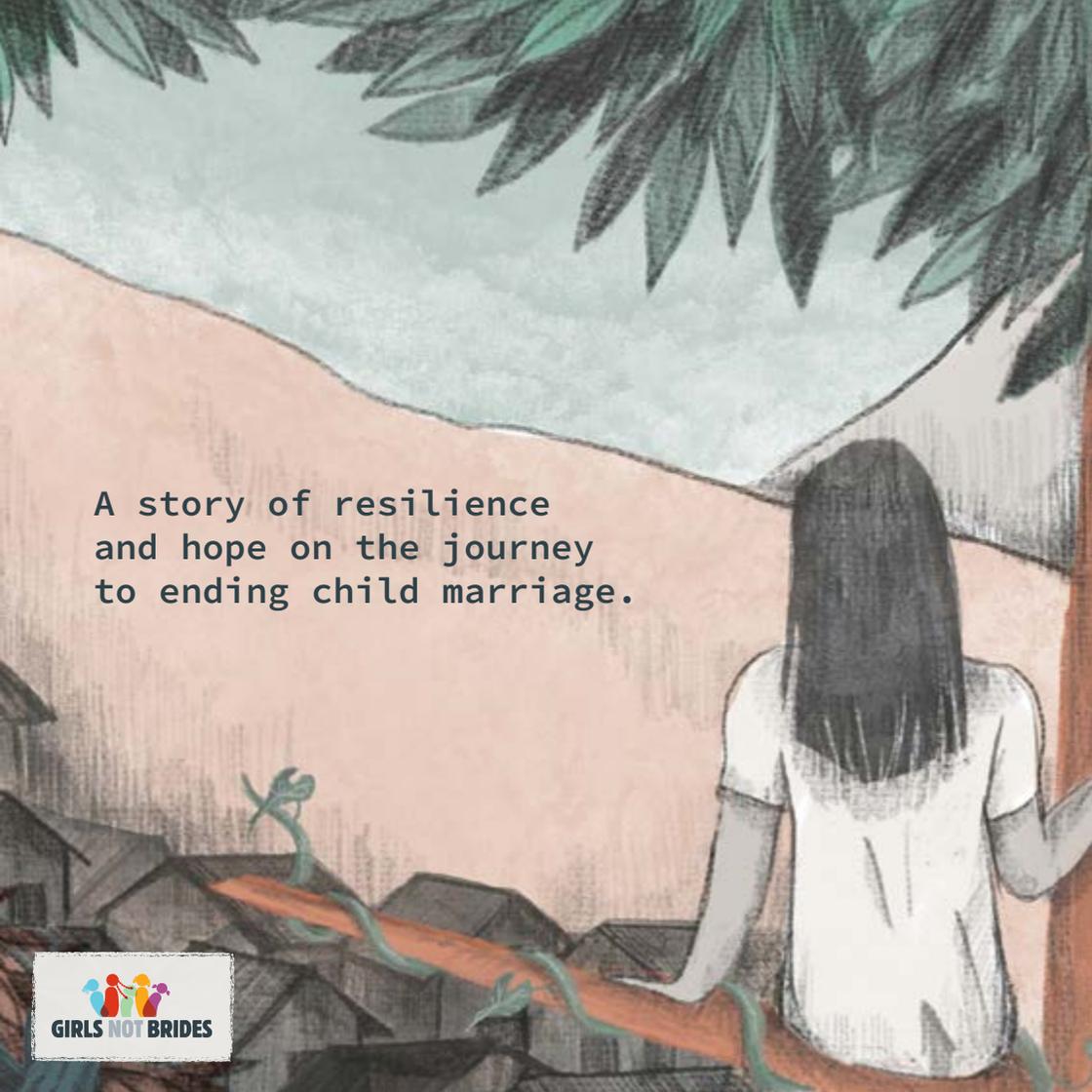
1300 Spring Street  
Suite 500  
Silver Spring  
MD 20910  
United States

☎ +1 301 844 7300  
🌐 [www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org)  
✉ [info@hias.org](mailto:info@hias.org)  
🐦 [HIASrefugees](https://www.twitter.com/HIASrefugees)  
📘 [www.facebook.com/HIASrefugees](https://www.facebook.com/HIASrefugees)

*Girls Not Brides* member organisation HIAS helps forcibly displaced women and girls pursue their potential and access human rights, free from violence and oppression. They work with communities to reduce risk, increase support for those who have experienced gender-based violence and build partnerships with women-led organisations to meet the safety, health, psychosocial, legal and economic needs of women and girls, and facilitate access to appropriate care and justice.



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
LIBRARY  
540 EAST 57TH STREET  
CHICAGO, ILL. 60637  
TEL: 773-936-3200  
WWW.CHICAGO.EDU



A story of resilience  
and hope on the journey  
to ending child marriage.