

# SOS Children's Villages Programme Gaza

## Emergency Programme

### Long term family-based care programme



## Background

The Gaza strip is located in the south-west of Palestine as a narrow strip in the southern region of Historic Palestine Coast on the Mediterranean. The strip extends over an area of 360 square kilometres, with a length of 41km, and a width between 6-12 Km.

## Children's situation

More than half the Palestinian population consists of children and youths. The impact of violence and conflict on children is particularly concerning. Children are still suffering from heaviest and most lasting consequences of hostilities in the summer of 2014, where 551 children were killed and 3,436 were injured, of whom 10% suffered permanent disability. Basic needs such as food, water and education are substantial and more than 300,000 children still need emotional and psychological support. The 51-day conflict left 258 schools and kindergartens damaged, including 26 schools that are beyond repair.

## **Recent escalation of conflict**

During the fall of 2015, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories have been convulsed by a wave of escalating violence. Behind the growing tension are several factors, one being a dispute around the religious site in Jerusalem known to Muslims as al-Haram al-Sharif, or the Noble Sanctuary, and Jews as the Temple Mount. That has combined with the lack of a peace process and growing resentment and frustration in Palestinian society aimed at both Israel and the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Palestinian Authority. In October tensions erupted in violent clashes triggered by the shooting of Jewish settlers from Neria in the northern West Bank, allegedly by members of Hamas. Violence started on the West Bank and consequently spread to Gaza where protests, clashes and a strained atmosphere have continued. Increased Israeli border control has severe consequences for civilians who miss work and suffer lack of food and goods.

To be able to meet the needs of children who have lost parental care or are at risk of losing parental care SOS Children's Villages response is to develop:

1. a temporary emergency project for one year, followed by
2. a long-term care programme including SOS-families, kinship care and family strengthening programmes.

Considering the critical situation of children in Gaza, SOS Children's Villages also aims at becoming strong advocates for children's rights in dialogue with the authorities. The two main objectives are to increase awareness of abuse and violence against children, and that children without parental care should be supported through family based care instead of orphanages and institutions.

## **Emergency Care Programme**

The objective of the project is to ensure the well-being and continued development of the most vulnerable children in Gaza suffering from effects of the conflict. The project planning and development started in November 2014 and the activities were launched in August 2015. The duration of the activities is one year after which long-term solutions will be found for the children. Some children will be united with their parents and some children, whose parents are deceased, or not able to care for them will be transferred to a long-term care programme explained below.

The main target groups for the emergency project are children separated from their parents; children living with a care giver, but in need of alternative placement due to a child protection issue; and children of internally displaced families (refugees).

To care for the above mentioned target groups, there are two types of activities.

### Interim care centre

The interim care centre, located in Gaza City, takes in children separated from their parents. It is a formal residential care setting where professional caretakers and employees are responsible for the well-being of children in the centre. The centre provides secure accommodation and services in basic primary healthcare, psycho-social support and recreational activities to children. Where possible, the children will be subscribed to formal education. If not possible, informal education will be provided for them. In the cases where children are reunified with their parents or with extended family, there will be follow-up with the families in order to ensure that the children are in a safe environment and are well taken care of.



The interim care centre opened in August and has to date admitted 36 children, of which three have already been able to leave the center. The centre accommodates up to around 40 children at a time for between 24 hours and one year; the maximum time it takes to either reunify children with their family or find a long-term alternative care solution. The average stay of the children is estimated to be around 3 to 4 months, and the total number of children having received care is estimated to 110 for the duration of the project.

*Jamal is 11 years old and comes from a family that lives in difficult circumstances. His father was violent and used to tie him up and physically abuse him when he got angry. Jamal was admitted to the interim care center in August and the family was given support. SOS cooperated with another NGO to give the family counseling sessions and in cooperation with community leaders the father was encouraged to change his violent behavior and find other strategies for interacting with Jamal. Meanwhile, Jamal spent time in the safe environment in the center. He especially enjoyed the meals and the social activities with other children. Jamal had not been attending school lately and after several attempts he was motivated to go back to his class. At the end of September 2015 Jamal was able to leave the centre and move back to his family. SOS follows up on his situation with regular home visits, where the family also receives food and other support. SOS also pays visits to the school to make sure Jamal is still committed to attend classes. Also the community stays involved in order to keep an eye on the situation.*



### Emergency family support

The emergency family support aims to prevent children from being permanently separated from their families. The main focus will be on internally displaced people (internal refugees), but also on other vulnerable groups. Preparations for the Emergency Family Support started in September. Due to HR recruitment issues the programme has suffered some delay, but these issues are now solved and the process is now back on track. Identification, assessment and selection of families for the Emergency Family support is now in process. The admission process will start in November and for a duration of one year a total of 100

families and 500 children will receive support. Some of the families have their children in the interim care centre and will take their children back after they have demonstrated ability and willingness to appropriately take care of the children. Other families who do not have their children in the interim care centre will receive support to prevent separation.

Priority of the support is providing immediate essential relief assistance over a period of 6 months with the aim of drastically improving current living conditions, especially through improving housing. Other activities are:

- Food items distributions
- Non-food Items distributions
- Small repairs on current housing
- Income generating activity assistance
- Assistance with training and informal education

The emergency family support also includes support to internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in makeshift shelters, caravans or tents. Focus of the programme is on improving living conditions, constructing playing spaces for children, ensuring continuation of Child Friendly Spaces. Many people are living in caravans, under the rubble of their houses or in generally very difficult circumstances and need some support to prepare for winter. This support will probably start being operational from end of November. These activities will be executed in collaboration with local NGOs and community based organisations and are estimated to reach around 2000 beneficiaries.

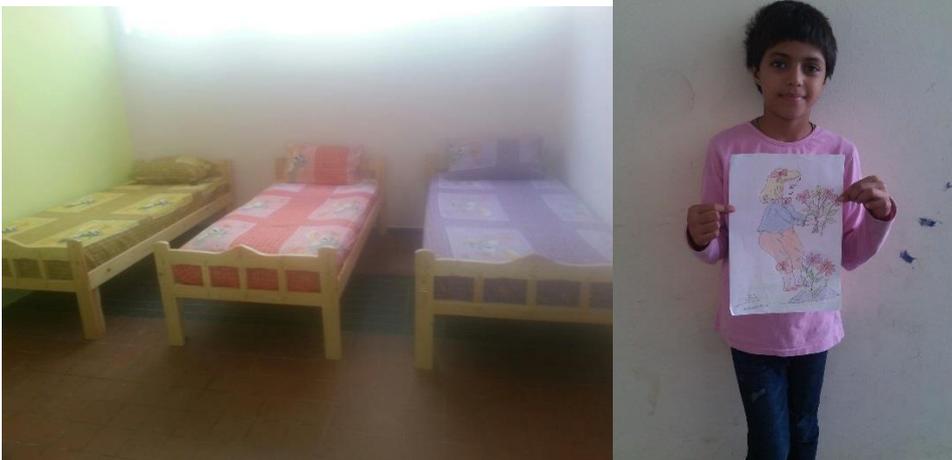
### **Effect of current clashes on Emergency Programme**

Gaza is a volatile area in general and emergency procedures are in place, such as training and drilling of the staff and the children in case of air raids or other events. The area was already in a difficult situation before the escalation of the conflict, with shortages of electricity, cooking gas and fuel as well as restrictions in movement.

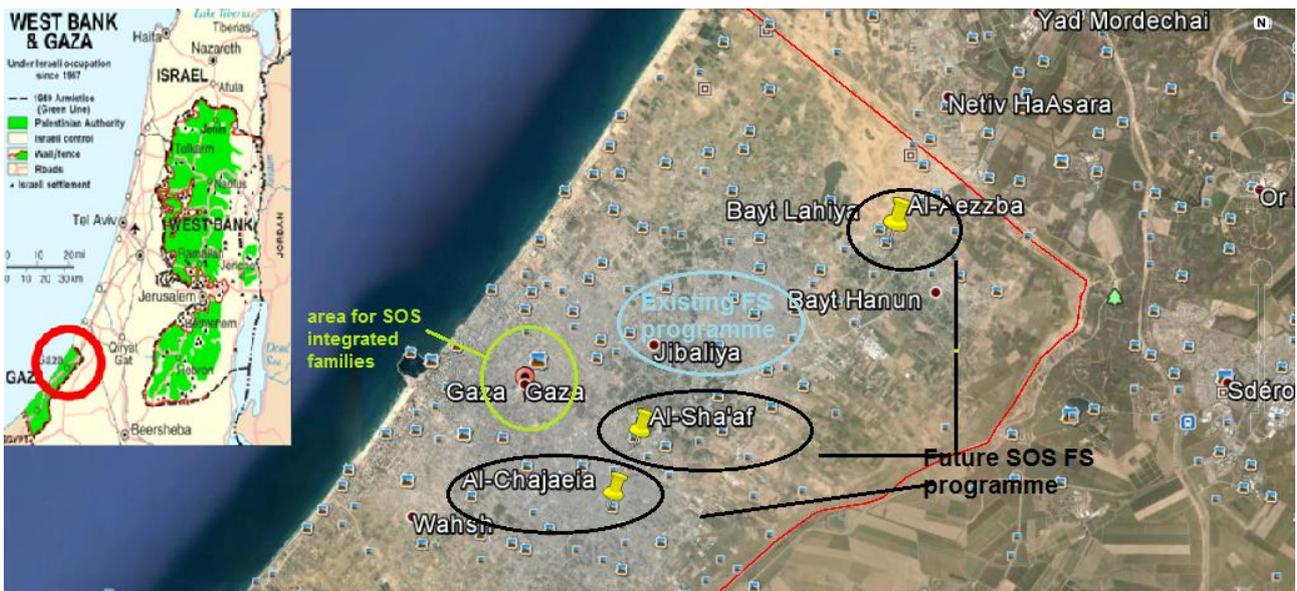
Movements are analyzed on a daily basis and in some cases school attendance is affected. In case an area is marked as unsafe, the movement will be postponed where possible. The interim care centre has a large basement where the children and staff can evacuate and the location is relatively safe.



*The interim centre is up and running with 36 children admitted since the start in August. At the centre children can enjoy a safe environment while the families receive support and counselling*



## Long-term Care Programmes



The main goal of SOS Children's Village's new programme is to develop long-term child care services in the north of Gaza, in Gaza City and the surrounding areas of Al-Aezzba, Al-Chajaeia and Al-Sha'af. The programme will contribute to improve the situation of children who have lost parental care, mainly orphans, and children at risk of losing parental care by securing their basic rights to family environment and access to quality child care services. The long-term programme will be developed during 2015 and the activities will start in 2016.

The main target group is orphans. The second target group is children at risk of losing parental care are mainly:

- children living in single-headed households.
- children with disabled parents or parents living with very severe chronic diseases or post-trauma in consequence of the political situation in Gaza.
- children victims of violence, abuse and neglect in their household,
- children living in extreme poverty as a consequence of the war.

For children who are orphans there are two types of long-term interventions:

**SOS families** - children who lost parental care and have no possibility to be cared for by their extended family, will be placed in an integrated SOS village.

During the first year, a pilot will be developed by establishing two SOS family homes in Al-Rimal neighbourhood in Gaza City. Each SOS family will be composed of a mother, and 3 to 5 children each. Considering the high level of psychological trauma the children of the location have, a low number of children per house is a key guarantee of success. An aunt will then be supporting the two mothers.

If the pilot, involving 12-15 children, proves to be successful, more SOS-families will be created and target up to 25 children (around 9 family homes) at full capacity of the programme. A third home is expected to be added at the end of the first year (last quarter of 2016).

**Kinship care** - Long-time care for children living with their extended family.

Kinship care means that children who have lost parental care live with their extended families, instead of in a SOS-family. Kinship care is the most common form of alternative care for children without parental care in Gaza. Trends and strong family-rooted culture in Gaza support kinship care to build on traditional network support systems. Kinship care can reduce the disruptions that abandoned/orphaned children face in their lives. Because children already know their caregivers, have a shared culture, and may be more likely to remain in the same community. They can continue to go to the same schools and have the same friends. This can be essential for maintaining a sense of identity, belonging and wellbeing. However, kinship care is not available or appropriate for all children, and can leave children vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. That is why careful decisions must be made on a case by case basis to ensure the best interest of each individual child. Considerations of children's needs, including emotional wellbeing and their preference must be taken into account. First year the idea is to involve 70 children in the program the first year and 100 children at full capacity.

**Family strengthening programme** - for children at risk of losing parental care.

This target group of children live with parents with low capacity of caring for them, where the best alternative is that the children remain in their families of origin but get extra support.

The type of services that will be given are of three kinds:

- Service-delivery (food packages, easier access to medication, psychological support, school transportation, extra-curricular activities, securing registration documents...)
- Capacity-building of *local partners* in the field such as financial and administrative management training, child and family development training; and for *parents* such as child care and parenting, child protection, life skills trainings.
- Economic empowerment for the youth and the caregivers, such as vocational trainings, income generating activities and job finding skills.

The programme is planned to involve 330 children the first year and 450 children at full capacity. There is an already existing family strengthening program in Jibaliya. The families in this location will be included in the new larger program in the north of Gaza described in this document.

## **Current status long-term programmes**

In the long-term care programme everything is going according to plan. Office arrangements, identification of and discussions with CBOs and internal discussions on the exact set-up are currently in progress.

### **SOS Families**

3 women have been recruited to form the first 2 families and are currently being trained in child rights and child protection issues, child psychology and nutrition. Each mother will be responsible for a maximum of 5 children. She is in charge of running her family house independently in order to provide the best care for her children. One aunt is required to support two SOS family houses. When mothers are on weekend or holidays, or when they urgently need to be out of their family house, the aunt will take over and be there for the children. The working hours system is to be decided once the team is in place. The next step is to rent flats for the families, and establish a child admission committee and procedures for admission. Operations will start in January 2016 as planned. The total number of children beneficiaries will be 15 at the end of 2016, 25 at full capacity.

### **Family strengthening and kinship care**

Community based partners and volunteers are being identified, and volunteer training is in progress. A structure for admission is being set up, with criteria and an admission committee. Next step is to carry out the needs assessment of the target group, which will determine the specific services to be offered. The admission criteria for family strengthening and kinship care will be similar, focusing on large families, families with malnourished children, families where the caregiver is suffering from terminal illness, and families in which domestic violence occurs. The Emergency programme, to be ended by mid-2016, might also feed in some families in the new locations. The total number of children beneficiaries will be 330 in the Family Strengthening unit in 2016, meaning around 66 families. The total number of children beneficiaries will be 70 in the Kinship care unit in 2016, meaning 17 families.

### **Effects of escalation of conflict on long-term programme**

Current confrontations and violence have affected areas where the new long term Family strengthening programme will take place (along the eastern border with Israel). Therefore travelling there is now more dangerous and some travels need to be postponed because of clashes, demonstrations and occasional air raids. This will in the end not affect the timeline of the long term care programme but will just delay some meetings with the CBOs we are working with in these areas.