

# NEWSLETTER

N. 11 | February 2023



Fondazione Marista  
per la Solidarietà  
Internazionale Onlus

## FMSI

Per il Bene dei Bambini

### Page 2

#### *Right to play*

Dignity, integration and  
protection of migrant children

### Page 5

#### *Syria Emergency*

The Marist heart of Blue Marists

### Page 7

#### *Healing boys and girls victims of war*

"A Better World for Children" Award



# Right to play

## Dignity, integration and protection of migrant children

**Angela Petenzi**

*FMSI Project Administration Officer*



**Away from home.** This is what many Venezuelan families have been forced to do by the complex social, economic and political situation the country is facing, forming part of the largest human displacement in the region's recent history. Colombia, which shares a 2,219-kilometre border with

Venezuela, has become the main destination for migration, and the area of Maicao, where the 'Heart Without Borders: for the Right to Play' project with the support of Miseen Cara is taking place, is among the largest areas of settlement for migrants. Sixty per cent of them are homeless or live in inadequate settlements: garages or flats, small shacks made of cardboard, cans or plastic without access to drinking water or electricity, trying to earn a living through informal jobs.

This situation of poverty and precariousness is amply reflected in the situation of children, with a multifaceted violation of their rights to grow up in a safe and healthy environment, to education, health and healthy food, to play and to be children.

Most of them do not attend school due to the lack of places, their irregular status, the lack of financial resources to cover school expenses and learning difficulties due to the trauma of forced displacement and the lack of study habits after a long period without a school routine. 70% of the children are illiterate, with dyslexia or attention deficit disorder (ADD). They have difficulty socialising and expressing emotions, and display violent attitudes and language. The impact of lack of schooling also affects the youth population.

The percentage of young migrants between the ages of 15 and 24 who are neither studying nor wor-

king is 42%. As Maicao is a border area, the consolidation of illegal trafficking and armed groups recruiting children and adolescents for their activities is facilitated. Human trafficking networks for the purpose of sexual exploitation take advantage of the vulnerable conditions of the migrant population, involving Venezuelan migrant girls, both indigenous and non-indigenous, aged between 12 and 17 years as victims, bringing them to other territories. For this reason, the project seeks to provide a healthy, safe and easily accessible space (thanks to its location in the city centre) that meets the basic needs of children and adolescents while promoting their development and inclusion in the Colombian school system.

Through educational, artistic and sports activities, children have the opportunity to exercise their right to play, establish healthy relationships with their peers and be encouraged to return to school. Workshops are also promoted with migrant families to accompany their children on this path and protect them from violence and abuse.

To date, almost 600 children have benefited from the programme, Venezuelan migrants, repatriated Colombians and members of the indigenous Wayuu group who historically settled on the Colombian-Venezuelan border and had to leave their communities in Venezuela. Thanks to the implementation of the project, they regain confidence, self-esteem and the ability to integrate positively into their new reality.







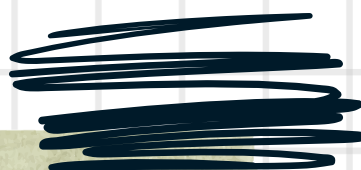
## A day at Fratelli Project!

"...where walls rose WAS ABLE TO CREATE BRIDGES OF PEACE

Read now the fourth report on this socio-educational programme for children and young refugees from Syria and Iraq. With this report, we want to take you through the classrooms and gardens of the Fratelli Project, introduce you to the faces of its beneficiaries and the stories of those who, in our centres, have found their childhood and hope for a different tomorrow. It was in 2016 when the Marist Brothers and De La Salle decided to join forces to open the international community of the Fratelli Project, in Saida and Beirut, Lebanon.

This small Mediterranean country of just four million inhabitants was facing the arrival of one and a half million refugees, fleeing the war in Syria and religious persecution in Iraq.

The Fratelli Project extended a helping hand to all those children excluded from the Lebanese school system, to mothers, often alone, to train for a new job, and to young teenagers to catch up and build their future. Since then, the Fratelli Project has grown and every day has created an educational opportunity for hundreds of vulnerable Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese refugees, who would not have had it otherwise. In the pages of this report, we will give you just a hint of what Fratelli means, a day in this socio-educational programme, which, where walls rose, was able to create bridges of peace.







## Syria Emergency

### The Marist heart of the Blue Marists

**Aleppo, already devastated by more than a decade of war and its aftermath, was hard hit by a terrible 7.8 magnitude earthquake on February 6 at 04:17 local time.** In Aleppo, the situation was already extremely difficult: more than a quarter of the population was displaced and a large number of people were living in a precarious economic situation. Many families were unable to provide basic needs for their children, and the elderly were forced, given the circumstances, to live alone. In addition to these economic and social dramas, the earthquake further affected the entire population of north-eastern Syria. Many buildings were damaged or destroyed. According to data collected by the WHO, the number of victims of the earthquake exceeds nine thousand people. The government has limited means to dig through the rubble: time is passing and the possibility of finding survivors is quite not realistic. In the meantime, there is a need to address the emergency situation of people left homeless. FMSI is supporting the people who have been affected by the earthquake with all the means at its disposal, with special attention to the city of Aleppo where it has been working with the Blue Marists for years. Now, together with Dr. Nabil Antaki of the Blue Marists, have launched a new emergency campaign.

A special thanks go to them, the Blue Marists, who are providing immediate and humanitarian assistance to people in need from the very beginning by taking in earthquake victims inside the Marist center.

*"Just half an hour after the earthquake, our doors were open to welcome 1,000 people on the first day, between 500 and 700 people on the following days. We offered them shelter, mattresses, blankets, hot meals, clothes, heating, electricity to recharge their cell phones and, most importantly, our love and our 'Marist' hearts."*

*Br. George Sabé, 11/02/2023*

But above all, **thank You.**

**Thanks to your help and trust, FMSI has already been able to send over 67,000 euros to the Blue Marists to deal with this emergency.**

FMSI asks for as much support as possible to continue to facilitate the work on the ground. 100% of the funds will be totally donated to humanitarian aid. Any bank fees and deductions will be covered by FMSI. The number of injured and displaced is increasing every hour.

Every contribution will enable the Aleppo Marist Community to distribute hot meals, blankets and humanitarian assistance to the earthquake victims.





## Three hundred and twenty-eight times thank you! Our 5x1000 supports vulnerable families in Aleppo.

**In 2021, 328 of you chose to donate their 5x1000 to our Foundation. We at FMSI have decided, as we do every year, to support those who are in the greatest need of help and support.**

The Syrian population has been burdened for years by the severe consequences of a wearisome war that has led to a humanitarian crisis; among the most serious repercussions, the continuous depreciation of the local currency has led to increasing inflation, exacerbating the already high food insecurity. This is how more than 12 million people, nearly 60 percent of the total population, survive with the uncertainty of being able to eat a basic daily meal. There are millions of displaced people in Syria, and those who remain, barely have access to enough food to survive.

More than a decade after the beginning of the conflict, Syria's humanitarian situation has reached dramatic peaks: war, displacement and a long-standing fragility of the economic system are at the root of the enormous poverty the country suffers.

For these people, for these families, your contribution has taken on an inestimable value.

In fact, the 5x1000 donation allowed us to finance in December 2022 the food parcels. These baskets were distributed in the city of Aleppo by the Blue Marists, who have chosen, despite the ongoing war, to stay and provide assistance to the thousands of displaced families, both through the distribution of food parcels, hygiene products and clothing and by supporting medical care for the sick and wounded who would not have been able to be

cared for otherwise, given the overcrowding in the hospitals. We also want to emphasize the significant importance, from an emotional point of view, of the moment of encounter and dialogue that people were able to exchange with the volunteers during the food distribution, a moment that was able to rekindle in them hope in humanity.

The food distribution helped 811 families, both Christian and Muslim, in conditions of extreme vulnerability, reaching a total of 3,025 people, including many children.

If this was possible, it is thanks to you.

And what we can say is: **three hundred and twenty-eight times THANK YOU!**

"How much does a tear weigh?  
It depends: the tear of a capricious child weighs  
less than the wind,  
that of a hungry child weighs more than all the  
earth."  
G. Rodari





## Healing children and girls victims of war

### “A Better World For Children” Award

On the occasion of its 15th anniversary, FMSI established the annual “A Better World For Children” Award and the first award-winning project was **MAISHA MAPYA - A New Life in Beni**, a project implemented in the North Kivu Region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The project was implemented by the local fraternity of Lay Marists Coeur Sans Frontières (CSF) in collaboration with BICE (Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance) and is aimed at children who are victims of attacks by armed militias in the territory of Beni and the neighbouring province of Ituri: these are children who have lost everything, been orphaned or separated from their parents while fleeing their villages, and have witnessed massacres, looting, burning of their homes and violence of all kinds. The project aims to cure them of the trauma and reintegrate them into the community through a comprehensive action that includes psychosocial support and the implementation of Resilience workshops to overcome the trauma, as well as hospitality and medical care at specialised facilities, accompaniment in the search for their parents and reintegration into school, and home visits to monitor the children's progress.

All the above-mentioned activities are carried out in cooperation with the host communities, local and national authorities (Service urbain des affaires sociales de la Division provinciale des Affaires Sociales, Ministère du Genre, Famille et Enfants) some local NGOs, the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières.

The project also included the training of local resilience workers by a Togolese BICE trainer in order to be able to work more effectively with children in

extremely vulnerable situations. Thanks to the work done, children who were previously silent and as if in a catatonic state have started to speak and smile again. They actively participate in games and other educational activities and cooperate with others, even in daily life.

Thanks to the play-based methodology, many children who had never been to school and had difficulty using a pencil and drawing, gained confidence not only with the help of the educators but also from the other children. Since some of the children were very shy and did not speak, it was necessary to run the same educational workshop up to three times for them to be able to open up and participate, overcoming isolation.

At present, some of them live with foster families, four have been reunited with their families of origin (one is waiting for family reunification), twenty-nine live with close relatives (since their parents were murdered), fifteen live with one of their parents (the other was murdered), almost all of them are still being psychologically monitored and helped in their gradual integration into school.

Thanks to this project, where there has been violence and families decimated and dispersed, a new community of welcoming families has been created. The children themselves, with the help of the educators, have been able to transform their enormous suffering into mutual help and new hope. But once again they make us say: no more violence, no more bloodshed, let the children live their childhood, the right of all.

# #MaristsforUkraine

