

A LIGHT FOR ALEPPO

Supporting the forgotten kids and their mothers in East Aleppo – Syria 2022



1) PROJECT'S INFORMATION

Donor: Vivere Gruppe Hülfsenberg

Reporting time: May 2022 – July 2022

Project area: Aleppo city, Syria

Project duration: 01/05/2022-31/07/2022

Promoting subject: Pro Terra Sancta

2) GENERAL CONTEXT: updates from official source and from the ground – up to September 2022

Since the subscription of our contract in September 2021, the situation in Syria has worsened considerably and is showing no signs of recovery. The economic crisis that started in 2019 with the introduction of the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act by the US administration, and which became more and more severe with the worldwide Corona Virus crisis and now with the Ukrainian war, has reached a bottom line that hardly anyone could have imagined. At present, more than 90 percent of the Syrian population live in extreme poverty and it is very hard to estimate whether there will be the grounds for a return to better conditions. The instability of the economy has become a predominant and daily issue for most, making life a constant run for sustenance.

The exchange rate between Euro and Syrian Pound is today 0.00022, meaning that 1 Euro is equivalent to 4500 SP. Consider that in 2010 the exchange rate was 0.016 (1 Euro = 60 SP) and that the sharpest depreciation of the currency took place in the last two years since the beginning of the Covid 19 crises. This means for instance that an old person that received a pension of 500 dollars per month up until 4 years ago receives today the corresponding of 20 dollars per month, about 100,000 SYP, the average salary in the country. It is estimated that to live properly a family of 5 members should have an income of 2,000,000 SYP. With income levels not adjusting to inflation and skyrocketing prices families have no chance of getting through the month.

Over the last year, prices of essential goods have almost doubled: today a kilo of bread costs 75 cents (2500 SP) and if it was not for government subsidies (for which most Syrians spend from one to three hours every day in line) market prices could not be beard by families. However, the crises is hitting the government as well and extensive subsidies are not sustainable: in February this year, a reduction of the social coverage has been announced, fostering discontent and manifestations in some areas of the country. Many families who relied on essential goods subsidies lost them from one day to another and are now forced to eat one meal per day. This is having a big impact on the health conditions of people, especially on many children whose diet is fundamental in determining the quality of their growth and development. Another big issue is linked to the shortage and excessive cost of natural resource. The cost of a litre of fuel increased from 5000 SYP to 7500 SYP from last September to this July. Car owners get a discounted amount of fuel every two weeks from government authorities, but this accounts for maximum 30 litters and a taxi driver working at regular pace finishes this amount in two days.

Electricity has been rationed as well since several years, but over the past year the poorest areas of the country, including Damascus 5 million citizens suburbs, live with one or two hours of electricity per day. The harshening of living conditions is forcing many people, especially young ones, to find ways to leave the country. This phenomenon has been going on since many years, but this last year seems to have driven away most of the residual faith that kept people holding on to their country and hoping for a better future.

Education crisis

The crisis continues to affect the mental well-being of those affected by new and prolonged displacement, exposure to violence, loss of income and reduced access to basic services in particular the youngest ones. 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.

The report issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the needs of the Syrian people in 2019-2021, reported that every month 30 thousand people in Syria undergo psychological trauma, 2.8 million people suffer from permanent physical disability, and a third of them are children. Many of them are neglected and ignored within their current society, and are particularly vulnerable to physical, sexual and emotional abuse and thus suffer from social isolation and the risk of being abandoned by the others. UNICEF estimates that 8.4 million children have been affected by the conflict, both inside and outside Syria, 6 million children do not receive humanitarian assistance, and more than 2 million do not receive adequate rehabilitation care. The UN Refugee Committee also estimated that 1 out of 5 refugees is affected by psychiatric condition, physical or mental impairment, with 22% of those who have disabilities 13.4% are children with thinking problems.

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 schoolchildren 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.

Child labour, including in its most hazardous forms such as recruitment and use of children in combat and support roles, is a persistent concern in some areas and particular in big cities like Aleppo, Latakia and Hama. Girls and boys, including adolescents and children with disabilities, face the risk of other forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The psychosocial needs of many girls and boys are left unmet.

3) ALEPPO CITY: area and neighbourhoods of intervention

The project has reached an important number of children from **East Aleppo** that was the most hit part of the city. In its 13 neighbourhoods, after the war, the destructive effects were visible at all levels, especially at the family level: the disintegration of families resulting from the effects of war began, as of today we can see the decreased number of men compared with women. The 2 centres supported by the project are based in two of the biggest neighbourhoods of East Aleppo: Karm Al-Dou'dou and Al-Sha'ar.

The impact of the war in these quarters was an increase in violence in all its forms, especially in areas where children and women lived alongside terrorists such as part of East Aleppo, which caused children to be deprived of educational opportunities. Some of these children resorted to work to meet their families' physical needs, like carpentry works - carrying - car repair - some resort to begging and homelessness, others to theft and illegal work. The project tried to involve children from this neighbourhoods, including them in the activities of the Franciscan Care centre in West Aleppo.

Al-Sha'ar – Here, many families depend on food and health aids and the humanitarian/relief services, which are provided by Charitable and humanitarian associations and organizations. In conjunction with the current situation of children, women used to do similar jobs such as selling bread on the streets, begging or working in sewing workshops for long periods, and some resorting to illegal marriage with militiamen to get protection. This great disintegration resulted in children of unknown descent and who lived a war and acquired methods of violence and aggression on themselves and others. The persecution experienced by women resulted in (“man-like women” - children of minor and/or unmarried mothers) and many of the psychological pain and strains that women face on a daily basis.

Karm Al-Dou'dou - It is an area of irregularities residential (Very Poor Area) which are built on agricultural lands in eastern Aleppo. The number of families residing in this neighbourhood reached 15.000 families, with an average of 8 members per family. The poverty rate in it is the highest among the neighbourhoods and areas of eastern Aleppo, where one of the neighbourhood committees estimated the poverty rate at 95% of all families, and more than 30% of the families contain widows and orphans, and most families have the fathers, mothers and even some children under the age of 18 working in industrial, commercial and service workshops or in the day-to-day system, which increased the number of children who dropped out of school and deprived them of free formal education, which exposes them to various forms of exploitation. The worst consequences have been the sexual exploitation and verbal violence, physical abuse and bullying - in addition to the psychological and physical disabilities resulting from the armed conflict that took place in their neighbourhoods and areas for a long time. Even here, many families still depend on food and health subsidies and humanitarian/relief services provided by charitable and humanitarian associations and organizations.

4) BENEFICIARIES

Thanks to the actual report, **1.100 children** attended the centre.

32 local people have been fully involved in the coordination, administration and implementation of the project, under the supervision of the project coordinators and managers and the ProTS staff from the headquarter.

The beneficiaries are **children** and **adolescents** of Aleppo that, due to the direct or indirect effect of the war, need psychological and social assistance and support. The age of the children is between 6/7 to 17 years.

The field visits carried out since the beginning of the conflict in several areas of the cities involved by Fr. Firas Lutfi, with different psychologists and social workers, allows the project team to know already the environment and the needs.

5) ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT and RESULTS:

→ Some activities took place regularly in the Terra Sancta College in West Aleppo, where the **art-therapy** can be done in bigger spaces available indoor and spaces for some sports activities outdoor, particularly pool and football playgrounds.

The total number of children supported through the Art Psychology Program has been **805** (345 + 460 from the two centres). The total number of children with disability has been **183**. They are taking the lessons in the two centres of East Aleppo, during the afternoon of Tuesday, Friday and Saturday.

→ Private and individual sessions were provided to a total of **28** sensible cases between the children coming from both centres in East Aleppo, particularly youth, with an average of one session per month (in addition to the other common activities), for more than 300 individual sessions organized per year. These sessions are going on in 2022.

→ Educational support (French, Arabic, English, Physics, Chemistry, Math, kids department) from 1st to 12th grade was provided in order to get official certificate for **50 children**, particularly the ones dropout from the school. The centres received children from 6 years old to 18 years old to strengthen them regarding education in their schools according to the grade in which they are enrolled in the school. In addition, as for the students who dropped out of school who are working during the week, they come to the centre on their day off to learn reading and writing.

→ **34** children are now followed by special session of Physiotherapy services in the centre.

6) ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT and RESULTS:

#	Description	Qty	Cost	Total	#	Description	Qty	cost	Total
#	Staff expenditure in Karm Aldou'dou centre for 3 months				#	Staff expenditure in Al-Sha'ar centre for 3 months			
1	psychologist	3	300,00 €	900,00 €	1	psychologist	3	300,00 €	900,00 €
2	4 pedagogical trainers	3	250,00 €	3.000,00 €	2	4 pedagogical trainers	3	250,00 €	3.000,00 €
3	2 trainers for the disabled	3	250,00 €	1.500,00 €	3	2 trainers for the disabled	3	250,00 €	1.500,00 €
4	4 articulation trainers for inabilities	3	250,00 €	3.000,00 €	4	4 articulation trainers for inabilities	3	250,00 €	3.000,00 €
5	physical therapy	1	250,00 €	250,00 €	Sub-total for the Al-Sha'ar centre				8.400,00 €
Sub-total for the Karm Aldou'dou' centre				8.650,00 €	Grand total for the two centres				17.050,00 €