



FONDATION
IMPACT HOPE

Establishment of a community centre in the devastated Midan neighbourhood in Aleppo (Syria)

Background

Between 2015 and 2016, the city of Aleppo and the Midan district in particular have seen a huge part of their population disappear under the bombs or migrate to less threatening horizons. People who were unable or unwilling to migrate now wish to find acceptable living and security conditions for their families or to see their relatives or neighbours returning to settle in the country. It is estimated that about 20 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan have returned to Syria despite the difficult living conditions.

The Midan neighbourhood is characterized by high poverty, high unemployment and poor prospects due to a lack of education, vocational training and opportunities. During the war (2012-2017), this neighbourhood was at the centre of the conflict in the city of Aleppo. It was largely destroyed. The buildings targeted by the project were occupied by various extremist groups. The houses of many community members were bombed and looted. Many people were forced to flee. Today, several buildings are being renovated and the project is encouraging families to return home. Life and social activities are starting to develop again. Although things are progressing, one challenge that remains in the development of social programs is logistics. Through the acquisition of premises, mainly located on the ground floor, the project aims to provide an atmosphere of safety, tranquillity and support to encourage children, men and women to participate in social programs and gradually reintegrate into their own neighbourhoods.

Brief summary of the project

Since the end of the fighting in Aleppo, the inhabitants of Midan have helped to develop social projects involving the various communities. The neighbourhood has quickly become a centre of reference by also developing recreational and educational activities. Thanks to these programs and training, we are today

witnessing the successful integration of several Christian, Muslim and Armenian communities, which is still quite exceptional in Aleppo.

The project consists of purchasing and rehabilitating a building in a war-torn neighbourhood.

The project team wishes to make it a place for rebuilding the life of the neighbourhood by relaunching activities necessary for the economic and human development of the inhabitants. All religious communities in Aleppo will be invited to take part in the project and to rebuild links between people regardless of their condition or origin.

English, music and computer classes will be provided for children and vocational training for adults that meets the needs of the community.

Social assistance will be provided to the families most affected by the conflict.

A mental health component will contribute to the healing of war traumas.

Training and peace education workshops will be organized to encourage coexistence between people of different religions and make it an example for the city of Aleppo.

Specific objective and expected results

To promote reconciliation and the “living together” among the various communities of Aleppo. Encouraging people to meet each other and rebuild their lives through vocational training and community activities so that they can flourish and become productive and useful members of Aleppo society.

Activities

The project consists of purchasing a commercial space of approximately 36 square metres on the ground floor of a building. Other premises would be needed later, but this first premises would already allow the first activities to be developed on a work-study basis:

- English, music and computer courses for children.
- Professional training: hairdressing, manicure, pedicure, ...
- Social assistance and home visits
- Mental Health and Personal Development:
 - ✓ Training workshops and education for peace and coexistence between people of different religions
 - ✓ War Trauma Healing Workshops

- ✓ Human Development and Growth
- ✓ Recreational activities for children and adults

Contribution of the project to a real change

The presence of a community centre in Midan will have a significant impact. Many of the families who have stayed and others who are returning need to reconnect with reality and think about reconstruction. Opening the centre to all faiths is a key factor in building a peace process at the grassroots level. Even if this centre represents a small initiative in the mass of needs, it could inspire other actors and families in Midan or elsewhere in Aleppo.

Location of the project

Midan district, Aleppo, Syria

Local partner

Latin Patriarchate of Aleppo

Direct and indirect beneficiaries

The main beneficiaries of this project are women and children. They are from the neighbourhood or come from other poor areas of the city of Aleppo. Many are returning after fleeing the region during the war. Their families are now in the process of reconstruction and trying to integrate back into their communities. They are looking for personal and professional opportunities and are seeking to establish their place in the community.

Direct beneficiaries:

- English, music and computer courses: the current enrolment is 50 children and adults.
- Vocational training including cosmetology (hairdresser), make-up and manicure/pedicure: 35 adults are currently enrolled.

Indirect beneficiaries:

- This social project reaches about 500 families.

Sustainability of the project

The project will gradually find its viability as it will be assumed by its beneficiaries. They will not only have made progress in the acceptance and integration of other communities, but some of them will have acquired professional skills that will enable them to generate income for the family.

Monitoring and evaluation

The project will be monitored by a social worker who will draw up a quarterly report on the evolution of the centre, the number of people who attend, the number of people trained and the integration of the different groups in the neighbourhood.