



Integrated temporary shelter and family reunification to protect the rights of unaccompanied and separated children in Tartous, Syria

Project coordinated by SOS Children's Villages Belgium and implemented by SOS Children's Villages Syria

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Executive summary

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Abbreviations

CFS	Child Friendly Space
CP	Child Protection
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EU	European Union
FSP	Family Strengthening Program
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
IACC	Interim Alternative Care Centers
IGA	Income Generating Opportunities
IMC	International Medical Corps
KAP	Knowledge Attitudes and Practices
KII	Key Informant Interview
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoVs	Means of Verification
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PSS	Psychosocial Support
ROM	Results Oriented Mission
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SOS IO	SOS International Office
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VT	Vocational Training

Executive Summary

1. Context

Since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, residents have been fleeing conflicted areas and seeking refuge both internally and externally. Refugees have been seeking asylum in neighboring countries such as Turkey (country with the largest refugee population in the world), Lebanon (the country with the highest refugee population per capita) and Jordan. In addition to external refuge, Internally Displaced Persons are fleeing areas of conflict to Syrian areas that have suffered less from the war. The Syrian coast (Tartous and Latakia) has been one of the least areas affected by direct conflict. Thus, IDPs have been actively seeking these areas throughout the time of conflict.

The violent nature of the conflict has left many children and adults in need of humanitarian aid. For children specifically, there has been an increased need in providing interim or long-term care for UASC, children at risk of being separated and children in street situations. Furthermore, adults and child family members (both host community and IDPs) who are still together, still suffer from socio-economic challenges and psychological stress due to the adverse effect of the conflict. Limiting livelihood opportunities, limited educational/recreational services for children and lack of a social safety net are amongst the challenges faced by IDPs and host community members in Syria.

2. Project background

In response to those needs, SOS Syria, with the coordination of SOS Belgium have initiated and implemented a project titled “**Integrated temporary shelter and family reunification to protect the rights of unaccompanied and separated children**” between 1 May 2016 and 31 October 2019, which has been contracted by the European Commission. The project set out to provide **interim alternative care** to UASC and other children in risk of separation or in street situations, with the ultimate aim of reunifying them with immediate or extended families, or finding alternative long-term care for those with little chance of reunification. Furthermore, the project has two further components aligned with the ultimate goal of enhanced child-well-being. One is the **Child Friendly Spaces** components open to the children of the targeted areas. The second would be the **Family Strengthening Program**, which assists families in becoming socio-economically equipped to meet their children’s needs and having sustainable income opportunities.

3. Approach and Methodology

This project is the target of a **final evaluation** conducted by the team of Jessica Moujabber, Elias Ghorra and Ghinwa Hayek, who aim to hold the implementing parties **accountable** towards the contracting party as to the **achievement of outcomes**. Additionally, the evaluation seeks to **generate actionable learning** to inform the design, implementation, and adjustment of future projects. Furthermore, another goal is to evaluate the diverse intentional and unintentional impacts of the project on direct and indirect beneficiaries and on the community as a whole.

The evaluation used a mixed methodology of desk review, secondary literature review, quantitative methods and qualitative methods in order to assess the project on the following criteria: **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability**. The methodologies were used to answer a set of **evaluation questions** agreed upon by the consultants and SOS, with the ultimate goal of assessing the project under the aforementioned criteria and coming up with recommendations and actionable lessons learnt that can be used for similar programming.

More specifically on the methodologies, the consultants conducted a review of relevant project documents and secondary sources, mainly ones related to programming targeting UASC and child well-being. Furthermore, the evaluation included quantitative surveys with adult beneficiaries of the project, and qualitative Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews with project beneficiaries, staff and external stakeholders.

4. Key Findings

As a result of the data collection under different methodologies, and the analysis of said findings, the consultants were able to come up with findings under each of the aforementioned criteria.

4.1. Relevance: evaluation questions and ratings

- a) Was the choice of area of implementation (Tartous) appropriate when compared with the needs of other areas? *Highly Satisfactory*
- b) Was the involvement of external stakeholders (humanitarian, governmental...) appropriate towards the project's scope of work? *Satisfactory*
- c) Was the initial design and scope of the project relevant to the needs of the targeted population? *Satisfactory*
- d) Were the amended components after November 2018 (FSP, inclusion of street based children and children in jeopardy of losing parental care) relevant to meeting the needs of the area and aligned with the project goals? *Highly Satisfactory*

For **relevance**, the project was suited for the area of Tartous due to the needs created by the influx of IDPs and the socio-economic strain created on both IDPs and the host community. Furthermore, the project's efforts were supported through partnerships with local and international stakeholders that worked to provide complementary services such as health care, technical business support and legal assistance. Meanwhile, the project's design at the inception of the project did not take into account changing contextual needs and targeting via the socio-ecological model. At first, only UASC children were expected to benefit from the IACC and the needs of children in risk of separation and children in street situations were not addressed, but were later on included after the project redesign. Furthermore, in the initial design, there was no component targeting vulnerable families who cannot meet their child's developmental needs, either financially or through positive KAP for parents/caregivers. Additionally, targeting the community to promote child well-being was also absent. Thus, with the adaptation of the project, the IACC criteria was expanded and the FSP component was added to adapt to the change in context and increased needs.

4.2. Effectiveness: evaluation questions and ratings

- a) To what extent did the project achieve its projected outputs/results? *Highly Satisfactory*
- b) How properly was the project executed in terms of quality and timeliness? *Highly Satisfactory*
- c) To what extent did the used monitoring and evaluation systems ensure the realization of the projects' results and objectives? *Unsatisfactory*
- d) To what extent did the beneficiaries (children, caregivers and community members) participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the project? *Satisfactory*
- e) How did the project adapt based on the recommendations of the ROM mission of March 2018? *Highly Satisfactory*
- f) How effective was the combination of the three main components (IACC, CFS and FSP) towards the achievement of the project goal? *Highly Satisfactory*

As for **effectiveness**, the evaluation showed that the project was effective in reaching its desired outputs/results, which can be seen by the successful achievement of the targets under each of the three components (IACC, CFS & FSP). Also, the achievement of the desired outputs/results was done in a timely manner while maintaining the quality of the activities. On the other hand, the project could have greatly benefitted from a more comprehensive M&E system aligned with international guidelines. This system would have allowed the project to effectively source qualitative and quantitative findings and data which can be used to guide the project as it is being implemented,

recommend adjustment to enhance quality and to produce tangible data that supports the achievement of the outputs/results. Further to M&E systems, the project was in need of a more structured involvement of beneficiaries in M&E and accountability methods in order to capture their views on the services and to assure a participatory methodology that would also promote accountability of the project towards beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

4.3. Impact: evaluation

When it came to **impact**, the evaluation was able to notice multiple changes as a result of the activities under the project's three components. There was an enhancement in the well-being of children who were in the IACC and who took part of the CFS activities. Additionally, both children and parents showed an increase in positive KAP. Furthermore, families under the FSP component were supported to become more self-sustaining and socio-economically stable. However, the impact of PSS activities could not be thoroughly evaluated due to an absence of pre/post M&E data and because there was a turn-over of beneficiaries throughout the CFS activities. For the impact of PSS sessions to be measurable, beneficiaries must attend at least six months of structured sessions.

4.4. Efficiency: evaluation questions and ratings

- a) How did the organization of human resources in the project (structure, recruitment, capacities etc.) contribute to the efficiency of the project? *Highly Satisfactory*
- b) To what extent was the coordination between the different SOS offices, in Syria, the region and global, an aid to the smooth running of the project? *Unsatisfactory*
- c) To what extent were resources and efforts across the different components (IACC, CFS and FSP) distributed in a way to best support the needs of the targeted population? *Highly Satisfactory*

In terms of **efficiency**, the project displayed satisfactory distribution of human and financial resources across the different components, and staffing was deemed adequate and competent. On the other hand, there was a pronounced lack of structured capacity building efforts, despite constant on the job coaching and training. Also, there was a pronounced opportunity for improvement in the coordination between field, national and international offices which could have aided in the sharing of knowledge and experience. This coordination could have further supported the field implementation through technical and operational input and assistance.

4.5. Sustainability: evaluation questions and ratings

- a) To what extent was the reunification of UASC with their families sustainable? Are there sustainable alternatives for those children who have not been reunified? *Satisfactory*
- b) To what extent are other actors (humanitarian, civil or governmental) able to continue project activities after funding has ended? *Highly Unsatisfactory*
- c) Did the project contribute to increase the capacities of community members to detect child-right violations and to refer children to appropriate local actors? *Satisfactory*
- d) Will the benefits of the intervention continue after donor funding has been ceased? *Satisfactory*

As for the **sustainability** of the project, the majority of IACC children were reunified with immediate or extended family members. It is important to note that SOS staff stressed the fact the children were not reunified until the status of the family is stable enough to host the children. Another portion of the children were sent to SOS Villages in Damascus where they can receive long-term care, as they had no

chance of reunification with immediate or extended family. Another reason why these children were sent to SOS Villages is the fact that there are limited long-term care services for children in Syria. Also, some children for whom there is an opportunity for reunification, have remained in the former IACC which has now become a Small Group Home, with the hopes of reunification in the future. On the other hand, there is an opportunity for improvement in the community ownership of the project. Currently, it is not feasible for the community to implement the project on its own. Furthermore, the project could have benefitted from more structured capacity buildings for community members to detect child-right violations and to refer children to appropriate local actors. Overall, the project has created produced enhanced KAP in both children and adults which is a long-term investment in their well-being. Furthermore, the project is particularly sustainable through the FSP since it creates self-sustaining income opportunities for families, and promotes their socio-economic stability on the long-run.

5. Recommendations and Lessons Learnt

Based on the findings of the evaluation and conclusions drawn, a range of recommendations are proposed, focusing on how to strengthen and enhance the response, further harmonize and integrate it, and render it more sustainable and coherent over the long-term as lessons learnt. In the following, these recommendations are presented as **strategic level** recommendations and more concrete, **operational level** recommendations. Whereas neither has priority over the other, both types of recommendations involve a different level of engagement from different actors and thus differ in their level of involvedness and associated timeline. The strategic level recommendations focus on more profound changes at the system level, going beyond just the project itself, requiring the involvement of multiple actors from different sectors. Recommendations at operational level, on the other hand, concentrate on enhancements within the project. Being more practical and action-oriented, these recommendations mostly require involvement from actors directly involved in the implementation.

5.1. Strategic

1. Recommendations Towards a more harmonized and integrated project

The project should evolve from having two parallel systems towards a more harmonised and integrated system. In other words, the project implemented in Tartous should be an integral part of SOS Syria's programming. This has been highlighted in different KIIs and through the findings from the desk review, whereby systems and processes have been developed locally due to the absence of any organizational level processes. This was observed in the lack of M&E system, management, and SOP for the different activities. Also, this was reported by external stakeholders highlighting the fact that they were approached for a partnership in Tartous without knowing that there is a national memorandum of agreement (MoU) put in place. Therefore, with an integrated and harmonized project, efficiency will be affected as teams will start developing processes from scratch which is a waste of human resources and effort. At the same time, this could affect quality given that it is not embedded within an overall system.

2. Ensure data management and M&E systems

As stated earlier, a comprehensive M&E system often includes: monitoring of outputs and outcomes, monitoring risks and assumptions, monitoring of inputs and activities (compliance monitoring) and an evaluation. Monitoring of inputs and activities could have benefitted from a comprehensive database. A master beneficiaries list (MBL), containing beneficiaries' details, linkages between children and parents and services received, is usually available in projects containing interlinked components. Consequently, in the absence of an MBL the agency will not be able to: 1) Ensure comprehensive targeting for the whole family, 2) Facilitate information management and beneficiary tracking, 3) Ensure adequate management of the project as achieved targets should be withdrawn from the MBL. These issues may not have been very pronounced due to the small target size, but an MBL is particularly important for larger scale programming with larger targets. A possible solution to this

matter would be the usage of SOS's own Program Database (PDB) which was not used, but this would require the alignment of project indicators towards the indicators included under the database.

Furthermore, the evaluation could not completely rely on SOS's M&E data in order to enhance the analysis and ensure an adequate measurement of the effectiveness and impact, due to a shortage in methods monitoring the achievement of a project's outputs and outcomes. Therefore, the presence of a limited M&E system has created a limitation to the evaluation but also a hindrance in the overall implementation of the project. As described earlier, progress made in the CFS could not be measured as needed given the lack of pre/post data. Also, adjustment might have been made throughout the project lifetime, yet this was done on an ad hoc basis and from personal initiatives of field staff. What is needed is to invest in M&E by ensuring integration of relevant tools across different components with clear adherence to standards and guidelines, by ensuring clear monitoring indicators that capture sufficient detail of the activities, going beyond purely operational indicators but also measuring the quality of services. This would require an overall strengthening of qualitative efforts. As for quantitative efforts, strengthening is required in measuring the impact of certain components (pre/post testing for well-being before and after joining CFS).

3. Provide Interim Alternative Care for with increased duration and capacity

The need for alternative care facilities in the areas of Tartous and Latakia is still existent and long-lasting. It is recommended to increase the timeframe and capacity of the IACC to meet the demand for the provision of care for UASC, children in street situations and children at risk of losing parental care.

5.2. Operational

1. In order to ensure that the project responds to the needs of the beneficiaries and addresses the root causes of the problem, it is important for SOS to develop a Theory of Change which will allow the project to be focused and targeted towards responding to the needs and problem. This would allow SOS to become more efficient and thus have a focused project rather than different components put together. Also, this will ensure that the project is relevant from the very early stages and is familiar enough with the context to be aware and ready to adapt to any contextual changes.
2. Improve community involvement through more a participatory approach that allows the agency to capture the views of the beneficiaries and to provide structure accountability processes. This aspect was improving throughout the project lifetime; however, for similar programming further improvement is needed in order to ensure a participatory approach and quality implementation. Additionally, accountability processes provide transparency to the implementation and hold the agency accountable towards its beneficiaries and stakeholders. Community participation should be at the heart of the intervention to ensure sustainability and endorsement of the expected behavioral changes. For example, the intervention should have provided more time for the community activities. It is true that SOS tried to reach out to communities through the mobile CFS, yet this was not enough to establish relationship which could support the wider coverage.
3. It is recommended to further enhance and focus on the community's behavioural changes to complement the awareness activities and the improvement in knowledge. As such, focusing on the environment beneficiaries live in and coordinating with other actors who can affect this, could play a significant role in addressing behavioural change. This could be done while integrating the protection awareness/referral sessions with existing activities, and in parallel ensuring that awareness sessions are taking place through outreach at the community level (where the outreach activities go to the beneficiaries in their households/community gathering spots and are not in SOS's centres). Thus, beneficiaries not only receive the needed

information on CP in places they are comfortable in, but are also part of behaviour enhancement activities and the community they live in is aware and supportive of the changes.

4. Throughout the evaluation process, it was noted through the various methodologies that the selection criteria of beneficiaries were not all-inclusive. It is recommended for such interventions that the activities should include more host community members (specifically noted earlier in the FSP component) to avoid being viewed as discriminatory and because the services provided could meet needs that are pronounced in the host community.
5. As stated earlier in the report, behavioural changing activities such as PSS require at least six months to produce a tangible change. Therefore, it is recommended to increase the timeframe for CFS and create a more structured form of activities, where children's progress is monitored through systematic and scientific M&E tools.