

CASE STUDY

SYRIAN ARAB REP. 2017–2018 / CONFLICT

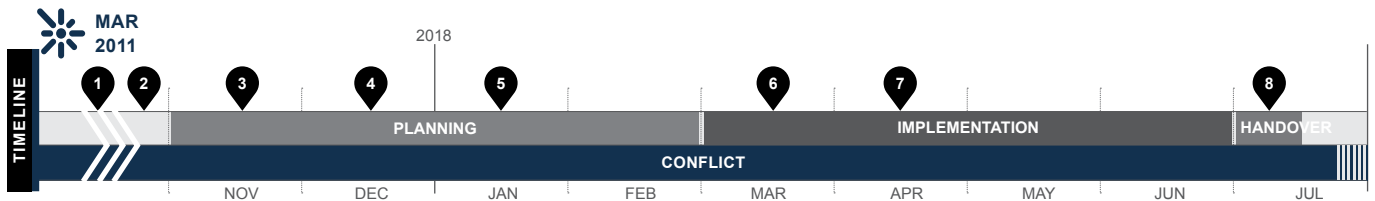
KEYWORDS: Collective centres upgrade, Protection mainstreaming, Remote management

CRISIS	Syrian conflict, 2011–onwards	
TOTAL PEOPLE IN NEED*	13.1 million (5.6 million in acute need)	
TOTAL PEOPLE DISPLACED*	6.1 million internally displaced	
TOTAL SHELTER NEEDS*	4.2 million individuals within the country	
PROJECT LOCATIONS	Dara and Quneitra governorates	
PROJECT BENEFICIARIES	58 households (259 people: 126 male, 133 female; incl. 123 minors under 18)	
PROJECT OUTPUTS	5 collective centres rehabilitated	
SHELTER SIZE	Approx. 50m² per household	
SHELTER DENSITY	Approx. 10m² per person	
MATERIALS COST	USD 2,000 per household	
PROJECT COST	USD 3,700 per household	

* Figures as of December 2017. Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The organization rehabilitated five collective shelters, with integrated WASH and protection assistance, through the establishment of voluntary community committees. The project was based on a shelter assessment conducted earlier by the organization with the aim of improving and harmonizing the humanitarian shelter interventions in the southern parts of the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria). Building on this, the organization also developed guidance notes for shelter interventions in collective centres, host families and informal tented settlements. Due to an escalation in conflict, the project failed to scale up and could only assist 58 households.



- 1 May 2017: Collective shelter and informal tented settlements mapping conducted and analysis report released.
- 2 Oct 2017: Release of the guidance notes for the rehabilitation of collective centres.
- 3 Nov 2017: Selection of collective centres.
- 4 Dec 2017: Launch of bidding process for selecting a contractor.
- 5 Jan 2018: Contractors due diligence and selection process.
- 6 Mar 2018: Commencement of rehabilitation works and signing MoUs with local councils.
- 7 Apr 2018: Formation of shelter/protection committees.
- 8 Jul 2018: Project closing and evaluation.

STRENGTHS

- + Effective selection approach for the implementing partner.
- + Households' participation in project design and implementation.
- + Harmonized rehabilitation guidelines were developed.
- + Good coordination with local councils and protection committees.
- + Integration of protection into shelter.

WEAKNESSES

- Women's engagement was very limited.
- Limited sustainability of the committees beyond project completion.
- Direct feedback from residents was limited.
- Loss of access meant that the project could not scale up.



Before (above) and after (right) rehabilitation works in one collective centre.

CONTEXT

For more information on the crisis and regional response, see A.29 in *Shelter Projects 2015-2016*.

Despite the formal cessation of hostilities established in February 2016, sporadic clashes in Dara and Quneitra continued to provoke displacement. Vulnerable conflict-affected populations including displaced, non-displaced, returnees and host communities lived in substandard, overcrowded and unsafe shelters and settlements, including collective centres (such as public, unfinished and abandoned buildings) and private accommodation (renting or hosted). Families experienced multiple displacements, and in many areas IDPs made up nearly a third of the population.

Family separation was a direct consequence (e.g. men away fighting, or detained) as well as a coping mechanism (women, girls and boys are more likely to be hosted). With prolonged displacement and a continued influx of IDPs, the capacity of host communities to provide adequate shelter diminished and, as resources become scarce, risks of abuse and eviction also increased. Women and girls living in substandard and overcrowded shelters were particularly exposed to risks (gender-based violence, theft, trauma, exploitation and abuse).

Families in the targeted collective shelters had been displaced for up to three years. Prolonged and repeated displacement often resulted in emotional distress.

NATIONAL SHELTER STRATEGY

The Shelter/NFI Cluster strategy in 2018 aimed to address life-saving and life-sustaining shelter interventions, prioritizing those most in need with emphasis on protection mainstreaming. Rehabilitation of collective centres was an important part of the Cluster strategy.

Prior to implementing the project, the organization conducted a comprehensive assessment in collective centres and informal tented settlements, aiming to harmonize and strategize humanitarian shelter interventions in southern Syria. Based on the assessments, guidance notes for rehabilitation of collective centres were developed for all Sector partners.¹ The project aimed to apply these guidelines for the first time, with the intention of being the start of a longer-term approach.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The project rehabilitated five collective centres in southern Syria, including four schools and a public housing complex. Conditions in the centres prior to rehabilitation posed physical safety and protection risks to the residents. The rehabilitation works included climate protection, securing partitions, water, sanitation and cooking facilities, according to standards developed collectively by shelter actors in southern Syria.

Due to lack of direct access to the area, the project was implemented by a local partner and remotely managed from Jordan. Through a competitive selection process, a local organization was chosen to coordinate with local councils and residents and carry out the rehabilitation works. Another local organization was selected to provide protection services. Independent monitors were contracted to verify the implementation and conducted site visits throughout the duration of the project.

¹ These are available at <https://bit.ly/2S5bXTX>.

² Faza'a refers to community support mobilized when a house is damaged. For instance, when a new IDP family arrives and community members bring them water and food and support them in registration with the local councils.

Since the facilities and infrastructure within and surrounding the collective centres were not functioning, the organization coordinated with other WASH actors in the area. For water provision, the only option was to provide water trucking. For sanitation, the works included the construction of cesspools and wastewater disposal systems.

Works were completed in July 2018, while the areas faced a major military offensive, which temporarily displaced over 300,000 people. Local partners lost access to the centres immediately after completion, which did not allow evaluations or satisfaction surveys to be conducted. At the time of writing, access had not been regained, so longer-term recovery pathways could not be assessed. Although the plan was to continue the interventions and scale up, this could not happen due to the shift in control in the area.

SHELTER/PROTECTION COMMITTEES

In addition to the physical rehabilitation, the project integrated protection considerations into the planning, implementation and management of the collective centres. In accordance to camp management principles, project partners put in place self-managed, community-based, shelter and protection committees (known as Faza'a Committees)² in three of the five collective centres. The committees were comprised of five members per location (one manager, two administrators and two protection coordinators) and received training, guidance and coaching from protection teams who operated in mobile units and static centres. The Faza'a committees' primary function was to enhance community-based protection. They were responsible for liaising between residents and humanitarian service providers, ensuring effective information sharing among site residents, supporting the process of establishing communal rules for the collective centre, mediating disputes and ensuring equitable access to communal areas and services for all the residents.



Rehabilitation works included furnishing and upgrade of common kitchens.



To mainstream protection in the shelter interventions, committees were formed in three collective centres with the role of improving information flows and dispute resolution, as well as fostering participation in the project.

TARGETING

An initial assessment of 100 collective centres was conducted in February 2017 and 12 centres were preselected for a more in-depth assessment, based on the following selection criteria: safety and security of the sites (e.g. number of airstrikes nearby the site for the past 90 days, armed groups presence, etc.), Housing, Land and Property due diligence, accessibility, financial feasibility, type of structure, use, functionality, structural integrity, level of damage and stakeholder engagement. The centre’s proximity to the psychosocial support centres established by the protection partner was also a strong consideration for the final selection. Five centres were finally selected.

To select where to pilot the Faza’a committees, the organization considered the population size, experience with self-established management committees and the willingness and capacity to participate. The committees were composed of 16 members (nine males and seven females).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The assessment process included engagement with local councils, host communities and IDPs in collective centres. The latter were consulted prior to beginning project activities. A suggested scope of works was drafted based on a technical assessment and adapted, as needed, to meet their preferences. Because of the public nature of the sites selected, local councils were also involved in this process.

During implementation, men and women were consulted regarding their availability, interest and area of strength to support the rehabilitation works. A number of male and female beneficiaries were contracted as either skilled or unskilled labour, material guardians or cleaners.

Throughout the project implementation, residents had the opportunity to provide feedback and this resulted in adaptations, such as agreeing on the location and arrangement of facilities. For example, some kitchens were moved to more suitable locations within the buildings, toilets were separated by family rather than sex for increased privacy, the location of opaque lockable partitions was agreed, as well as the location of lighting for communal spaces.

One of the main purposes of forming the Faza’a committees was to increase the effectiveness of communication with and participation of the IDPs in the rehabilitation works. This was done through weekly reports, monitoring notes and suggestions, and direct feedback to independent monitors. The committees registered new residents, coordinated cleaning of communal areas, led community sensitization activities and other specific protection mainstreaming responsibilities, like raising awareness for protection issues and referring any special cases to the available service providers, with the support of the local partner.



The project was managed remotely and implemented by a local organization selected through a merit-based process.



Doors and windows were repaired or replaced to increase security and privacy.

Upgrade works were designed in consultation with collective centre residents and monitored by independents.



Good communication with the local council and the affected people helped in the targeting process and reduced security risks.

Extra rooms were added to allow for greater privacy where needed.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Despite extensive consultations, **two of the local councils initially refused to sign MoUs** with the organization and expressed disagreement with the selected locations or scope of work. Local acceptance of the implementing partner and some resistance to the improvement of residential conditions of those in collective centres were contributing factors to these blockages. Through engagement with residents and local councils, the local partner resolved the issues.

The project was implemented remotely and thus it required independent verification of the activities implemented by the local partner. This included third-party monitoring agencies and the organization’s monitoring consultants who visited the sites and gathered feedback from residents. The flow of information between the two partners (protection and shelter), independent monitors and the organization was a challenge. Information did not always reach parties on time or was outdated. These systems posed a significant burden on all actors and sometimes caused delays, as information had to be triangulated and verified remotely before actions could be taken.

Significant investment of time and resources was required to build the capacity of committees to fulfill their duties, particularly protection support. One-to-one sessions with each member was favored over collective trainings, which required a lot of time from the local protection partner. Similarly, committee members who volunteered their time requested that financial incentives be provided.

Limited funding and space in the collective centres represented a challenge to meeting minimum standards. In one location where there was no space to separate two families, a temporary sleeping room was built outside the building.

RISK MITIGATION

Prior to the project implementation, a risk management plan was developed. Many risks, such as the lack of cooperation from the local authorities, limited availability of or poor-quality supplies, aid diversion, etc. could be mitigated by community engagement and close independent monitoring. In the event of a threat of loss of access to project areas, the organization intended to reach out to other actors who would be able to maintain access. When the government advanced into southern Syria, work in the collective centres was in its last stages. As the scale of the displacement was unprecedented, the organization focused on delivering humanitarian assistance to the newly displaced. Access was fully lost before any other agency could reach the project sites.

WIDER IMPACTS

The formation of voluntary committees supported protection mainstreaming in shelter interventions. In addition, trained committee members were able to provide referrals and support residents with dispute resolution and accessing services.

The development of the guidance on collective centre rehabilitation was an important step in harmonizing shelter actors’ approaches in southern Syria. The guidelines were shared at the global level and used to inform programming in other countries in the region.



The shelter/protection committees provided valuable feedback which helped agree on priority interventions, such as location of facilities and lighting.



The project applied contextualized standards and procedures developed by the Shelter Sector in southern Syria. However, due to loss of access, it could not be scaled up.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED



Works included the rehabilitation of water and sanitation facilities (left) and the construction of cesspools and wastewater disposal systems (right).

STRENGTHS

- + The high quality of the intervention was ensured through the selection of a competent implementing partner via a **transparent and competitive merit-based selection approach**.
- + **Households' participation in project design and during implementation**, which resulted in modifications based on people's preferences.
- + **The definition of a common standard for rehabilitation works** (BoQs and technical specification) with response actors within the Shelter/NFI Working Group helped harmonize interventions, providing more equitable support of standard quality to affected populations.
- + **Good coordination with the local council and the protection committees** ensured accurate selection and verification of targeted households, reduced safety and security risks for staff members and helped resolving any issues that arose during the intervention.
- + **Integration of protection activities into the shelter project** encouraged participation of collective centre residents in decision-making processes and made protection services – such as risk awareness, psychological first aid and referrals – available to project participants and the larger community.

WEAKNESSES

- **Women's engagement in project implementation was very limited**, due to the low interest and the cultural barriers that limited women's participation in social spheres. Although women were engaged in the protection committees, social norms made their participation in decision-making structures difficult.
- As committee members were not compensated for their work, it was **difficult to foresee the functioning of committees beyond project completion, without the continued support** and encouragement of the protection partner.
- **Direct feedback from residents was limited**, despite having independent monitors and feedback mechanism in place. On one hand, communities may have perceived a risk of not receiving assistance if providing feedback. On the other, monitoring visits were limited to once or twice a week and, although awareness campaigns on the mechanisms were conducted via phone calls, monitoring capacities were not sufficient. A more diverse and proactive approach in seeking feedback should have been considered.
- Although outside of the organization's control, **losing access to the implementation areas** at the late stages of implementation resulted in the partner's inability to engage with residents beyond the completion of works and provide longer-term support to the protection committees. It also meant that **the project could not scale up**.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **The integration of the protection committees into the implementation of activities** provided an opportunity for IDPs to be part of the implementation process and make the project activities more responsive to the community needs.
- It is always difficult to find technical partners who are able to **take into account all the non-physical aspects of shelter interventions** (such as dignity, equitable access and do no harm). The use of the Faza'a committees added a protection lens which was valuable to the shelter partner, while conversely shelter was used as an entry point to provide protection services and address gender norms.
- **Remote management requires very clear information management** systems and lines of communication. Even so, triangulating information and verifying programme quality takes a lot of efforts and time. **More resources should be made available** to the monitoring and verification of activities.
- **More emphasis on real-time evaluation approaches** should be considered in unstable environments, where it is not always possible to complete all planned activities – particularly those related to follow-up of the action with evaluations, satisfaction or occupancy surveys.
- **Incentives for the work that committee members perform should be carefully considered**. Although there is a clear rationale for compensating, this would not be sustainable. More work needs to be done on balancing the time these initiatives require for participants. For example, **agreeing ahead of time what is a reasonable amount of time members can dedicate without compensation** (e.g. two hours a week), setting up an initial compensation when the time investment is greater than that (training, consultations, etc.), followed by a gradual reduction of incentives as time commitments are lowered.