
SUMMARY REPORT

Concerning the Tracing of the Compulsory Indeterminate Placement
Children and SOS Children's Villages Syria

Reporting as of 01 August 2025

Mandated by:

SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit Hermann-Gmeiner-Fonds Deutschland e.V. (HGFD) and the Chair
of the Supervisory Board of HGFD

INTRODUCTION	3
1. Investigation: Current Status and Limitations	4
2. Background to the Compulsory Indeterminate Placement Children	6
OVERVIEW: Investigation Concerning CIPs To Date	8
1. Compulsory Indeterminate Placements Process and Criteria to determine	8
2. AFIT Review of Database and uncovering additional CIP Children.....	8
3. Summary of AFIT Investigation Results	9
PART A: CIP Related Issues Identified as a Result of Investigation.....	12
1. Referral, Placement and Exit Process from SOS Syria.....	12
2. Exit and Handover Requests.....	14
3. Authorities and Individuals Involved.....	15
4. Treatment and Care of CIP Children	17
5. Child and Youth Safeguarding Related Issues	18
6. Possible Name Change of CIP Children Under Review by AFIT	19
PART B: Survey of Specific CIP Cases	21
1. The Case of the Yasin/Al Abbasi Children	21
2. The Case of the CF-001 Children	23
3. The Case of the CF-002 Children	25
4. The Case of the Russian CIP Children.....	25
5. The Case of The Iraqi CIP Children	28
6. The Case of CIP Child A.....	29
7. The Case of the CFB-001 Children	31
8. CIP Analogous Children from Eastern Ghouta.....	32
9. Category B Cases Review.....	33
PART C: Reunification and Tracing	34
1. Projected Investigative Work	37
2. Engagement with Other stakeholders	37
ANNEX 1: Investigation Methodology	39
ANNEX 2: Investigation Procedures	40

INTRODUCTION

1. The Advised Further Inquiries Team (AFIT) was mandated by the Board and the Chair of the Supervisory Board of SOS Kinderdörfer weltweit - Hermann Gmeiner Fond Deutschland (hereinafter “HGFD”)¹ on 21 June 2024.² HGFD is one of the main sponsor and funding partner of the programs in SOS Syria and its mandate included conducting a further assessment into the work of SOS Children’s Villages Syria (hereinafter “SOS Syria” or “National Association”)³ in general, with a focused term of reference to investigate the situation of the children classified as “Security Cases” - now referred to as Compulsory Indeterminate Placements (hereinafter “CIPs”) - pursuant to AFIT Terms of Reference (TOR) objective 3.⁴
2. The term CIP was adopted following HGFD’s initial recommendation that the organisation should use a more appropriate term to describe the children, which was supported by the AFIT.⁵ The objective was to adopt an agreed term that more accurately reflected the circumstances of the children and describes the process by which they were placed, rather than continuing to use a term that primarily reflects the circumstances of their parents and risks reinforcing stigma.⁶
3. This investigation, concerns children admitted by the Syrian Arab Republic Army and Armed Forces, Air Force and Air Defence Command, Air Intelligence Directorate, Investigative Branch (hereinafter “Security Authority” or “Air Force Intelligence Directorate”) into SOS Syria’s Alternative Care Children’s Villages as early as 2013, and into the Interim Alternative Care Centres (IACC) of the Emergency Response Programs (ERP) of SOS Syria late 2014, whose parents were imprisoned because they were accused by the Assad Regime of charges related to political dissent, suspected affiliation with terrorist designated entities or activities, or alleged involvement with armed groups, including opposition factions or foreign fighters.
4. This Summary Report focuses on the priority identified by HGFD to determine the circumstances under which the CIP children were placed in the care of SOS Syria, assessing their care and treatment during that placement, and tracing their current whereabouts and

¹ HGFD is a Promoting and Sponsoring Association (PSA), an independent National Member Association of the Federation, with distinct legal status established in accordance with German Law. Together with other PSAs of the Federation, HGFD is major contributor of funding of several projects and activities of SOS Children’s Villages worldwide.

² The 21 June 2024 Mandate and the 23 January 2025 Mandate and hereafter collectively referenced to as “the Mandate”.

³ SOS Syria is a national member association and distinct legal entity established in 1975 under the laws of the Syrian Arab Republic.

⁴ AFIT TOR objective 3 reads: “Plan, scope and undertake focused investigations/assessment into general child safeguarding issues in light of historical issues, and specifically investigate the so called “Security Cases”, to obtain a thorough account of these children’s experiences, including their current whereabouts and the specifics of their integration into the CV program” (a) “Prepare a detailed special report on the ‘Security Cases’ of SOS CV Syria. In so far as it is possible and information fully available this report will deliver a thorough account of these children’s care and experiences with a focus on actions or omissions with regard to preventing their secondary victimization and revictimization, protection against discrimination and bullying/peer violence, as well as the determination of the best interests of the child in general.” (b) “In so far as it is possible and where information is available, the report will include information on their current whereabouts and the specifics of their integration into the CV program.”

⁵ HGFD AFIT Interim Report – Preliminary Report Concerning the Children Classified as Security Case, 17 December 2024 p 20. *“The term ‘Security Cases’ unfairly ties their identity to the actions and circumstances of their parents, as well as the unfortunate conditions they have inherited. A more sensitive and suitable name would help recognize the children’s individuality and protect their dignity.”*

⁶ The process for changing the term to CIP is described below at page 8.

wellbeing. The aim is to establish whether the children were reunited with their families upon leaving SOS Syria or, where feasible, to facilitate their reunification. Other aspects of AFIT's work, including the organisation's broader role and perspective on the placement of these children, is not included in this Summary Report, which is focused on the CIPs, and will be addressed in a subsequent Report.

5. This Summary Report is drawn from prior reporting at approximate six-month intervals, and on a confidential basis, to leadership at HGFD. This Summary Report is a summary of the investigative work conducted thus far, without disclosing confidential or protected information. Statements, findings and recommendations within this Summary Report are necessarily informed to varying degrees by confidential and protected information received, and this Summary Report should be understood in that context.⁷
6. This Summary Report is divided into six Parts. The first two are an introduction and overview of the CIP investigation. Part A provides a detailed description of the process by which the CIP children were placed under the care of SOS Syria, and a review of related issues. Part B provides a review of select CIP cases and related issues. Part C provides details on current tracing efforts, and projected work. Last, Annexes providing details our investigation methodology and our investigation procedures.

1. Investigation: Current Status and Limitations

7. AFIT's investigation is ongoing, and this Summary Report captures the current status of our work. Please note that multiple lines of inquiry under our mandate are still open. As such, the information provided herein is subject to change pending further investigation. At this stage, we are only able to make findings based on the information available to us to date.⁸
8. During AFIT's investigative work, and in light of the extreme sensitivity surrounding the CIP children prior to the fall of the Assad Regime, we undertook extensive precautionary measures to ensure the safety of the SOS Syria staff we had engaged with, AFIT team members, and individuals cooperating with AFIT. These measures included conducting comprehensive security assessments and obtaining briefings from the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), as well as consultations with the Safety and Security at SOS CVI, and relevant regional personnel. In addition, AFIT held multiple discussions with SOS Syria leadership to evaluate potential risks and determine whether AFIT's inquiries might inadvertently expose personnel to harm or security threats. Although this precaution narrowed the scope of the investigation, it was deemed proportionate when weighed against the potential, albeit unquantifiable, risks involved at that time.

⁷ AFIT submitted Confidential Interim Reports on 17 December 2024 and 25 July 2025, focusing on its investigation from June to December 2024, and the end of December 2024 through July 2025 respectively. From January to July 2025, AFIT's work focused primarily on the investigation into the CIP children and related issues

⁸ Please see Annex A for details of our Investigation Methodology including standard of evidence.

9. The information received by AFIT and reported prior to January 2025 reflects the precautions taken, which were necessary given the security considerations in Syria at the time of AFIT's preliminary work and first field visit in September to October 2024. To ensure an ethical and cautious approach, AFIT obtained informed consent from each participant before proceeding with inquiries concerning CIP children. All interviewees agreed to respond to questions. Nonetheless, AFIT recognised that individuals participating in cooperation meetings may have chosen not to disclose the full extent of their knowledge, possibly due to residual safety concerns. Indeed, such instances were confirmed in subsequent meetings following the fall of the Assad Regime. Political developments in Syria in November and December 2024 allowed AFIT to re-engage with certain individuals under significantly reduced threat conditions.
10. Since mid-January 2025, the focus of AFIT's cooperation meetings has been primarily on former staff members, other individuals not connected to SOS Syria, and a limited number of current staff members. Although there have been good responses and cooperation from several former staff members, there has been some reluctance from others to speak with AFIT.
11. The scope of AFIT's investigation was focused on information made available to it by SOS Syria, HGFD, and SOS Children's Villages International (SOS CVI) - with the International Office Region (IOR) for CEE, CIS and Middle East (IOR EUCM), and the International Office (IO)⁹. This included interviews conducted with management and staff and analysis of documentation and other records. The team did not have access to documents pertaining to the CIP children available at the Syrian Arab Republic Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL), the Air Force Intelligence Directorate¹⁰, the Office of the Governor of Rif Damascus, or the Office of the Attorney General of Damascus, all of which have been identified as being involved in different capacities in the placement and handling of the CIP children (discussed at Part A section 1-3). AFIT also reviewed documents and information available from open source, on social media news outlets (Facebook and Instagram), information leaked or released by social media commentators and activists in Syria.
12. Although the work performed incorporates AFIT's understanding of the facts and information as it stands, AFIT does not express legal opinion on any of the issues but merely state the facts as they have come to our attention. We have not been mandated to undertake a legal analysis.
13. For the purpose of its investigative work, investigative objectives, and in relation to any conclusions and/or findings, AFIT adopts a "reasonable basis" or "reasonable grounds to believe" standard, which requires that the facts and information presented must be sufficient

⁹ See Annex 3 for organisational chart. SOS Kinderdorfer-International (SOS KDI, also SOS CVI) commonly referred to as 'the Federation', is the umbrella organization of the national SOS Children's Villages associations, comprised of 121 ordinary members, with **independent legal status**, while 18 more are run by the General Secretariat (GSC), and have **dependent legal status**. SOS CVI is an association registered in the Register of Associations in the Federal Police Headquarters in Innsbruck, Austria, in accordance with Austrian Law.

¹⁰ Security Authorities, or Air Force Intelligence Directorate, will be used interchangeably, in reference to the Syrian Arab Republic Army and Armed Forces, Air Force and Air Defence Command, Air Intelligence Directorate, Investigative Branch.

to lead an objective observer to conclude that a particular event or situation is likely to have occurred beyond suspicion but doesn't necessarily require absolute certainty. Therefore, where a conclusion or finding has been made by AFIT, it means that an objective and ordinarily prudent observer would find that the event or situation occurred as described with a reasonable degree of certainty.

2. Background to the Compulsory Indeterminate Placement Children

14. During the civil war and lingering internal conflict in Syria, the Assad Regime's systemic persecution and detention of political dissidents, opposition fighters, foreign combatants, and individuals accused or suspected of terrorist activities, resulted in hundreds, if not thousands, of children losing parental care. It is within this context that at the height of the civil war, SOS Syria began receiving children without parental care, including children internally displaced, children from areas of heavy fighting or siege, and children separated from their parents for various reasons. The children were placed in IACC set up as part of SOS Syria's ERP and managed by SOS CVI in several locations in Syria, for support and protection.
15. The placement of children into the care of SOS Syria by security authorities led to the adoption of the designation "Security Case" children that was widely used by SOS Syria, and with regional and international staff at the IO, and now more widely within public sphere. This term refers to children and minors whose parents were either in the custody of, or under investigation by, the Air Force Intelligence Directorate - subject to arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, custodial torture, or other extrajudicial measures typically directed against individuals suspected of political dissent or affiliation with armed opposition groups.¹¹ The process of referral, placement and exit of the children is discussed below (Part A, section 1-3).
16. The placement of these children did not fit the admission criteria of SOS Syria. Most notably, at the time it was not possible or permissible to establish the circumstance of the parents or immediate family members of the children due to security and safety risks. The established admission process required, among other steps, meeting with the families of the child, understanding their circumstance and/or whereabouts, having access to official documents pertaining to the child including birth certificates, a family book, temporary guardianship transfer, and involvement of a Sharia Judge as it pertains to the temporary transfer of guardianship from the parent (usually the father, or in the absence of the father, the

¹¹The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria's 2025: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/web-agony-un-commissions-report-unveils-depths-former-governments-detention>
<https://iiim.un.org/documents/reports/>

If the Dead Could Speak, A 2015 Human Rights Watch report: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/12/16/if-dead-could-speak/mass-deaths-and-torture-syrias-detention-facilities>

Human slaughterhouse: Mass hangings and extermination at Sadnaya Prison, Syria:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/5415/2017/en/>

The Syrian Government Detention System as a tool of Violent Repression, June 2024, IIIM Report: <https://iiim.un.org/the-syrian-government-detention-system-as-a-tool-of-violent-repression/>

grandfather)¹² to SOS Syria.¹³ Most documents obtained from SOS Syria and reviewed by AFIT regarding CIP children do not include any civil and legal documents. There were however referral letters from the Security Authority and MOSAL accompanying the placement of each child. These letters contained clear instructions (security instructions) requiring SOS Syria to accept the children, provide them with care, ensure that their names and details were kept confidential, and not to take any actions regarding the children without consulting with the referring entity.¹⁴

17. Equally, the processes at that time for the exit of the children from SOS Syria, formally known as the reintegration process (or reunification with families), was not adhered to.
18. SOS Syria also received children who had lost parental care due to the parent's imprisonment, reportedly for offenses ranging from minor to major crimes; indicating, superficially at least, that their imprisonment or detention was not politically motivated. SOS Syria routinely received children referred through formal channels such as the police, the Office of the Attorney General, or prosecutor's office, and other security bodies, for various reasons reflecting them as internally displaced children. However, these referrals occurred within a framework of designated referral authorities in coordination with the MOSAL and most importantly in line with 'gatekeeping' criteria, now enshrined in the SOS Syria Gatekeeping guidelines.¹⁵ It is important to distinguish these instances from those involving placements originating from the Air Force Intelligence Directorate, albeit with the involvement of MOSAL. The Air Force Intelligence Directorate has been identified as responsible for placing children with SOS Syria whose parents were detained and under investigation by them.

¹²Gatekeeping: National Guidelines to ensure the necessity and suitability of care for children without adequate parental care (SOS Children's Villages Syria), of 5/10/2022, states: "*Guardianship: For relatives of the extended family (in accordance with the provisions of article 176 of the Personal Status Code), the father and the grandfather may, upon loss of the father, establish a chosen guardian for their minor or unborn child, and may also reverse this decision. The guardianship is submitted after death to the court for confirmation*"

¹³Article 177 of the Personal Status Code: If the Minor or the Unborn Child has not any selected guardian, the court appoints a guardian; a care institution may also be appointed in accordance with the Institutional Care System. Children are placed through the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor in specialized institutions or centres, be they governmental, non-governmental or private, after obtaining a Temporary Special Guardianship to provide the children with permanent or temporary care according to criteria established by the responsible authorities.

¹⁴ These instructions are typically found in referral letters concerning children admitted by Security Authorities, and we are referring to them as "security instructions" for the purpose of our work.

¹⁵ These guidelines are the process of gatekeeping in the laws and practices at national level, and is the process of referring children and families to appropriate services or care arrangements, with the aim of preventing inappropriate placements.

OVERVIEW: Investigation Concerning CIPs To Date

1. Compulsory Indeterminate Placements Process and Criteria to determine

19. In December 2024, HGFD made recommendations to SOS Syria and IOR EUCM, to adopt a more appropriate term to describe the children.¹⁶ For this purpose AFIT worked with the designated team from SOS Syria and IOR EUCM to develop a more appropriate term. The objective was to adopt an agreed term that more accurately reflected the circumstances of the children and the process by which they were placed with SOS Syria, rather than continuing use of a term that primarily reflects the circumstances of their parents and risks reinforcing stigma.
20. Over the course of January through March 2025, AFIT organized and carried out numerous meetings, virtually and in person in Syria, focusing on the process of compiling information obtained from SOS Syria and cooperation meetings focused on those with direct knowledge or interaction with CIP children and the relevant process around them. The new *agreed* term was "Compulsory Indeterminate Placements" or 'CIPs'. This term, definition, and qualifying criteria, were all agreed by the designated SOS Syria and IOR EUCM's representative, and HGFD, as confirmed via AFIT. The criteria referred to children placed in SOS Syria Alternative Care programmes and SOS Children's Villages International (CVI) run ERP/IACC facilities, at the direction of the Security Authority or its direction to MOSAL. The definition underscores the Security Authority's control over placement, duration, supervision of activities, involvement in any reunification processes, and the hand over and receipt of the children. However, in subsequent public and internal documents of SOS Syria and IOR EUCM, this term has not been used, opting instead for the phrasing "*children who were forcibly separated and placed in our care without proper documentation*".¹⁷

2. AFIT Review of Database and uncovering additional CIP Children

21. In 2024, AFIT started its investigative work with an initial known 35 CIP children. From early January 2025, AFIT commenced an extensive review of a large database of records of children admitted to the programs of SOS Syria, which it had received from the IO and IOR EUCM. The review of the database revealed additional children whose admission to SOS Syria was consistent with the 35 CIP admissions which AFIT was already investigating. While AFIT was conducting its independent review of these documents, SOS Syria was engaged in their own review of the database. The AFIT and SOS Syria teams engaged in the review of the database independently and compiled their own lists with a much larger number of CIP children.

¹⁶ AFIT, supported this recommendation which was reflected in the HGFD AFIT Interim Report – Preliminary Report Concerning the Children Classified as Security Case, 17 December 2024 p 20. "*The term 'Security Cases' unfairly ties their identity to the actions and circumstances of their parents, as well as the unfortunate conditions they have inherited. A more sensitive and suitable name would help recognize the children's individuality and protect their dignity.*"

¹⁷ See e.g., SOS Children's Villages: Committed to family tracing and reunification in Syria, SOS Children's Villages International (<https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/news/statement-syria>).

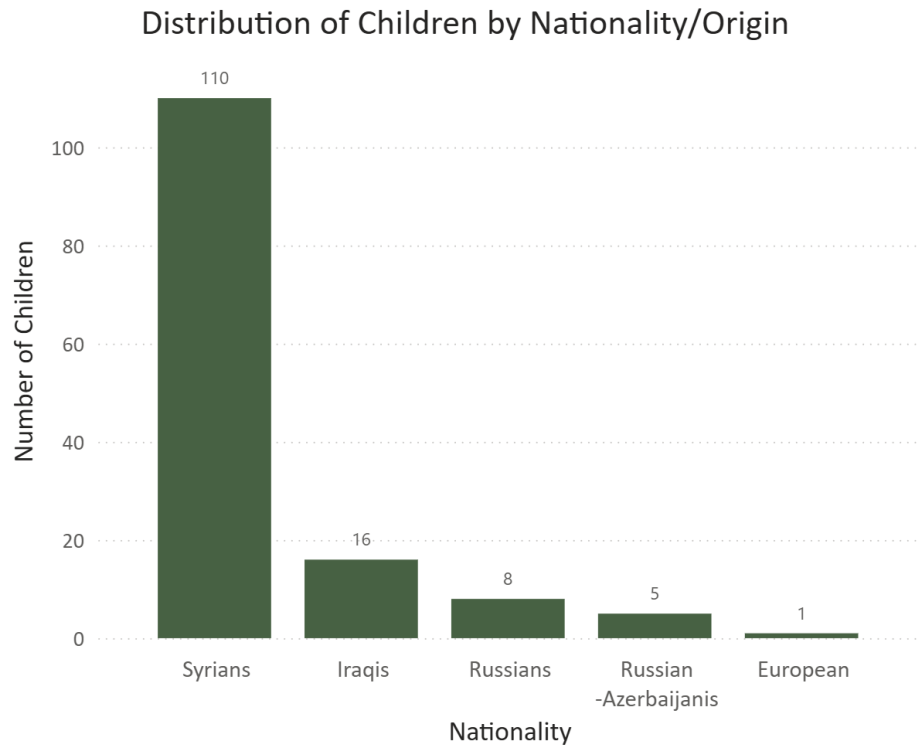
22. In a collaborative and cooperative process, AFIT and the team at SOS Syria, discussed and compared the two lists. The teams agreed in identifying the same children as falling within the CIP classification for 139 of 140 children, while the circumstances of one child required further investigation. AFIT classified that child as CIP based on the referral by Security Authority and its ongoing control over the child, the handling of the child by SOS Syria which was consistent with that of a CIP, and other characteristics including that the child was described as having parents of European origin. However, SOS Syria did not agree on this conclusion, contending that the child's mother was not a person of security interest to the Security Authority and other rationale which are discussed below at Part B Section 6. AFIT confirmed its position following further investigation. Therefore, the list of currently known CIPs - according to AFIT - is 140 children.

3. Summary of AFIT Investigation Results

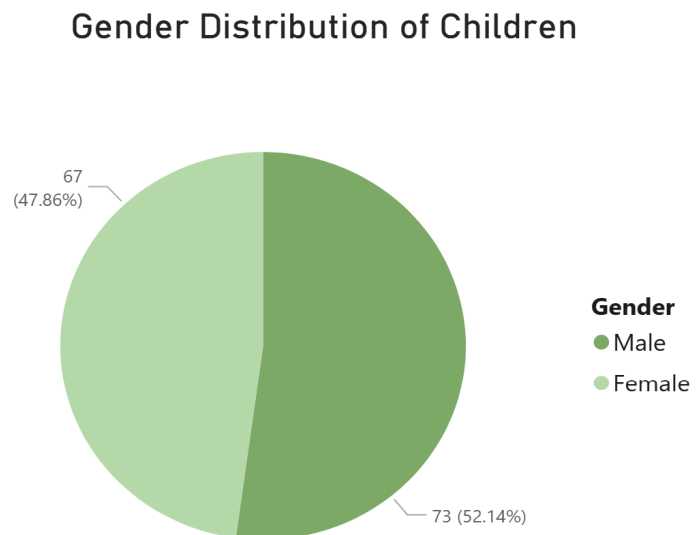
23. Most of the documentary information reviewed regarding CIP children and their placement, was provided by SOS Syria following their review and compilation of available records between January and March 2025. Additional information was obtained in cooperation meetings with individuals who retained documents they were willing to share, including photographs of several CIPs. The results of AFIT's investigation of the CIPs is represented in the following table and graphs addressing nationality and/or origin, age range, and gender.

Origin or Nationality	Particulars
110 Syrians	A total of 110 are Syrian nationals, based on documents reviewed.
16 Iraqis	A total of 16 children are Iraqi nationals.
8 Russians	A total of 8 children are Russian possibly of Chechen origin according to testimonies received.
5 Russian - Azerbaijanis	A total of 5 Russian children are most likely of Azerbaijani origin, based on documents reviewed.
1 European	One child is possibly of European origin based on documents reviewed and accounts received.

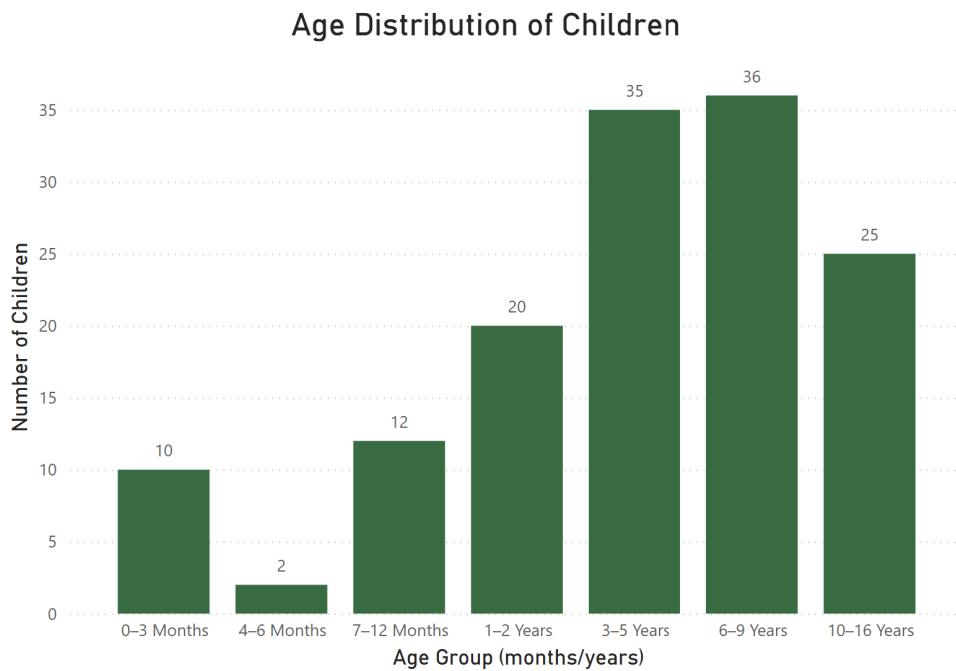
Table 1: Summary of confirmed CIPs by regional origin and/or nationality and established particulars.



Graph 1: Nationality and or Origin of CIP Children



Graph 2: Gender Distribution



Graph 3: Age distribution at the time of admission

24. For most CIP children, with only a few exceptions, the available information regarding their date of birth is limited to only the year. Consequently, the indicated age range remains an approximation based on the limited data provided and information shared during cooperation meetings with caregivers and other staff members who, for example, were only able to estimate the age or refer to the child's corresponding school year.

PART A: CIP Related Issues Identified as a Result of Investigation

25. The specific CIP cases discussed in detail below are primarily the outcome of investigative work conducted following the fall of the Assad Regime, and between January and July 2025. To protect the identities of CIPs and their families, ciphers have been applied.
26. However, in respect of five CIP children from the same family, CF-001, they were already a focus of our investigation before December 2024, having learned of their possible placement with SOS Syria during the course of the Independent Special Commission (ISC).¹⁸ While the cases of Russian children and CF-002 children were among those for which investigation had started prior to December 2024, and AFIT received the most documentation, and gathered numerous accounts regarding their reunification and care at SOS Syria, there were several key aspects missing from the information AFIT was able to collect before December 2024. However, from January 2025 after the fall of Assad Regime, we were able to collect and corroborate further information. The other cases reported below were also only uncovered since January 2025, thus several aspects of these cases remain under investigation.

1. Referral, Placement and Exit Process from SOS Syria

27. Information obtained and considered as part of our investigation from January 2025 supports the conclusion that the referral and placement procedures for CIPs were not isolated incidents, but rather part of an organized process involving coordinated actions by various governmental agencies of the Assad Regime. As demonstrated below, as it relates to SOS Syria, it has received referral documentation or requests to place children under its care for all the currently identified CIP children from Syrian governmental agencies since 2013. In this respect, based on a review of documentation provided by SOS Syria, and based on several accounts received through cooperation meetings, AFIT has been able to identify this referral system. However, the extent and quality of documentation available for each individual CIP case varies considerably. In most instances, it was possible to clarify factors contributing to the presence or absence of documentation. In other cases, the lack of documentation remains unexplained.
28. For the CIP children, whose specific cases are reviewed in greater detail below, AFIT has identified standard referral letters from the Security Authority involved, which in all cases were from the *Army and Armed force, Air Force and Air Defence Command Air Intelligence, Directorate Investigative Branch*, and or referrals from MOSA/MOSAL¹⁹ and the Governor

¹⁸ The ISC was appointed and mandated by the International Senate (IS) of the Federation, to review and investigate serious allegations and concerns arising from the work of SOS CV Federation. The ISC Reports - Part I Public Summary Report was published on 6 June 2023, and the more detailed Part II Confidential Investigative Reports and Annexes presented to the International Senate of SOS CV and its Executive Board on 5 May 2023. <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/our-work/our-safeguarding-framework/safeguarding-info-hub/isc-report>

¹⁹ Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) was the predecessor of MOSAL, prior to its merging with Ministry of Labour in 2016, following which MOSAL was established.

of Rif Damascus. The two latter entities routinely referred to a letter from the Security Authority as the main requesting authority of the placement. Referral letters consistently have security instructions on how a child should be treated.

29. The initial referral or placement letter was issued by the Security Authority bearing a signature and a stamp, in most instances addressed to the Governor of Rif Damascus, with instructions to find a “suitable shelter” for the child/children whose name(s) are listed in the letter. In some instances, however, the letters may be addressed directly to MOSAL, and in others to SOS Syria. The letters contained full name(s) of the child/children; first name of the mother; and year of birth of the child in question. In some cases, there is reference to the gender of the child especially if the referral letter contained only one child. Typically, the referral letters from the security authorities stated:

Please receive and provide suitable shelter for the aforementioned child/children, keep their names confidential, and do not take any action against them except in coordination with our administration, in compliance with our limitations and in accordance with what the national interest and security necessity require. (emphasis added).²⁰

30. In the majority of referrals for placement the typical steps appear to be the following:

First: the Air Force Directorate sent the referral letter to Governor of Rif Damascus with the instructions to find suitable shelter as described above.

Second: The Governor of Rif Damascus sent a referral letter to MOSAL making reference to the request received from Air Force Directorate and instructed them to find suitable shelter for the children.

Third: MOSAL sent a referral letter to SOS Syria, making reference to the letters from Security Authority and the Governor, requesting the children be placed in SOS Syria, with clear security instructions.

In other instances, the letters from Air Force Directorate were addressed directly to SOS CV Syria, but these are not common.

31. For some CIP children, AFIT found letters from MOSAL addressed back to the Governor of Rif Damascus, confirming that the child/children were placed under the care of SOS Syria, as per their instruction to find them shelter. In other instances, we have identified letters from SOS Syria, referring to a letter from Security Authority or MOSAL, confirming that the children referred have been placed in one of its programs.

²⁰ The scanned copies of the documents we have received and reviewed, believed to be the original documents, are in Arabic. In the translation process, care was taken to preserve the exact wording, with the translator remaining faithful to a literal rendering of the Arabic text into English.

32. The referral letters from MOSAL to SOS Syria typically contained security instructions as follows:

Please collect the following children [list of names] and provide them with appropriate shelter and do not take any action regarding them except after coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, while emphasising the need to consider their situation, keep their names confidential, and do not leak any private information about them (emphasis added).

33. For all CIP children, AFIT identified a referral letter as described above. It is also noted that the majority of the children appear to have been placed with SOS Syria on or shortly after the date indicated on the letter from the relevant authorities. This raises the possibility that the children were placed before the letter was formally issued or received, suggesting either prior verbal communication approving the placement of each child as they arrived or an established understanding that they would be accepted.
34. The majority of children were placed in one of the IACC of the ER programs, in the first instance, and this information is again reported back to the referring Security Authority through MOSAL. For those that stayed longer they were moved to the regular Alternative Care in Children's Villages Sabura and Qudsaya, once the IACC were closed. Another group of children (minority) were directly placed in the Alternative Care Children's Villages.²¹ According to each child's length of stay, additional information regarding the child and relevant requests regarding the needs of the child (such as permission to enrol in school or to attend a "forensic" medical examination) were communicated to the security authorities. This is consistent with what AFIT has been told by SOS Syria - that all the necessary decisions affecting the CIP children required permission and approval from Security Authority.²²

2. Exit and Handover Requests

35. For the majority of CIP children, the process around their exit from SOS Syria did not follow the then exit and reintegration procedures of SOS Syria and SOS CV Federation. We have identified letters requesting the handover of the children.²³ The volume of documents available depends on the length of stay of each child. Children that stayed with SOS Syria longer have more documents while those that stayed a short time have only referral and

²¹ Alternative Care / "Children's Villages" Model (SOS Children's Villages), is rooted in ensuring every child grows up in a nurturing, family-like environment. Children live in small-scale, family-like households—commonly referred to as "villages"—typically comprising 8 to 15 homes. Each house is staffed by a dedicated caregiver (an "SOS parent") and often houses biological siblings together to maintain family bonds. More information can be found here <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/our-work/protection/quality-care>.

²² Cooperation meeting with SOS Syria 27 August 2014, virtually, and 24 September 2024 Damascus, in person.

²³ Except for a few children who are believed to have been reunified with their mothers directly albeit with the permission of the Air Force Intelligence Directorate, for the remaining CIP children there are requests to handover either to the Security Authorities through their designated security assistant(s), or in the case of the Russian children, instructions were issued for their transfer to the Russian Consulate.

handover letters. For instance, two siblings who stayed only four days with SOS Syria, had just the two documents in their file showing they were placed at a specific alternative care location and then handed over to the Security Authority (the handover request includes the name of the security personnel who received them from SOS Syria).²⁴

36. From documents reviewed, exit from SOS Syria's care is evidenced by a request to "hand over" letter, typically issued by the Security Authority or MOSA/MOSAL on behalf of, or on instruction from, the Security Authority. Such a letter would typically state:

Further to our letter [details of letter] in which we presented to you the child [name of child/children] and his siblings to be located in a suitable shelter, please hand over to us the children.

37. The handover request letter usually includes a handwritten annotation by the Security Authority assistant²⁵ who received the child/children, confirming receipt of the named children. This note is usually signed and dated. AFIT has identified six Security Authority assistants that engaged in the exit and hand over of the children, as the persons receiving the children. This process is consistent with the accounts received from individuals interviewed.

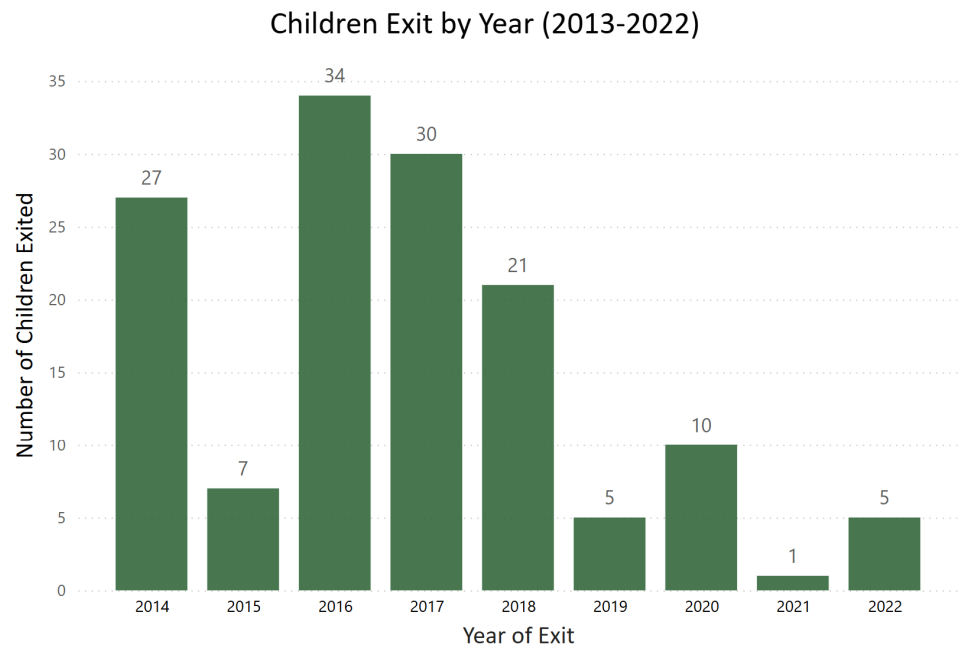
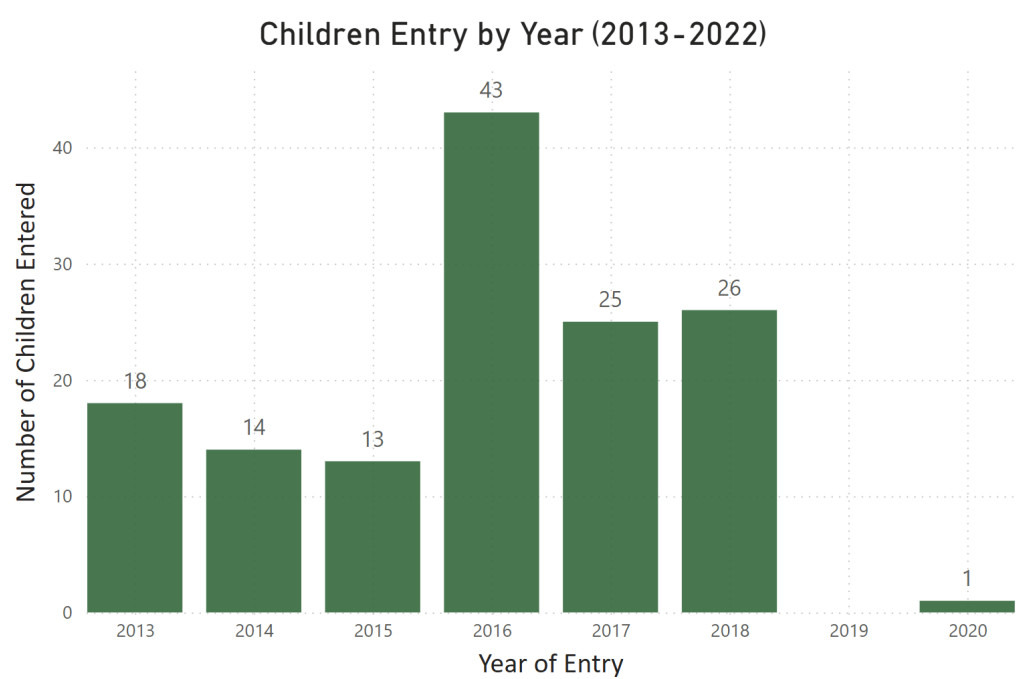
3. Authorities and Individuals Involved

38. None of the referral letters issued by the Security Authority included a clearly identifiable personal name. However, they consistently feature a handwritten signature, an official institutional stamp, and a generic professional title indicating authority, such as "*Director of Air Intelligence, by delegation Head of Investigation Branch*" which is consistently included in all letters, signifying the role of the issuing official without revealing their personal identity.
39. All the referral letters from MOSA/MOSAL consistently include the full name of a sitting minister or deputy minister, with handwritten signature, official ministerial stamp, and their full title. All referrals from MOSA between the years 2013 and 2016 bear the signature and full name of a former MOSA Minister. All referrals between the years 2016 and 2019 bear the signature and full name of a former MOSAL Minister. The name of a Deputy Minister appears in a few referrals alongside the name of the former MOSAL Minister.
40. All referral letters from Security Authorities are addressed to the Governor of Rif Damascus, although in almost all instances the letters do not bear the governor's name. Similarly, letters sent from the Governor of Rif Damascus to SOS Syria do not bear the governor's name, or that of any other person, with the exception of two instances involving two families of two

²⁴ Siblings CF-006 were admitted to SOS Syria only for four days in 2017.

²⁵ The term 'Security Assistant' is a direct translation from the original Arabic designation. Accordingly, we have opted to retain this terminology to preserve the accuracy and integrity of the source reference.

siblings each in which the name of the Governor appears - one letter regarding a handover request in 2016, and one referral letter in December 2016.



Graphs 4 and 5: Children entry by Year and Children exit by Year

4. Treatment and Care of CIP Children

41. Based on several and consistent accounts received, SOS Syria provided care and services to the CIP children that matched the quality and standards afforded to all other children under its care. To the extent possible within the limitations imposed by the internal conflict and previous regime, SOS Syria demonstrated efforts to advocate for the CIP children's well-being. This included access to education for the children, implementing processes aimed at safeguarding their best interests, such as ensuring that prison visits to parents were conducted in a manner that protected the children's mental well-being.
42. So far, AFIT has identified five child safeguarding incidents involving CIP children.²⁶ AFIT reviewed documents of the relevant actions taken by SOS Syria to investigate the matters - including the actions of the person(s) involved - taking the necessary corrective or punitive measures, and providing support to the affected child.²⁷ However, AFIT did not find evidence of systemic child safeguarding failures, concerns or mistreatment of the CIP children in general, and due to the fact that they are CIP.
43. Several current and former staff members consistently reported that there was no mistreatment, abuse, discrimination, bullying, harassment against CIP children, and that all of them were treated the same as all other children, in accordance with SOS CV Federation wide policies and standards.²⁸ Several caregivers interviewed reported that children arrived in poor physical condition or generally in a state of neglect. Some caregivers and program participants informed us that as soon as they received the children, they went through the process of cleaning them and consoling them and trying to win their trust as the children appeared scared.
44. In a case of two Russian CIP children, individuals we spoke to reported that they noticed bruises and indications of physical harm upon arrival in SOS Syria consistent with physical abuse.²⁹ It is not clear yet whether the children were mistreated or abused by their parents prior to being imprisoned, or in prison, or whether the children were abused by other individuals. This is a line of inquiry we are pursuing.
45. Several caregivers reported that there was a high level of scrutiny on them and how they treated the CIP children. Both to ensure that the children were safe, but also as a way to monitor what the children may have told or revealed to their caregivers about their background and

²⁶ SOS Children's Villages Child and Youth Safeguarding policy April 2023: *"Child and youth safeguarding is the responsibility that SOS Children's Villages has to take all possible steps to make sure its staff and representatives, its operations and its programmes do not harm children and young people or expose them to any risk of harm, including harm caused by other children and young people in care of and supported by SOS Children's Villages, and to respond appropriately when harm does occur."*

²⁷ For example, AFIT was informed of an incident - supported by documents reviewed - involving a caregiver using language that can be stigmatizing towards a CIP child. This matter was addressed in an appropriate manner and appears, so far, to be an isolated case.

²⁸ SOS Children's Villages Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy, April 2023:
https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/a4415d99-338b-4636-9162-0d419904b281/Child_and_Youth_Safeguarding_Policy_2023_EN_LIBRARY.pdf

²⁹ Cooperation meeting, Damascus Syria, held on 27 February 2025, in person and virtually.

their parents. Most caregivers that cared for CIP children confirm receiving security instruction regarding the children from the facilities or village management.

46. The caregivers reported that they were told that *“they were supposed to give them [the children] back to their families as they received them”* and gave an example of a CIP child who *“was injured following a fall, and the caregiver who looked after the child was heavily penalised, given warning and then eventually let go. The instruction was to look after them very well. Not even allowed to cut their hair.”*³⁰ Several individuals informed us that they were given strict instructions not to photograph CIPs, not to include them in any promotional or advertising material for fund raising, including any photographs and videos taken during festivities and events.³¹ One former staff member reported that she thought the CIP children were “treated differently” in that there were many restrictions placed on them because they received instructions from Security Authority and were strictly enforcing those instructions.
47. Thus far, no other child safeguarding incident failures were identified or reported, besides those referenced above which are covered in greater detail within the specific cases below.

5. Child and Youth Safeguarding Related Issues

48. The child and youth safeguarding related reports detailed below were received from SOS Syria following a request from AFIT intended to understand if any cases of harm, discrimination, mistreatment, or abuse had occurred pertaining to CIP children. SOS Syria has the duty to ensure that children and youths under its care are not harmed or exposed to risk of harm, including harm caused by other children and youths.³² Incidents regarding any harm, abuse or mistreatment of children in general under the SOS CV Federation and SOS Syria, are recorded as a child and youth safeguarding concern or incident that must be assessed or investigated.
49. A CIP child was admitted to hospital suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting. The relevant incident reporting paper states that this was due *“to the neglect of caregiver.”*³³ The same report alleges further that the same caregiver had verbally abused and exploited another three CIP children under her care.³⁴ Upon investigation of the incidents conducted by SOS Syria safeguarding team, it was determined that regarding the first incident, there was no negligence found regarding the care of the child, her illness was caused by being vaccinated a couple of days prior, and that the child had eaten peanut butter which upon discontinuation the diarrhoea

³⁰ Cooperation meeting with a former caregiver, held on 28 March 2025, virtually

³¹ Cooperation meeting with a former staff member at National Office, in person and virtually Damascus 25 February 2025.

³² SOS Children’s Villages Child and Youth Safeguarding policy April 2023, states: *“Child and youth safeguarding is the responsibility that SOS Children’s Villages has to take all possible steps to make sure its staff and representatives, its operations and its programmes do not harm children and young people or expose them to any risk of harm, including harm caused by other children and young people in care of and supported by SOS Children’s Villages, and to respond appropriately when harm does occur.”*

³³ Initial Reporting form, concerning child CSY110

³⁴ The caregiver had instructed the older sibling of the three CIP children (aged 11, 6, and 4 years) to bathe the children and look after them, and clean the house, *“thus assigning her tasks that were not appropriate for her age”*.

and vomiting stopped. However, in connection with the further incident, SOS Syria found that the caregiver had verbally abused and exploited the children.³⁵

50. Another child suffered an injury to the arm, which required urgent medical attention in hospital. The relevant incident report stated that although the injury was caused by another child, it happened because of the caregiver's negligence. The same child suffered a fall which injured the child's head, requiring the child to be rushed to hospital. It was found that this was due to the negligence of the caregiver, who was dismissed from her position.
51. For all the incidents referenced above, AFIT reviewed the corresponding incident reports and meeting minutes documenting the internal investigations and the discussions on appropriate measures to be taken against the caregivers involved.
52. Based on documents reviewed provided by SOS Syria, and based on numerous corroborating accounts by caregivers, psychologists and social workers, a total of 25 CIP children visited their parents (mainly mothers) in prisons. AFIT found that the children of Russian origin had multiple visits and more visitations than their Syrian counterparts. For other CIPs we have reviewed letters from the Security Authority requesting hand over of the children with a note saying, *"we will return them to you as soon as we finish with them."* These letters likely mean that the children were taken for visitation to their mothers in prison, as we know was a practice.
53. The documents reviewed, and as corroborated by numerous accounts, show that visitations were requested and arranged by Security Authority. In some instances, we were informed from accounts received that prison visits were challenging for the children, and to address this, the children were accompanied by either their caregivers or the psychologists to prison visitations. Psychological support was also provided to them upon their return.
54. Although the caregivers and individuals we spoke to confirmed that the children were well cared for, some caregivers reported that some of the CIP children were experiencing mental health related issues. This was confirmed by both internal and external psychologists who AFIT interviewed and who had provided support to, or assessment of, CIP children.

6. Possible Name Change of CIP Children Under Review by AFIT

55. We have received consistent reporting of the practice of changing the names of some CIP children. At this stage, it remains unclear where and how the name changes occurred. AFIT is exploring several possible scenarios based on the documents and accounts received so far.
56. Some former caregivers reported that the management of the alternative care facility gave them a name by which to refer to a child, but the child often did not respond to that name. One

³⁵ Meeting minutes of SOS Syria Safeguarding team to discuss incident.

former caregiver³⁶ informed us of a child she looked after from one month old until two years old, during which time she knew the child by a specific name and surname. However, once the child was reunified with the mother, she was informed by the mother of the child's real surname.³⁷

57. A former caregiver described receiving two siblings into her care and being given their names by management. However, she later heard the siblings addressing each other by different names. She made a concerted effort to speak with the children and to listen closely to their conversations, ultimately determining that their names had been changed. Another caregiver indicated that she eventually learned that the name of the child she was caring for was different from what she had known him by.
58. For some children of Russian origin, one person we spoke to reported knowing the children by specific names, communicated by the management, but the individual reported that she later saw a document relating to the same Russian children, in which their names were different and described as "*long names*". AFIT reviewed documents concerning Russian and Syrian children and noted inconsistencies in how the names of the same child are recorded across different documents. In some cases, these appear to be variations in spelling, while in others, the names differ entirely, most often involving either a change to the first name or the surname.

³⁶ Cooperation meeting with former caregiver, virtually and in person - Damascus 28 March 2025

³⁷ Cooperation meeting with former caregiver, virtually and in person - Damascus 28 March 2025

PART B: Survey of Specific CIP Cases

1. The Case of the Yasin/Al Abbasi Children

59. Since the fall of the Assad Regime in December 2024, the AFIT has also investigated whether the children of Dr Rania Al Abbasi were placed in the care of SOS Syria.³⁸ A significant amount of information gathered concerning the Al Abbasi children comes from open sources.³⁹ Based on these sources, it is reported that on 9 March 2013, members of the Military Security branch in Damascus arrested Mr Abdul Rahman Yasin (or Yassine) the husband of Dr Rania Al Abbasi, at their home in Damascus. Two days later, on 11 March 2013, a large contingent of Military Security personnel returned to the home and arrested Dr Rania Al Abbasi, with her six children aged between 14 and 2 years, as well as her secretary/dental assistant.
60. Beginning on 12 December 2024, numerous videos and documents have been posted on social media by family members of Dr Rania Al Abbasi, claiming that SOS Syria and other orphanages and associations in Damascus have been “hiding” the children of missing persons and detainees in Syria, including placement under false names. The videos have reached thousands of viewers primarily in Arabic-speaking countries. These claims raise profound concerns regarding the role of SOS Syria during the Assad Regime, particularly with respect to its potential involvement in the forcible separation of children from their families and the compulsory placement of those children.
61. Despite advocacy for the family’s release prior to the fall of the Assad Regime, and subsequent investigations following its fall, no information has emerged regarding the fate of Dr Rania and her children. Investigations, including leaked Caesar files (Human Rights Watch) from 2015, suggest that Mr Yasin may have died as a result of torture in Sadnaya prison.⁴⁰
62. Against this background and as per its Mandate, in cooperation meetings AFIT regularly addressed whether any individual participating in our cooperation meeting had knowledge of or encountered the Yasin/Al Abbasi children and being under the care of SOS Syria at any stage.⁴¹ In most instances when one or more of the questions regarding the children were asked,

³⁸ We have identified two variant spellings for the children’s surname: “Yasin” which is more commonly used in recent references, and “Yassine/Yassin” found in earlier media articles. Although the children are widely known as the Al Abbasi children, reflecting their mother’s family name, their official surname is Yasin. To avoid any confusion and to ensure consistency, we have decided to include both paternal and maternal surnames in this Summary Report.

³⁹<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241219-painful-wait-in-saudi-for-family-of-detained-syrian-chess-champion> - France 24: Painful wait in Saudi for family of detained Syrian chess champion.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/06/03/syria-missing-children-orphanages-assad-detainees/> Foreign Policy: Syria's Orphanages and Missing Children Under the Assad Regime.

<https://daraj.media/en/before-syria-there-was-russia-the-hidden-children-of-care-institutions/> Daraj Media: Before Syria, There Was Russia: The Hidden Children of Care Institutions.

<https://tensofthousands.amnesty.org/content/rania-al-abbasi-and-her-six-children.html> Amnesty International: Rania al-Abbasi and her six children https://www.state.gov/withoutjustcause/#Rania_Al_Abbasi U.S. State Department: Without Just Cause Campaign

⁴⁰<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/16/syria-stories-behind-photos-killed-detainees> Syria: Stories Behind Photos of Killed Detainees. Caesar Photos’ Victims Identified.

⁴¹ Depending on the cooperation meeting and the person participating, one or multiple of the following and other similar questions were asked: When was the first time you heard about the Yasin siblings, children of Dr Rania Al Abbasi? What can you tell us about the Yasin children, Dr Rania Al Abbasi’s children? What do you know about the Yasin children, Dr Rania Al Abbasi’s

individuals reported they have no direct knowledge of or have not directly encountered the children. Individuals have also answered that the first time they heard of Al Abbasi children was through the social media posts since December 2024 or in other media articles.

63. Several caregivers, both current and former, have indicated that they consulted with colleagues who had been with the organisation significantly longer than themselves, prompted by social media posts accusing SOS Syria. These caregivers report that none of the colleagues they spoke with had any knowledge of the children, none of having cared for the Yasin/Al Abbasi children or did not have knowledge of any of their colleagues caring for the children, and none were able to recognise the children from posted photographs.
64. Other former staff members who worked at SOS Syria, both at the national office and other locations at various levels, also confirmed that they had no knowledge of the Yasin/Al Abbasi children. Several of these former staff members left the organisation with grievances and HR issues, and although they were often critical of various aspects of the organisation, they were consistent in defending it against the many social media-based accusations. Additionally, current and former staff members consistently reported being severely affected by the issues surrounding the Yasin/Al Abbasi children, and the accusations against the organisation and its employees as a whole, claiming that the accusations are untrue, or grossly exaggerated.
65. In December 2024, there was a public social media post claiming that a girl appearing briefly in an SOS Syria promotional video from 22 November 2022 was one of the daughters of Dr Rania Al Abbasi. In response to this claim, SOS Syria arranged a call between representatives of the Al Abbasi family and the girl, during which she personally confirmed that she had no relation to the Al Abbasi family. On 25 December 2024, another relative of the Al Abbasi family, posing as a prospective tenant, visited the apartment where the girl in question and six other young girls reside as part of the SOS Syria youth housing programme.⁴² The woman entered the apartment accompanied by the property owner, and began taking photos and videos of the girl. The assistant youth supervisor intervened and informed her that filming the girls was not permitted, at which point the woman left the premises. It later emerged that the property owner had contacted the Al Abbasi family and informed them that young people were residing in his property under the SOS Syria programme.
66. The phone call between the family of Dr Rania Al Abbasi and the girl appeared to have resolved the matter positively, and the family accepted that she was not one of the children. However, this issue resurfaced in July 2025, following the launch of the official investigation

children? Do you know when the Al Abbasi children were in SOS CV Syria? Do you remember seeing the Al Abbasi children? Do you remember any high profile Security children? Please look at this picture, do you remember any or all of these children?

⁴² As part of its programs, SOS Syria has Small groups homes (SGH), in which Care is provided to small groups of children or young people, by professional child and youth care workers working on a shift or rotational basis. Usually, there is a focus on returning the child or young person to their family. Youth are accommodated in several different apartments around Damascus. They are supervised and looked after by one or two individuals referred to as youth supervisors. <https://www.sos-syria.org/sos-services/alternative-care/sos-small-group-homes>; <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/our-work/protection/quality-care>

into missing children of detainees by the National Missing Persons Committee.⁴³ This investigation saw the arrest, by the Ministry of Interior, of former directors of Lahn Al Hayat orphanage and subsequently the arrest of former MOSA/MOSAL Ministers (one of whom was in office between 2013–2015 and the second between 2015–2020) in connection with the missing children of detainees. These developments reignited speculation about the identity of the young girl featured in the SOS Syria promotional material.

67. As a result, AFIT initiated a request to SOS Syria to provide the file of the girl in question, containing civil and legal documents, including family details, which was reviewed. AFIT held a virtual meeting with the girl in question on 18 July 2025 to validate her identity and clarify her circumstances. Based on documentation reviewed and the interview with the girl, AFIT has no reasonable basis to consider the girl as one of the Yasin/Al Abbasi siblings.
68. AFIT acknowledges the particular significance of the Yasin/Al Abbasi case within the wider CIP issue. AFIT continues to pursue and verify lines of inquiry regarding numerous CIPs and their families, including the Yasin/Al Abbasi children. Based on its investigation to date, AFIT cannot yet reach a conclusion whether these children may have been under the care of SOS Syria or not at some point and considers it premature to report such a conclusion at this stage.

2. The Case of the CF-001 Children

69. The CF-001 family case has been widely reported in the media since February 2017. The CF-001 family of five siblings (ranging in age from aged 5 to newborn) were placed with CV Syria in 2014 and exited in February 2017. The former staff members, and some current staff members, who AFIT spoke with were able to confirm the placement of the siblings with SOS Syria programs, and some having heard of hostages exchange event, in which the children were reunified with their mother and father. Other individuals had direct knowledge because of partial involvement in the process.
70. The individuals interviewed confirmed the two caregivers of CF-001 children provided good care, describing them as loving and deeply devoted to the children. The children of school age were reported to have attended school alongside other SOS Syria children outside the children's village, although no document was identified to support this. According to accounts received, during their stay, their true identities and family backgrounds were not widely known to anyone AFIT spoke to, who reported they only became aware during and after their reunification when additional information about them began to emerge. From documentation reviewed, it appears the children visited their mother in prison on at least two occasions.
71. The events surrounding the children's reunification with their father through a hostage exchange have been widely corroborated by several individuals. A former National Office staff

⁴³ The Committee was established by the Presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic Decree No. (19) for the year 2025 On the Formation of the National Commission for Missing Persons, 17 May 2025

member⁴⁴ who has firsthand knowledge of the events, informed AFIT that in 2017 the father of the children who was “*one of the opposition commander in Daryaa area*” kidnapped an officer of the Syrian Army in the region of Idlib. Following which an army officer came to the National Office asking for the children. The officer informed staff members that his brother, a high-ranking officer described as “Colonel”, had been kidnapped in Idlib and that the commander holding him had asked for his children to be released. At that point, it appears that the National Office did not provide the officer any information about the children. However, following this incident, another organisation got involved as an intermediary, and it appears that negotiations began regarding a plan to conduct the hostage exchange.⁴⁵

72. With the involvement of another organisation, AFIT has been told that the planning regarding the exchange including the transfer and travel of the children to Idlib was arranged by this other organisation, while the National Office was relegated to handing over the children to SARC that organisation at Qudsaya village where the children were placed. AFIT has been told that for two days Qudsaya village was guarded and surrounded by the military and the situation was described as “very scary” by one former caregiver⁴⁶ who was present at the time of the events. The caregiver reports that they were not aware of any details of what was happening until the children were taken from the village.
73. This event is also confirmed by another former staff member at the national office, who confirmed the hostage exchange took place and that the children were reunified. Furthermore, we are told that a caregiver had accompanied them to Idlib to ensure that the event was less traumatic for the children and to ensure someone familiar would be with them during the process. AFIT was told that the caregiver managed to speak to the children after their reunification through the organisation and reported that they had been reunified with the father and mother and that they are well.⁴⁷ The children are believed to have been reunified on a day early in February 2017, and is a date of reunification AFIT is currently using in its records.⁴⁸
74. Based on the accounts received regarding the reunification of the CF-001 children, and in light of several media interviews provided by their mother, in which she confirmed these events and stated that she received her children in good condition,⁴⁹ AFIT is confident that the children were reunified with their families. Nevertheless, AFIT is continuing with its efforts to trace the family and obtain firsthand accounts from them.

⁴⁴ First Cooperation meeting with a former staff member held of 14 January 2025.

⁴⁵ A national Humanitarian Organisation was involved in facilitating the hostage exchange.

⁴⁶ Cooperation meeting with former caregiver, virtually on 12 April 2025

⁴⁷ Report from specific individual with knowledge.

⁴⁸ This date has been provided by SOS CV Syria. There is no official request to hand over the children from MOSAL or the security agency, and AFIT did not find this date in the very limited documents regarding the CF-001 children. However, the Rudaw Arabia article references Tuesday 8 February 2017 as the date in which the family arrived to Hama for prisoner exchange and released to their father thereafter: “*On Tuesday morning, February 8, 2017, a minibus arrived in Hama, carrying a family that had spent three years in Syrian regime prisons and shelters. The family was released after a prisoner exchange deal was concluded between the General Committee for Prisoners' Affairs in Syria and the Damascus authorities*”

⁴⁹ <https://bit.ly/4dUQQj5>

3. The Case of the CF-002 Children

75. The CF-002 siblings were admitted in 2018 and exited CV Syria in 2020. They were included in the initial list of 35 CIP children that the AFIT received. The siblings, were placed under the care of SOS Syria through a referral letter from MOSAL with the following instructions:

“Please collect the children [personal details] and provide them with an appropriate shelter and do not take any action against them except in coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs, emphasising the need to take their situation into consideration, keeping their names confidential, and not leaking any information about them”.⁵⁰

76. The children were placed in ICC Sabura and then they were moved to Qudsaya village. Based on the meetings held with the mother of the children, AFIT was able to confirm several details regarding their placement at SOS Syria program, and the care and treatment received. The mother provided AFIT details about the arrest and detention of the family including the children, before they were placed with SOS Syria. The mother provided an account of her treatment in detention and the difficult process and efforts to find her children once released.

77. The mother began making inquiries regarding the whereabouts of the children upon her release and reported that no one would provide her with information about them. Ultimately, an individual confidentially informed her that the children had been placed in SOS Syria. According to the mother, the individual frequently visited SOS Syria in connection with other aspects of their work and was instrumental in facilitating her first access to the children.

78. The mother acknowledged that SOS Syria had cared well for her children but felt the reunification process was rushed. Despite her recent release from prison and lack of readiness, she reported being pressured to take custody of the children within 15 days, despite having informed them that she was not prepared to care for them at that time. SOS Syria maintained that reunification included support measures under the Family Strengthening Programme (FSP), such as assistance with housing. The children were reunified with their mother in 2020.

4. The Case of the Russian CIP Children

79. A total of thirteen children of Russian origin were placed in SOS Syria. Although the children were for the most part simply described as Russians, AFIT found that five of them are Russian Azerbaijani and in one cooperation meeting with a former National Office staff who was involved in the case of the Russian children during their repatriation process, it was reported that some of the other Russian children may have been of Chechen origin.⁵¹

80. During review of a specific document detailing the general distribution of children within the various houses at Sabura Village, AFIT identified that some children’s names were marked

⁵⁰ Letter from MOSAL addressed to SOS CV Syria. Personal details have been removed from the direct passage cited.

⁵¹ Cooperation meeting in person and virtually Damascus 25 February 2025.

with initials in bold, specifically “S” or “HS”.⁵² Further review revealed that the names marked with these initials corresponded to CIP children in AFIT’s list. A total of 20 children in the document had such initials, with all Syrian CIP children marked as “S”, and all Russian CIP children marked with “HS”. Based on the analysis conducted, AFIT considers it reasonably likely that “S” stands for “Security” and “HS” stands for “High Security”. This document is the only record AFIT has located that reflects this distinction between “Security” and “High Security”. A line of enquiry is being pursued about whether specific “high value” or “High Security” children were placed specifically with SOS Syria, and if so, why.

81. Additionally, AFIT has observed that while the names of the Russian children generally corresponded to those found in documents from MOSAL or Security Authority, and the final CIP list, in several instances had distinctly different spelling. From investigative work done to date, it is not uncommon to find variations in the spelling of names across different documents. At this stage however, AFIT is questioning this, and cannot conclusively determine yet, whether the inconsistencies in the spelling of the names were: deliberate attempts to hide the identity of the children; the result of errors; or simply a reflection of transcription of the name. Based on its analysis of one specific document, AFIT is reasonably certain that it identified evidence of name changes, consistent with accounts directly provided to AFIT, as discussed above.⁵³ Two Russian CIP siblings appear to have different surnames in this document.

a. Care of the Russian Children

82. AFIT has gathered extensive testimonies and reports from current and former caregivers, who were the primary or secondary caregivers of the children, or who had seen the children in the Children’s villages and interacted with them during their daily lives. Additionally, AFIT has obtained accounts from a CIP child who was in direct contact with most of the children, and from another individual who was also in direct contact with them. From these accounts, we have been informed that there were two groups of Russian children across two Alternative Care locations and, initially, one group was allowed to visit their mothers in prison, and the other group was not. It is not entirely clear why,⁵⁴ but we know from documentation reviewed, and other accounts, that all the Russian children were eventually allowed to visit their mothers.
83. When comparing the number of times the Russian CIP children visited their mothers in prison to the number of times that the Syrian CIP children visited their mothers, the Russian children had much higher number of visits even though they were less in number in the overall CIP group. AFIT has also gathered detailed accounts from individuals who accompanied the children during prison visits, particularly concerning the interactions between the mothers and their children, as well as the emotional impact of these visits on both. The mothers were often described as strong and assertive.

⁵² Document titled: children distribution SGH – youth houses; received as part of data production.

⁵³ Cooperation Meeting, in person in Damascus on 27 February 2025 – discussion above regarding name changing practice.

⁵⁴ Cooperation meeting virtually on 24 February 2025

b. Repatriation Process and Possible Reunification

84. Based on documents reviewed, and interviews conducted, the repatriation process of the Russian children was handled by the Russian consulate in Damascus, and corresponding efforts conducted by the Office of the Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights in Moscow. According to documentation reviewed and accounts received from multiple sources, all Russian children underwent DNA testing, conducted by Russian doctors. According to official documentation reviewed these tests were required in order to confirm familial links in Russia, and facilitate the tracing and reunification of the CIP children with families in Russia. This was a widely used practice for children of Russian origin within Syria and their repatriation and reunification process to Russia.⁵⁵
85. AFIT has received first hand confirmation from those that were present when the children were handed over to the Russian Consulate on the day of their exit from SOS Syria. Several caregivers were present when both groups of children – the first group of seven children which was handed over in August 2020⁵⁶ and the second group of five Russian-Azerbaijanis children, handed over in February 2022.⁵⁷ For the first group exit process, one individual reported that there were Russian soldiers alongside other individuals collecting the children.
86. In its efforts to trace the children and confirm their current whereabouts and welfare, AFIT was able to receive confirmation of the process for repatriation, and the reunification of all the Russian children from an official source. However, the investigations team has not been able to confirm this themselves. One of the organisations identified as a potential partner to collaborate with for tracing of CIP children is ICRC Syria. Accordingly, initial contact was established through SOS Syria, following established protocols as early as January 2025. However, they declined to engage directly with AFIT. In April 2025, ICRC Syria informed SOS Syria that they have received confirmation that all 13 Russian CIP children had been reunited with their families. This confirmation has been welcomed by AFIT. However, its investigative process requires direct verification or an official confirmation letter, neither of which were accomplished, which is why AFIT continues to pursue its own tracing and verification process.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Russia reaches deal with Syrian Kurds on DNA tests for children of ISIS fighters:

<https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/386690/Russia-reaches-deal-with-Syrian-Kurds-on-DNA-tests-for-children-of-ISIS-fighters%3A-TASS>

Russia Repatriates 26 children from northeastern Syria. <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2024/11/russia-repatriates-26-children-from-northeastern-syria/>

Russia collects DNA of 100 children of ISIS parents in Syria for possible resettlement:

<https://www.kurdistan24.net/index.php/en/story/381436/Russia-collects-DNA-of-100-children-of-ISIS-parents-in-Syria-for-possible-resettlement>

⁵⁶ Based on letter addressed to SOS Children's Villages Association.

⁵⁷ "Notifications of receipt and reunification from Alternative Care Programs in the Syrian Arab Children's Villages Association SOS"

⁵⁸ In its efforts to establish collaborative partnerships, in May 2025, AFIT held a series of meetings with several organisations based in Jordan or those with regional presence in Amman. With all identified organisation AFIT held productive and fruitful meetings, with willingness to support and where possible to cooperate, in its efforts to trace the children for the purpose of reunification where needed, to establish the wellbeing and welfare of all CIP children.

5. The Case of The Iraqi CIP Children

87. AFIT initially received information during a cooperation meeting that children of Iraqi origin may have been placed under the care of SOS Syria.⁵⁹ Based on this information, the team started its inquiries on Iraqi children with the National Office and continued to seek further details through subsequent cooperation meetings with other individuals.
88. There is limited information about the Iraqi CIP group of children in general. However, based on the limited documents reviewed provided by SOS Syria, a group of sixteen Iraqi children were placed under the care of SOS Syria in late 2013. The children whose ages range between 2 and 17 years old, were placed through a referral letter from MOSAL, which gives among other limited information provided “*date of arrest*” of the children which indicated the children were arrested late in 2013.⁶⁰ The letter states: “*We refer to you the children of Iraqi nationality, number X, as shown in the table below, in order to receive them, and instruct whoever is responsible to provide them with the necessary care*”.
89. There are additional letters from MOSAL instructing SOS Syria to hand over 13 children, which also refer to letters from Air Force Intelligence Directorate, and a note of the Governor of Rif-Damascus. Both letters were requesting the handover of the children to the Air Force Intelligence Directorate. We have also reviewed an internal SOS Syria letter informing of having received the 16 Iraqi children and that they have distributed them to different houses with details of the respective caregivers. This internal letter does not make any reference to Security Authorities, nor to the fact that the children are Iraqis.⁶¹ None of the few documents reviewed had the “security instruction” usually contained in the CIP referral letters. However, there is sufficient information to conclude that the children were treated as CIPs by the authorities, and ultimately most of them were handed over to the Airforce Intelligence Directorate through a direction from them to receive the children.
90. The information received regarding the Iraqi CIP is rather limited, however, an individual confirmed that she knew of 15 Iraqi CIP children, and she had looked after three of them who were siblings. She informed that while most of the other CIP Iraqi children stayed only a few weeks (22 days) in Qudsaya village, the children under her care stayed for three months, and she was told that’s because “they are special”. She reported that, on the day they left, she was out in the market, and their mother had come looking for them to the Alternative Care location accompanied by Security agents. She could not get back on time to say goodbye to them, but she informed AFIT she was able to speak to their mother over the phone who thanked her for looking after the children. From the documents reviewed AFIT knows that the three children stayed longer than the others in the group and exited in March 2014.

⁵⁹ Cooperation meeting held on 17 January 2025, virtually.

⁶⁰ Letter from MOSAL to SOS Syria of December 2013, which provides information of the children’s arrest in the following date: two siblings arrested on 24/10/2013 and the remaining children indicated as being arrested in December 2013.

⁶¹ Letter of 23/12/2013 from Qudsaya village management to the National office management.

91. On 6 July 2025, a social media platform, known for publishing among other things, leaked documents concerning missing children of detainees, including CIP children placed at SOS Syria and other care institutions, released a copy of a MOSAL letter dated 18 September 2022. The letter was addressed to SOS Syria, requesting that they receive four siblings of Iraqi origin from Al Ansar Charity (Dar Al Rahma) and place them in their care. AFIT inquired with SOS Syria regarding these children and the possibility of their admission. SOS Syria maintains that the children were never placed under their care and denied knowledge of the children and having received the referenced letter. Nevertheless, AFIT's investigation is ongoing to establish or rule out their placement with SOS Syria.

6. The Case of CIP Child A

92. The case of Child A⁶² first came to the attention of AFIT during an in-person cooperation meeting at the SOS Syria National Office in Damascus.⁶³ The individual informed AFIT that there was a CIP child in one of the Alternative Care locations, who had been referred by MOSAL, with instructions to accept the child and not to disclose the name, and the person reported that the child was of European origin. According to the individual, there was no doubt the child was CIP, but claimed that based on their Arabic surname, they could not be European. At the time of this meeting, AFIT was in the process of compiling and finalising the larger list of CIP children. However, as part of a request to review and assist in making a determination regarding the review of Category B "Complex Cases" (see Part B, section 9), the case of Child A was included for AFIT's review. The "Complex Cases" category involves children that SOS Syria could not readily determine as CIP or not.
93. From documents reviewed provided by SOS Syria, Child A was admitted to SOS Syria alternative care in the Sabura Village in September 2020, with a referral letter from MOSAL with security instructions as follows:

*"Please receive the child [A] age is around [personal details] years (parents are [personal details]) and provide with an appropriate shelter and do not take any actions with her except in coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs, emphasising the need to take her situation into consideration, keeping her name confidential and not leaking any information about her."*⁶⁴

94. AFIT was able to review documents containing information and details regarding Child A, including a letter from SOS Syria to MOSAL confirming placement of the child with SOS Syria, but also informing them that they do not accept placement of CIP children anymore. The content of this letter is similar to other letters previously provided to AFIT to show that SOS Syria has been refusing to accept CIP children from the Security Authority after clear instruction from the International Office to stop such practice in October 2018. According to

⁶² Placement in September 2020 exit July 2021

⁶³ Cooperation meeting held January 2025, in person and virtually in Damascus

⁶⁴ Letter from MOSAL to SOS CV Syria. Personal information removed from original quotation.

yet another letter from SOS Syria to MOSAL, they informed the Ministry that a woman claiming to be the mother of Child A had requested to have access to the child. The letter provides additional details surrounding the child and mother explains that the woman was imprisoned and released after three months following the conclusion of her investigation, which according to documents reviewed does not appear to be politically motivated imprisonment. SOS Syria requested in the letter to MOSAL to inform the designated party to provide an opinion on these developments.

95. There are several letters, including official letters from MOSAL, a Sharia court, and several SOS Syria internal emails discussing the case of Child A. SOS Syria started the process of reunifying Child A with their adoptive mother, and a letter was sent to MOSAL requesting their opinion regarding reunification. MOSAL replied saying they had no objection to the reunification: *“We see no objection to handing over the aforementioned child to [name of adoptive mother] after verifying all supporting documents”*.⁶⁵ The adoptive mother in the meantime obtained a Sharia Court determination that she can have temporary legal guardianship of *Child A valid for three months*.
96. Based on several documents reviewed pertaining to Child A provided by SOS Syria, AFIT informed its opinion to the National Office that it believes Child A to be a CIP and would be included in its list, bringing the total of CIP children to 140. SOS Syria disagreed with this opinion, and a lengthy meeting was held to debate this with the team. SOS Syria were adamant that Child A is not CIP, and they have submitted a Case Review Memo to that effect, and presented a detailed argument to AFIT based on the AFIT criteria and threshold as to why they do not consider Child A to be CIP. It was communicated to SOS Syria that at this point AFIT would in any event continue its investigation on the case of Child A.
97. AFIT has been conducting extensive investigation including tracing of Child A and the adoptive mother. Part of the documentation provided by SOS Syria was a handwritten letter signed and stamped by the Civil Democratic Administration in Raqqa – Raqqa Civil Council Women's Committee (commonly referred as the Women's Committee), which states that Child A had been given in adoption to the mother. AFIT was able to speak with relevant individuals at the Women's Committee. It was explained that numerous children, particularly those whose fathers were foreign ISIS fighters, were left behind in Raqqa and surrounding areas after ISIS retreated in 2017. One individual explained, that in some cases, pregnant mothers abandoned their children shortly after giving birth, often after being liberated from captivity or escaping from their ISIS affiliated husbands. This information shed light on the humanitarian challenges faced by organizations managing the welfare and protection of vulnerable children in the Raqqa region, where Child A is from. It is also useful background to understand why Child A may have been described as having “European Parents” and considered by the Security Authority as CIP.

⁶⁵ Letter from MOSAL to SOS Syria dated 17/05/2021

98. The information provided substantiated to a high probability that the child was the child of a deceased, imprisoned, or fled ISIS fighter and as a default position the child was being treated as a security consideration leading to the prior CIP procedure being adopted. Another distinguishing feature of this case supporting its inclusion as a CIP is that there was no record from the security authorities explicitly stating that the child was not of security interest, which was the case with CFB-001 (see below) who were not categorized as a CIP.

7. The Case of the CFB-001 Children

99. AFIT received a request to review Complex Cases in which the case of the CFB-001 was included. From the documents reviewed for the children, it was understood that they were placed in Qudsaya village towards the end of 2013. In the documents reviewed AFIT identified that there was interest in them from Security Authorities upon their placement. The referral letter which is dated two days after the children were admitted to SOS Syria - came from the Air Force Intelligence Directorate. However, further documentation states that the children were brought into the location by a patrol of Intelligence Division.
100. From documents reviewed it is not clear at what point the Air Force Intelligence Directorate got involved. However, according to a letter from the Ministry of Justice, Public Prosecution of Damascus, the mother was in prison, interrogated/investigated, and released. From documents reviewed, AFIT understands the mother wanted to be reunified with the children.
101. Both MOSAL and the Security Authority had consented to the reunification with the mother, with the Security Authority explicitly stating in a letter that they have no security interest in the children, and that they did not place them with SOS Syria. The reasons why the children were not reunified with their mother is unclear, however, an internal SOS Syria “Case Study” prepared in, or after, January 2025, states that reunification was not possible for “*unknown reasons*” in 2014, and that a second attempt at reunification following the mother’s request, was not possible again according to personal circumstances.⁶⁶ AFIT also understands from internal SOS Syria documents that the children visited their mother in her home, they spent holidays with her and she also visited them at the village.
102. For the purpose of the review conducted to determine whether they are to be classified CIP or not, the letter from Security Authority, essentially relinquishing any interest in the children⁶⁷ was crucial in the determination of AFIT that they are not CIP. On the one hand there were gaps in the documentation reviewed, and on the other, there is a lot of information about the children’s stay at SOS Syria, including visits to their mother, a plan, assessments and details of their ongoing personal and educational development, consistent with a care plan for all

⁶⁶ Case study of CFB-001 Family, prepared in January 2025

⁶⁷ Letter From the Security Authorities to SOS CV Syria, dated March 2019

non-CIP children. Once AFIT determined, based on its criteria, that the children were not CIP, no further investigation was conducted regarding these children.

103. In March 2025, SOS CV Syria initiated reunification process with the father of the CFB-001 children. AFIT has been informed that the children were successfully reunited with their father in May 2025, and the mother continues to be involved in the lives of the children.

8. CIP Analogous Children from Eastern Ghouta

104. Eastern Ghouta is to the east and southeast of Damascus. It became a rebel stronghold early in the Syrian uprising (2011–2012), which made it a strategic target for the Assad regime. The Siege of Eastern Ghouta lasted for almost 5 years (2013–2018). In early 2018, Assad's forces launched an offensive, firstly targeting Douma and Harasta. By April 2018, Eastern Ghouta was fully captured by the Assad Regime.⁶⁸
105. The children found in Eastern Ghouta were from an area targeted and attacked by the Assad Regime, due to the 2011-2012 uprising. The method by which the Eastern Ghouta children found themselves at SOS CV Syria is very different from the CIP children. In some circumstances the Eastern Ghouta children were brought to the Children's Village by the Intelligence/Security services (but not the Air Force Intelligence Directorate). The children were in several cases separated from their family members, or having witnessed their families die, were found alone and abandoned (unaccompanied), and brought to the SOS CV Syria by the military, everyday citizens, NGOs, or community-based groups. Similarly, there is no suggestion that their parents had been imprisoned by the regime - these were children who simply found themselves alone at the time of a major military offensive, and the children could be classified as internally displaced unaccompanied children/minors.
106. The Eastern Ghouta children may have been considered as CIP by some staff members because in several cases the military or some security branches were involve in the referral or actual placement of the children.⁶⁹ There are certain security related issues with the Ghouta children, and displaced people from Eastern Ghouta in general, as they came directly from an area which held uprisings and resistance against the Assad Regime, and it was a heavy battle ground for armed groups of different affiliation. The Ghouta children were displaced and taken to SOS Syria as shelter or temporary accommodation until their families could find them. Other Eastern Ghouta children came through humanitarian corridors, and into a centre which was set up and facilitated through an agreement between UNICEF and SOS Syria. Some children were placed into SOS villages from this centre.

⁶⁸ [Damascus's Eastern Ghouta Siege is a Form of Collective Punishment | Syrian Network for Human Rights](#) and [L'armée syrienne annonce avoir repris l'intégralité de la Ghouta orientale](#)

⁶⁹ See case of CFB-0001 children, who according to documents reviewed they were brought into Children's villages late night by military officers. In this respect, there is a statement from the night manager of Qudsaya Village which received the children, stating they were brought in by military patrol.

107. There does appear to be some MOSA involvement, by way of referral letters so the children can be admitted into the SOS Syria programs. The Eastern Ghouta children have not received the same focus as the CIP however, we think that they are a different group with different type of security related issues around them.
108. Most of the children from Ghouta and Eastern Ghouta that came into SOS Syria programs, we are told, have been reunified with their parents within a few days or a few weeks of their arrival into the centres, as they were looking for them. Others had to go through the tracing and reunification process to identify extended family members to reunify them with. Although these children are not strictly CIP in accordance with AFIT's criteria for classification, AFIT believes they were the subject of a level of security investigation, albeit limited, into their background before they were "cleared" for reunification by a different security entity. AFIT is therefore conducting a separate inquiry into the Ghouta children that were placed in some of the SOS Syria programmes.

9. Category B Cases Review

109. Documentation underlying the potential CIP children as of January and February 2025 as produced from the database review process were provided to AFIT. AFIT had these materials translated from Arabic into English and identified a process to undertake a review of the documentation. From the initial application of the CIP criteria across the children and files identified, 15 were identified as "complex" and placed under the Category B group requiring further consideration and verification. The material in support of these 15 cases were provided by SOS Syria and independently translated by AFIT. The members of the AFIT critically analysed the documents provided – informed by the investigative work conducted thus far which had provided firsthand information from current and former staff and caregivers.
110. The review process included AFIT reviewing the documents from the database and the product of their investigation to date independent of the SOS Syria and EUCM team. Meetings were then organized with SOS Syria team and a member of AFIT in person in Damascus and joined by EUCM and a second AFIT member by video. These meetings included discussion between the attendees applying the threshold criteria and working to reach a consensus on the status of the further cases as CIPs or not. The meetings were constructive, and consensus was reached with respect of 14 of the 15 children, with 14 being *agreed* as not classified as CIP children. The case of one child (above at Part B, Section 6) required further review to determine whether the child met the same criteria.

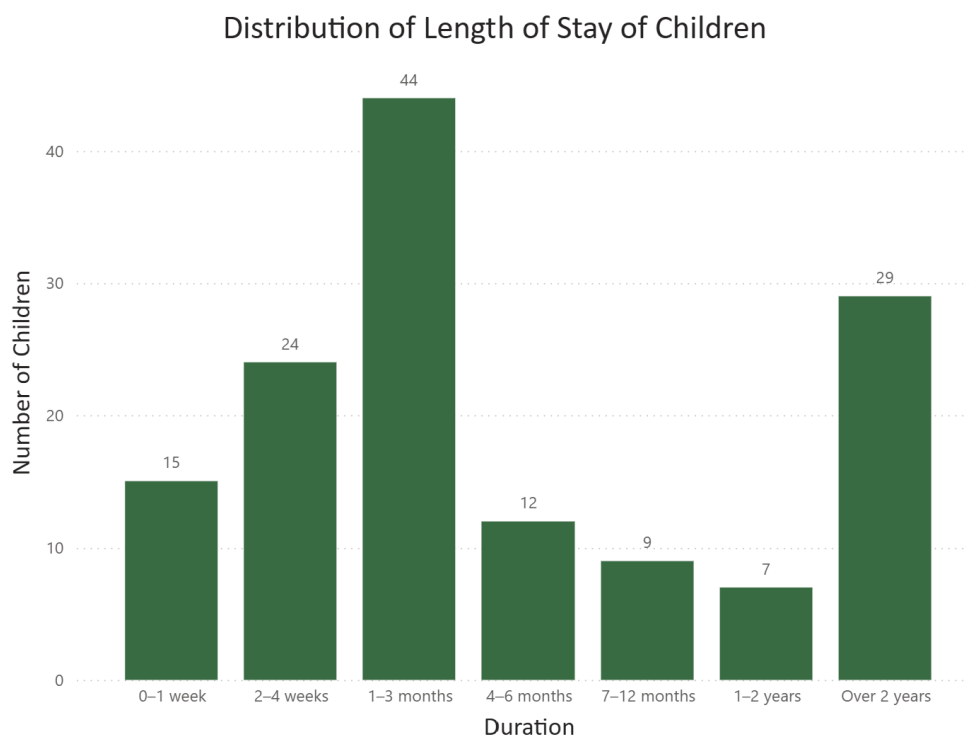
PART C: Reunification and Tracing

111. During its first field mission to Syria, AFIT requested a meeting with MOSAL, and with the support of SOS Syria, was able to secure this meeting. On 7 October 2024, AFIT attended a meeting with former MOSAL Deputy Ministers Mr Yasser Al Ahmad and Mr Anas Dabush. During the meeting – which was originally planned for half hour, however, lasted one and half hours – AFIT’s mandate pertaining to CIP children was discussed. AFIT communicated that its work included ascertaining where the CIP children are, details of reunification with their families, and the need for post-reintegration follow up.
112. The Deputy Ministers explained, among other things, that under Law No. 21/2021, known as the Child Protection Act - Syria's first dedicated legislation to safeguard children's rights - they also have a legal duty to ensure the protection and well-being of all children. They further explained that this duty extends to CIP children, emphasizing that measures had been taken to ensure their well-being and that they are properly cared for. They informed us that all information regarding children in general is private and confidential, which prohibits them from sharing specific details pertaining to CIP children. The meeting with the Deputy Ministers ended with their assurance that the children are in good condition and are being appropriately looked after. While we appreciated the time given, the responses were insufficient for our mandate, and AFIT continued its work to trace the CIPs.
113. Obtaining clarity on how many children were reunified with their families after leaving the SOS Syria programmes is a significant focus of our current inquiries. Throughout cooperation meetings, AFIT has consistently canvassed whether individuals had contact with any of the CIP children or their families, whether they possessed information regarding the children’s reunification with family members, and, in general, whether they had any knowledge concerning the children's situation following their exit from the programmes. In most cases, those interviewed reported having no information about the children's fate. However, some individuals have provided valuable information which have been, and are being, pursued as part of tracing efforts.
114. Within the documents reviewed, AFIT identified references to a child or children that had been reunited with family members. The sources are a combination of SOS Syria forms containing statements confirming receipt of children signed by a family member (usually accompanied by the identification card of the receiving family member) and requests to hand over children from authorities. While AFIT has taken these documents into account, and regard them as positive indicators that reunification occurred, for the purposes of the current work and tracing of the children, we have consistently evaluated such documents alongside corroborating accounts from individuals interviewed.
115. An individual confirmed direct involvement in handing over some CIP children to their mothers as part of the reunification process. In the case of one child, this staff member

confirmed that she was asked to bring the child to the Security Authority's offices, where the grandmother was also present, and handed the child to the grandmother.⁷⁰ The individual informed AFIT that they wanted to keep in touch with the family, and she had written her number on a piece of paper and placed it among the child's effects, but the security agents found the piece of paper and told her that she is not allowed to be in contact or to know anything about the child. She has not had any contact with the child since.

116. This individual explained that, on each occasion of a reunification, the Security Authority instructed them to bring the children to the Security Authority office, where the mothers were present, and the children were then reunited with them. The reunification of one of these children has been further confirmed by his former caregiver, who is still in contact with the child through his mother.
117. AFIT was able to identify cases of reunifications, which we believe to a high degree of certainty, have occurred. In these instances, priority in tracing efforts has been given to them, as they would be easy to confirm, and in particular where individuals have informed AFIT they are in contact with the families.
118. Therefore, AFIT's process to trace the CIP children is conducted within wider socio-political considerations and security context that continues to affect the situation in Syria. These dynamics are often influenced by unresolved conflict legacies, and the social stigmatization of families associated, rightly or wrongly, with detained or disappeared persons. For example, AFIT has received accounts that described some families as belonging to "conservative" backgrounds, and some families appear to bear the burden of perceived past affiliation with extremist groups, or of holding views considered extremist, which may expose them to social stigma or social repercussions. Conversely, perceptions of past affiliation with the Assad Regime or Syrian Army under the Regime may expose individuals to social stigma or social repercussions. Consequently, tracing efforts require a cautious, discreet, and long-term approach, recognizing that progress may be gradual and that building a level of trust or confidence with affected families and communities is essential to the work of AFIT.
119. For a significant majority of the 140 CIP children, there is still a considerable lack of information regarding their reunification and whereabouts after exit from SOS Syria. After they were handed over to the Security Authority, there is nothing in records AFIT has thus far reviewed and been provided, to indicate the CIPs whereabouts post-reunification. However, it is important to take into consideration that, as illustrated in Graph 6 below, many children were placed for short periods of time of just days, while others for just a few months.

⁷⁰ Cooperation meeting held in January 2025, regarding the reunification of CIP children.



Graph 6: Length of stay

120. For the purpose of this report addressing the tracing of CIP children and our related investigation, it must be noted that we have received consistent reports that the documentation and record keeping at these IACC facilities and the handover process of children's records upon their closure created considerable challenges when compiling the databases, and contributed to the lack of information and full knowledge surrounding CIP practices until the effort spearheaded by SOS Syria to compile the databases in December 2024 to March 2025.

121. Continued work to trace CIP children and their families going forward will be challenging for a myriad of reasons. AFIT is certain that this difficult task would be significantly strengthened through cooperative efforts with the government of the Syrian Arab Republic. AFIT would welcome the opportunity to coordinate with the government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding its tracing work to fulfil the commitment to establish the whereabouts and wellbeing of the children and, where possible and necessary, to reunite them with their families.

1. Projected Investigative Work

122. During the last six month we have been able to identify and confirm 140 CIP children, and we have successfully mapped out information and individuals that we believe will be instrumental for the purpose of tracing some of the CIP children. AFIT will continue to survey the organisational implications regarding the practice of CIP admissions and report accordingly. We will continue with cooperation meetings with staff members, current and former, of SOS Syria. We have identified and compiled a list of individuals, current and former staff members at IO, IOR and HGFD level, that visited Syria and worked closely on ERP and Syria based programmes. We intend to continue conducting cooperation meetings with those individuals some of whom have already indicated willingness to speak with us. We will continue our engagement with local associations and associations advocating on behalf of the families of detainees and other such local groups and continue engagement with whistleblowers. We have related investigative plans, which we will continue to pursue, details of which cannot be shared for confidentiality and privacy reasons.
123. Based on information available about the CIP children, we have decided to run expert Open Source Intelligence (OSINT LAB) searches on a small sample of CIP children drawn from the different nationalities, age, availability of photographs, and availability of additional information such as name of mothers and fathers.
124. As of 9 June 2025, the HGFD Anonymous Confidential reporting channel has gone live. AFIT members have direct access to the reports and can receive notification of a new report. The reporting channel is in English, Arabic and Russian languages and has been widely shared to a large network of SOS Syria's current and former staff members, including with the support from SOS Syria, and within a network of individuals who AFIT is in contact with.
125. Additionally, we are in the process of engaging certain online groups, and individuals managing large groups online, to share the link with them. We are pursuing ways to fully distribute the link, including among the Syrian diaspora in Europe, Middle East and beyond.

2. Engagement with Other stakeholders

126. Recently AFIT has been engaging with external entities and possible partners for the next phase of the work. During these partner meetings, we requested, among other things, for further information on Syria based NGOs and civil society connections. This has generally been very well received, with willing partners sharing contact information and offering to make introductions. This backing from partners is crucial to this strategy as trust is an all-important factor, especially within investigations involving children and youths.
127. These groups are passionate about their work and are heavily involved in this next transitional phase in Syria, and it is anticipated they will have specific information regarding the CIPs to

advance our investigation. Several former detainees and/or their families are in contact with several of these civil society associations, and therefore AFIT understands that this may well open further lines of inquiry. This strategy is necessary as the Syrian situation has not found its baseline in terms of political stability and structure.

128. As from the beginning of its work, AFIT cannot rely on second hand and often incomplete information at distance, and this strategy of broad cooperation will allow a closing of the investigative gap. AFIT would welcome the opportunity to coordinate with Syria based NGOs and civil society connections, as well as international organisations and governments who have a similar commitment to establish the whereabouts and wellbeing of the CIPs and, where possible and necessary, facilitate reunification them with their families.

129. We invite individuals with information to contact us via the following: confidential email to CIPTracing@IICSInvestigations.com, via confidential anonymous reporting channel at <https://www.sos-kinderdoerfer.org/reporting-channel>, or via mobile, WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal at +436764548448.

15 August 2025

Submitted by:

The Advised Further Inquiries Team

Ms Million Berhe

Mr Thomas Foley

Mr Jason Howard

ANNEX 1: Investigation Methodology

1. The investigation was conducted using a combination of techniques and methods. During our investigation from mid-June through December 2024, our work started with an extensive desk review of documents and records provided by HGFD. This was followed by virtual cooperation meetings with SOS Syria staff members and IOR EUCM staff members and a field mission to Vienna from 4-6 September 2024 to meet with IOR EUCM leadership and staff.
2. Between 23 September and 10 October 2024, AFIT conducted a field mission to Damascus, Syria, and conducted cooperation meetings with staff members at national office, with caregivers, youth advisors, social workers, and psychologists. The field mission included visits to Small Groups Home (SGH) Sahnaya, community integrated families in Sahnaya, and meetings in Sabura and Qudsaya villages. AFIT interacted with children and youth participants during visits to care and community integrated homes. AFIT conducted approximately 50 individual and group cooperation meetings, including 12 cooperation meetings which included questions and conversations specifically regarding CIPs, with individuals who were identified ahead of time as having had knowledge, having worked closely and or cared for the children.
3. The focus of the investigation between January and July 2025, was on the tracing of the CIP children, and in this respect, AFIT conducted cooperation meetings with over 60 individuals. For several individuals, two or more meetings were conducted; for others, in addition to formal cooperation meetings, AFIT engaged in ongoing communications via phone and messaging.
4. AFIT has reviewed several hundred documents obtained from SOS Syria and HGFD, and a limited number of documents from SOS CV International. We received documents from whistleblowers and personal sources in, and outside of Syria. This review included documents leaked and published on social media platforms and from various online groups concerning missing persons and the missing children of detainees.
5. AFIT sought to corroborate all evidence gathered available as of the time of this reporting. However, for instances where we could not find corroboration, this will be made clear. In other instances, evidence obtained, even from a single source, was comprehensive enough to be a reasonable basis of a conclusion, for example, a first-hand account of direct involvement. Positions taken because of our validation exercise have been set out under the appropriate points of this document and are designed to be prudent and objective.
6. Potential reporters and whistleblowers were informed that investigations by the AFIT were confidential, and the identities of those providing information or reporting, survivors, witnesses, whistleblowers were to be protected to the strictest standards and legal obligations. However, it was important to be transparent and to caution that confidentiality can never be absolute based on the progression and requirements of the AFIT investigation including the need for information to be corroborated. Also, it was important for potential reporters and whistleblowers to understand that although the AFIT is independent and impartial in its work, its primary purposes, as mandated by HGFD, were to investigate and report to HGFD. The AFIT has put measures in place to ensure the confidentiality and security of any information received and to protect the identity of those who provide information.

ANNEX 2: Investigation Procedures

Steps taken	Details
<u>Preparation and Planning</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Held an opening meeting with the SOS CV Syria management team to obtain an understanding of the events that led to the sanctioning of the investigation and to establish the objectives and scope of work to be carried out; ▪ Obtained understanding of relevant rules, regulations, internal policies and procedures governing operations of SOS Syria and EUCM; ▪ Attained understanding of the SOS Syria organizational structures; and ▪ Obtained an understanding of the SOS Syria, IOR EUCM and their policy, guidance, and operational areas of work
<u>Data Collection</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conducted multiple interviews and discussions with current, former staff members of SOS Syria, IOR MENA and EUCM, and relevant third parties. ▪ Acquired the relevant documentation and material necessary for the performance of verification and validation procedures.
<u>Documents Collected</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ During the course of the investigation, documents relevant to the investigation inclusive of the following were reviewed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal SOS CV Syria documents, documents received from external parties including MOSAL, Sharia Judges, Security Authorities, Forensic medics, Public Prosecution of Ministry of Justice. - Internal SOS CV Syria emails with respect to reportable issues, internal investigation and audit reports, and external investigation and audit reports. - Evaluation reports of various social media accounts. - Open-source materials. - Internal HGFD emails and documents, pertaining to the relevant years under investigation and individuals in charge at the time. - Extensive database of children admitted to programs of SOS CV Syria. - Extensive photographs.
<u>Documents Review</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reviewed the documents obtained following document production requests, from SOS CV Syria, EUCM, HGFD. ▪ Reviewed documents received from whistleblowers. ▪ Reviewed the internal, external, and independent audit reports, previous investigations reports, policy reports, programs related reports, and other pertinent information.
<u>Cooperation Meetings Conducted</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The cooperation meetings we have conducted generally fell within the following categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current and former SOS CV Syria staff members at National Office level - Current and former SOS CV Syria staff members in Alternative Care including caregivers

- Current and former International Office or CVI staff members
- Current and former SOS CV Syria Board and General Assembly Members
- Current and former HGFD staff members
- Current and former beneficiaries, program participants, and family members
- External service provider psychologists and Mental Health Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) specialists
- Individuals working within International Organisations

<u>Field Missions</u> <u>and Physical</u> <u>Verifications</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conducted five field missions including a preliminary/scoping mission to Vienna in September 2024; three field missions to Syria over Sept-Oct. 2024, Jan-Feb 2025 and Feb-Mar 2025; one field mission to Jordan in May 2025.
--	---

<u>Reporting</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compiled two interim Confidential Reports ▪ Conducted regular briefings with HGFD Leadership ▪ Held regular updates with HGFD
------------------	---
