



A NAME AND A FUTURE

Supporting the forgotten kids and their mothers in East Aleppo - Syria

Project Title: A NAME AND A FUTURE *Supporting the forgotten kids and their mothers in East Aleppo - Syria.*

Project area: Aleppo city, Syria

Project duration: 3 months (01/01/2021 – 31/03/2021)

Promoting subject: Pro Terra Sancta

2. Context¹

The conflict in Syria, now in its tenth year, is the largest and most complex humanitarian crisis in the world, with no end in sight. The humanitarian context has been further challenged by an unprecedented economic downturn in Syria in 2020 that has had profound impacts on the already extremely unstable and difficult living standards of a significant proportion of the Syrian population. These economic hardships have been compounded by multiple shocks over the past 12 months, including the imposition of sweeping new US sanctions at the Caesar Act, the regional financial crisis (especially the banking crisis in neighbouring Lebanon), as well as the Covid-19 preventive measures, and imposition of new and farther-reaching coercive measures. Overall, 11.1 million people are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance in Syria in 2020. This includes 4.7 million people estimated to be in acute need. Crucial civilian infrastructure such as schools, water supply systems, health facilities, and housing infrastructure has sustained extensive damage or contamination from explosive hazards, and much of it remains unrestored or in disrepair. In areas where hostilities have subsided, life remains a daily struggle due to limited access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, increasing financial hardship and an eroding capacity to cope. More than 80% of the population is estimated to live under the poverty line. Recent economic shocks stand to further set back the recovery of the Syrian people and render many more vulnerable. Millions of women, children and men continue to rely on humanitarian assistance as a vital lifeline and to meet their basic needs.

The crisis continues to impact the mental well-being of those affected by new and prolonged displacement, exposure to violence, loss of income and reduced access to basic services, touching the youngest in particular: 42% of surveyed households report signs of psychosocial distress in children, (nightmares, lasting sadness and anxiety, amongst others) suggesting that many girls and boys are in a situation of prolonged distress. Half a million children are chronically malnourished and an additional and in 2020, the number of food insecure people has increased by 22%, from 6.5 million in 2019 to 7.9 million people in 2020. Multiple grave and often inter-connected protection risks persist. An estimated 2.5 million children aged five to seventeen are out of school and face elevated protection risks related to, among others, child marriage and engagement in child labour including in its worst forms such as recruitment. One in three school children are displaced, with the physical and mental impact of displacement affecting individual growth and learning. Missing legal registration of children represents an obstacle to access to health and schooling rights.

Absent civilian documentation frequently represents a barrier to exercising housing, land and property rights, and freedom of movement and is referenced by affected populations as the top concern for accessing assistance and services. Insecure shelter/ housing tenure due to the lack of civil documentation generates additional physical and mental consequences for communities, often leaving them with little choice but to reside in unsafe, sub-standard buildings or in other sites of last resort.

¹ The majority of background information sources in this project proposal are based on the *2020 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) of the Syrian Arab Republic*, OCHA, December 2020.

Fueled also by increasing economic hardship and a dramatic loss of purchasing power due to the devaluation of the Syrian pound, affected population have little choice but to increasingly resort to harmful coping mechanisms, many of which disproportionately affect women and girls, including child/forced marriage and various forms of gender-based violence.

Years of crisis have exacerbated living conditions for most Syrians due to significant reductions in the availability of, and access to essential services, destructions of housing infrastructure, loss of livelihoods and reduced purchasing power as a result of economic decline. Only 53% of hospitals and 51% of primary healthcare centers (PHCs) across Syria are estimated to be fully functional². Over 8 million people have to rely on alternative and often unsafe water sources to meet or complement their water needs, increasing public health risk, with indicators on water availability and quality being worst for IDPs in north-west and north-east Syria. The number of people requiring shelter assistance has increased by 20 per cent, from 4.7 million in 2019 to over 5.5 million in 2020. This rise is driven by loss of capital, the destruction of housing infrastructure and the deterioration of shelter conditions in 238 out of 272 sub-districts and compounded by the scale of new displacement in 2019, protracted displacement, return movements and a very limited shelter response.

Over half of all IDPs have now been displaced for over five years, many requiring sustained basic service delivery and livelihood support. The deteriorating economic situation has contributed to the continued loss of livelihoods and reduction in household purchasing power. The on-going devaluation of the Syrian Pound (SYP), which since October 2019 has lost over half of its value on the informal market and reached a low of 1,250 SYP per US dollar (US\$) in January 2020, has further reduced families' purchasing power. These factors combined have contributed, amongst others, to the increase in the number of food insecure people and are likely to lead to further increases in poverty, inflation and price levels for basic food and non-food items in 2021.

2.1 Project area

Aleppo is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Until the war erupted in 2011, it had maintained its status as the country's economic capital.

At the beginning of December 2016, the Regime forces were able to occupy again the eastern part of Aleppo. Following the end on 22nd December 2016 of the evacuation of over 36,000 people from east Aleppo to non-state armed group-controlled areas in Idlib and western rural Aleppo, an estimated 90,500 people from east Aleppo remain within Aleppo city. Of these, some 47,500 individuals have been registered as residing in east Aleppo, 38,750 people are sheltered in west Aleppo, and 4,250 IDPs remain at the Jibreen collective shelter.

With over four years of fighting, the battle of Aleppo represents one of the longest sieges in modern warfare, which left an estimated 31,183 people dead, almost 1/15th of the overall Syrian war casualties.

² World Health Organization (WHO), *Whole of Syria consolidated Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS)*, Q4 2019.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) registered that 1612 days of fighting for Aleppo left 21,452 civilians dead. Among them were 5,261 children and 2,777 women. Also The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has described the fighting as one of the most devastating conflicts in modern times. Several infectious diseases broke out in Aleppo and other areas in Syria during the civil war, including poliomyelitis, measles and cutaneous leishmaniasis. There are still emergencies connected to the lack of electricity and water.

In February 2020, backed by intensive airstrikes from Russian and Syrian jets, government troops captured more than 30 villages in the western countryside of Aleppo over the weekend. In doing so, they put the country's second city out of reach of rebel fire for the first time in years and cemented control of the former commercial hub's link to the capital, Damascus. The latest advances come after al-Assad's forces drove rebel fighters from the key M5 highway linking Aleppo to the capital, Damascus, and reopened the fastest route between Syria's two biggest cities for the first time in years. Needless to say that those who pay the very high consequences of this 10-year tragedy are the common people who struggle to survive for the war where they are still fighting and for a peace that does not offer much more than rubble and hunger, in places where bombs no longer fall.



Kids supported in East Aleppo, Jebreen

2.2 Protection needs

Many and interlinked protection needs are widespread throughout Syria. These are driven by the cumulative long-term consequences of active hostilities, multiple and continuing displacements, eroding resources, and dynamics linked to spontaneous IDP and refugee returns, increasing the stress on already overburdened communities. Inadequate living conditions in makeshift settlements or overcrowded sites, as well as the loss of livelihoods, property and assets compound protection risks, including risks of gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection concerns. The protracted crisis has disrupted social services and public service delivery, straining family coping mechanisms and community safety nets, and resulting in psychological distress. Children continue to be exposed to multiple protection risks and severe abuses and grave rights violations. Child labour is a persistent concern in some areas. Separation from caregivers reflects patterns of both voluntary and involuntary separation show the need of preventing separation and strengthen family tracing. Girls and boys, including children with disabilities, face the risk of other forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

2.3 Education emergency

After nearly ten years of crisis, insufficient availability of, and access to, continuous protective quality education remains a critical need in Syria. An estimated 2.45 million children are out of school (1.5 million of whom are boys), 1.6 million students are at risk of dropping out, a respective increase of 16% and 23% from last year. More than one-in-three schools are partially damaged or destroyed. An estimated 2 million school-aged children have been internally displaced.

The education system remains overburdened with multiple curricula taught in some areas, this has significant repercussions on the provision and certification of learning. The teaching and school administration capacity remains overstretched or underpayment of teachers limits retention and the quality of education. Children in underserved communities and IDPs in camps and informal settlements have limited or no education services available. Children with disabilities and adolescents continue to be disproportionately underserved. In addition to this, children who are out of school are more likely to be exposed to protection risks such as child labour and early marriage. Furthermore, it is less likely that children and their families will prioritize education if they feel that the quality of services provided will not lead to economic opportunities and/or if they feel that traveling to school or being in school may pose a risk in some areas. These risks may be attacks on education, unsafe learning facilities or bullying and harassment.

2.4 Health needs

More than ten years of crisis have heavily disrupted the health system in Syria impacting access to services and leaving millions of people living below emergency standards for health care. While health actors have made progress in addressing communicable disease, disrupted water networks and waste management, combined with food insecurity and continued high levels of displacement, leave millions vulnerable to epidemic-prone diseases and place heavy demands on surveillance networks and immunization activities. Chronic shortages of health care workers, particularly in north-east Syria, prevent full functionalization of health facilities and essential services. Shortfalls of essential medicines are key barriers to health access, particularly for non-communicable diseases which are estimated to account for 45% of all deaths. The recent global pandemic of coronavirus 2019 (Covid-19) has put additional stress on the health system and health actors to coordinate, prepare and respond to the outbreak. Irrespective of modality, health actors require rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access in order to ensure essential, life-saving health care for people in need.

3. The project

The proposed project aims to continue to contribute to the improvement of living, legal, health, protection and education conditions of the Syrian population, and particularly the children, through the support to the two centres *Ism wa Mustaqbal* (A Name and a Future) in East Aleppo.

The centres are the first of its kind that deals in a systematic and institutional approach with the effects of the Syrian crisis on the children of unknown parentage. The aim is to shed the light on this

marginalized groups terribly affected by the war that also suffer for a lack of legal status and protection under the Syrian Code of Law. They can't be registered at the Syrian official Registry Office, and without any law to support them it makes it hard to get some of their basic human rights.

These centres intend to help and support these children, together with their families, in every aspect including **psychosocial, legal, education and medical services, as well as livelihood and rehabilitation assistance**: on one hand, supporting the children psychologically and socially to face the tragic remnants of war and the latent psychological stress; on the other hand, empowering the families' and mothers' role through occupation-training and developmental plans increasing the social-awareness and reconstructing their dignity. With the actual project proposal we intend to support the activities addressed to the children: art activities and post-school, psychological rehabilitation and medical assistance, during the course of 2020.

To date, the centres support approx. 520 children each, for a total of 1.050 children together with 400 women, some of the mothers of the children.

3.1 Project Objectives

Overall Objective

Support the Syrian population, and particularly children, afflicted by the conflict in the city of Aleppo, helping them to increase their resilience.

Specific Objective

Assist vulnerable orphan children of East Aleppo, not legally registered, and their mothers, re-integrating them in the society and providing them with psychosocial, education and medical services, through the services of the *Ism wa Mustaqbal centers*.

Expected Outputs

1. New materials and equipment are purchased for one of the two centers in East Aleppo in order to run the activities for the children.
2. 1.100 selected children are supported through the activities of psychosocial support of the centers together with 150 disabled children.
3. 32 local staff are involved under a contract of 3 months.

Activities

The following actions will be carried out for each expected output in order to implement the project:

A1. Organization of psychological support activities

Psychological support activities will be organized within the two centers in East Aleppo and addressed to the 1.100 enrolled children. The activities will be offered both in the morning and in the afternoon for the entire duration of the week and will take place in the following ways:

- Approximately 300 individual sessions, for the most delicate cases identified by the coordinators at the beginning of the year.

- Approx. 50 sessions with group activities, where children will be divided by age (years 3-6, 7-9, 10-13, 14-17) aimed at improving their ability to express themselves and their emotions through dialogues and other dedicated exercises.
- As for the psychological support activities provided together with women and mothers, they will be organized during the week, in order to have 3 group sessions and several individual sessions every day (depending on availability).

A2. Organization of recreational / rehabilitation activities

Each week several sessions of art-therapy activities will be organized:

- Drawing, sculpture and manual work are organized for 1.050 children divided by age groups, aimed at encouraging the development of creativity and expressiveness through works with specific materials 150 disabled children will attend similar courses with special path and works.
- When possible, trips and visits to different places in the city of Aleppo are proposed, such as the citadel, the historic areas, the museum, production factories, together with the proposal of workshops.

A3. Assistance to disabled children and physical rehabilitation desk for the injured, mutilated and disabled.

Through medical care and physical rehabilitation special care services are offered for children with disabilities, to provide the following:

- Individual or group sessions for 50 children with mental retardation, autism, mental disorders, speech disorders or delayed pronunciation, as well as sessions of raising family awareness of how to treat children with disabilities.
- Physical therapy services will be addressed to children and adults who have been hit or injured in war and who have suffered dysfunctions; to children who need physical therapy sessions for cerebral palsy or amputations.

A4. Medical assistance

- Monthly distribution of medicines and support for medical bills.
- Medical consultations will be provided in the centres (for ex. gynecologist, paediatrician).
- Set up of collaborations with providers of other medical services in the project area and follow-up of the cases/patients.

4. Beneficiaries – target group

The goal of this proposal is to support and help needy and vulnerable families in Aleppo Est..

Direct beneficiaries:

A total of **1.050 children** and their families (mothers and children) will benefit directly from this project, together with **150 disabled children** and **300 women/mothers** with specific activities.

- **32 local people** will be fully involved in the coordination, administration and implementation of the project, under the supervision of the project coordinators and managers and the Pro Terra Sancta (ProTS) staff from the headquarter.

The beneficiaries will be chosen according to the geographical distribution in the city of Aleppo, from among the people who were most affected, the poorest, and who witnessed the most tragic situations during the war on different religions.

Indirect beneficiaries

- Family, friends, sons and daughters of the area; by transferring the experiences and knowledge that were deprived of them, and amending the wrong concepts and beliefs when mentioned before them.

- Society; by avoiding violent communication with others and emphasize nonviolent communication and respect all variations in society.

5. Sustainability of the project

The present request intends to cover the costs of the two centres in East Aleppo for the next three months to ensure their continuity of operation over the medium term in a context that is still somewhat unstable and uncertain. Such support would guarantee the possibility for the center to be able to grow as regards the continuity of the services offered and the quality, thus also favouring the creation of a "good practice" within East Aleppo, as an example to observe and study for opening of other similar centres.

It is currently difficult to estimate how the situation in Syria and the war in Aleppo will evolve in the future. The centres operating in East Aleppo intend to work in favour of abandoned children who have suffered severe trauma due to war and abandonment, in such a way as to favour, where possible, a re-insertion in the social and educational context, to allow the training of independent and resilient individuals who are once again aware of their potential and abilities. In this sense, resilience as sustainability of the beneficiaries of the project (children and women / mothers).

This project proposal is part of rehabilitation but responds to a situation of enormous emergency still present in Syria. Therefore, at the end of this project, ProTS will be fully committed to find other funds and resources to support the important work of the Franciscan Care Center.

Finally, the cooperation experienced between different Christian Churches and between Christians and Muslims can be a perfect combination to improve the living situation of the people and to build up new peace workers, new multipliers for dialogue and reconciliation.

6. Budget (Please find attached the detailed budget)

The total project time is: 3 months – 01/2021 to 03/2021

The total project cost is: **34.170,00 EUR**

The contribution received from Support International is: **12.000,00 EUR**