

# Ahlan Simsim Friends Qualitative Monitoring Report

Report drafted by: Nadeen Al Khammash (Jordan M&E Officer)

Report reviewed by: Rebecca Samaha (Regional RML Coordinator)

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## Introduction



Since November 2022, countries across the MENA region including Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq implementing the Ahlan Simsim (AS) Friends program conducted qualitative feedback in the form of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and/or Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with children who attended the minimum number of AS Friends sessions, their caregivers, and facilitators who implemented the AS Friends program.

The main objectives from the qualitative monitoring are to make any future programmatic improvements and modifications on the AS friends content based on the feedback of caregivers of children, children and facilitators, as well as to generate key learnings that can be disseminated to internal and external audiences to take up or integrate the AS friends' content into their systems and programs.

This qualitative feedback is aligned with AS's learning themes of Client Responsiveness and Impact and Outcomes, by helping to answer the below learning questions:

- How can IRC AS/PtL partners support caregivers and children to complete ECD services? What motivates caregivers to enroll themselves and/or their children in ECD services and activities? What are the main barriers for caregivers and children to complete all sessions?
- What is the impact of AS/PtL models on children's early learning and development? How effective are AS/PtL models in improving child socioemotional development outcomes?

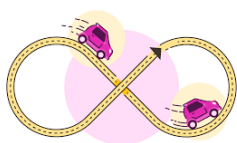
This is done through getting beneficiaries feedback on:

**Children:** Their reaction towards the program's content, activities, and facilitator(s) performance.

**Caregivers of Children:** Caregivers feedback on their children's developmental behaviors, education, and socio-emotional skills after attending the AS Friends sessions.

**Facilitators:** Educator's feedback on AS Friends content, material, training guide and performance, technical assistance, and their interaction with the children.

## Methodology



Qualitative tools targeting a sample from AS Friends children, facilitators and caregivers of children were built and designed to be conducted through FGDs and KIIs. The tools were developed in close coordination with the Regional Technical Team, and then a round of feedback was generated from countries to ensure

the tools were context-specific. The sample targeted children who completed the minimum number of AS Friends program sessions/activities.

The qualitative tools were developed in English and Arabic; mainly for having countries collecting qualitative data in Arabic with the beneficiaries (native language for most beneficiaries).

## Data Collection



Data collection took place via papers in all countries except for NWS that used CommCare for data collection. Most of the data collection was conducted by the country M&E team in a face-to-face modality, while the remaining few interviews were conducted remotely via phone calls.

Qualitative data collection took place in NES, NWS, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon from December 2022 till end of January 2023, with the sample size of children, children’s caregivers and facilitators displayed in the below table. The target **children** are disaggregated to an average sample size of 64 males and 64 females. Countries targeted children who received direct IRC services, except for NWS who also targeted children from both IRC direct and partners services. Jordan mostly conducted FGDs with Jordanian children and caregivers, in addition to some Syrian children and caregivers. In Lebanon, nationalities included Lebanese and Syrian children and caregivers. In NWS and NES, nationalities included Syrian and Kurdish children and caregivers. In Iraq, nationalities included Iraqi children and caregivers. For children participants, all countries conducted FGDs with two segregated age groups including children aged between 3 to 5 years and children aged between 6 to 8 years. In terms of **caregivers of children**, countries conducted FGDs with an average of 35 male and 88 female caregivers. Countries mainly conducted KIIs with facilitators except for Iraq, which conducted FGDs with facilitators. Countries conducted KIIs/FGDs with an average of 13 male and 17 female facilitators.

Country	Children	Caregivers of children	Facilitators
NES	18	12	8
NWS	24	36	8
Jordan	21	17	5
Iraq	18	18	6

<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total number of children, CGs and facilitators interviewed</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>30</b>

### Main Findings

The main findings from children, caregivers of children and facilitators’ perspectives are portrayed below. The findings are synthesized across the region, as well as disaggregated into specific/unique findings at a country level where relevant.

#### AS Friends Program



Data collectors from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, NES & NWS used three AS Friends qualitative tools to ask children, children’s caregivers and facilitators questions on their general feedback, impressions, and reactions to the AS Friends program. The focus was mainly on having children express their feedback on the AS Friends program, and for their caregivers to express how the program developed their children’s socioemotional skills, their interaction and relationship with their children and their own feedback on the AS Friends program. Facilitators expressed their feedback on the AS Friends material, programmatic approach, whether the program is inclusive to children with learning difficulties and/or children with disability, and whether certain age groups of children benefited more from the program.

#### Children’s Perspective on the AS Friends Program



##### 1. Regional

**Children** across countries expressed that they were satisfied with the AS Friends services. Children were also able to categorize at least one feeling from the **“Emotion Cards/posters”**. Most children recalled feelings of **“Happiness”**, **“Sadness”**, **“Fear”**, and **“Anger”** when feeling cards were shown to them. Also, the majority were able to recall **stress-relief techniques** given in the sessions including breathing exercises,

physical movements, expressing emotions to their caregivers or others, and/or drawing and painting. Many children across countries remembered the **AS Friends characters** names such as Elmo, Jad, Basma, Ma'azooza, and Ka'aka. Furthermore, children enjoyed **AS activities** and sessions including drawing and painting (favorite activity to the majority of participant children) – this also includes worksheets AS facilitators provide at the center that children would even use at home to draw or color with, in addition to storytelling, games that require physical movements, playing with other children and/or AS videos/songs. For example, children's favorite **stories/worksheets** were "Coloring Friends Cake" worksheet and "Beit Al Bulbul" story. Most children in the region also said that their **favorite songs/episodes** included: "The AS Theme Song".

When it came to children expressing their interaction with children who had difficulty in learning or understanding, and children with disability, their response was positive as children mentioned they would engage together in AS activities, interact, and play with those who in their perspective think were different from them. Furthermore, children mentioned **liking the AS Friends program**; children expressed these using words such as "happiness", "joy/laughter", and "playing and/or interacting with other children" during their time spent at the AS centers. Children also expressed that facilitators' kindness towards them was something that made them feel comfortable during sessions. Finally, no child had a complaint, nor faced **challenges** when asked about the AS program.

#### a. Children's favorite Ahlan Simsim TV Show Characters

Children in Iraq, Jordan, NWS, NES and Lebanon were asked whether they could recall any of the AS Friends characters. The AS Friends characters children were able to recall across countries are mentioned in the regional section, however, below are the unique results of which children mentioned their favorite AS Friends character(s) in NWS and Lebanon:

→ **In NWS**, one child mentioned that he/she liked and enjoyed all AS characters equally.

→ **In Lebanon**, some children's favorite AS characters were "Al-Asafir".

#### b. Emotion Cards/Poster

Children were shown the AS program feeling cards by AS Friends facilitators during the FGD, and most children across the region were able to recall what the emotion card represented. Children responses across countries mentioned in the regional section above expressed similar trends of children's signification of acknowledging an emotion/feeling from the emotion cards. However, below are the unique findings of each country group of children recollection of feelings/emotion cards:

→ **Jordan**

Some children were confused whether one of the characters were "scared" or "sad" and defined them to be the same thing.

→ **NES**

Some children in NES mentioned "fear" as their most relatable emotion of the AS emotion cards. Since the situation in Syria had led to difficult circumstances to many families, we feel it is important to highlight

that children expressed fear as their most relatable emotion, even though it is mentioned in the regional section.

➔ **NWS**

Majority of children were able to recall mainly negative emotions including “Anger”, “Fear”, and “Sadness”. Since the situation in Syria had led to difficult circumstances to many families, we feel it is important to highlight that most children expressed those negative emotions, even though they are mentioned in the regional section. Only some children mentioned “Happiness”.

➔ **Lebanon**

One child aged 3 to 5 years mentioned “Cold” and “Fear” indicating that these are the emotions he recalls when he is being intimidated by his father.

### c. De-Stressing Techniques

Children were asked methods they seek to help them de-stress from strong emotions. Facilitators used the AS stress relief techniques link to help children remember. Children across countries mentioned in the regional section above expressed similar trends of children’s definition of de-stressing techniques post their participation in AS Friends program. Below are the unique findings of each country group of children’s stress relief techniques:

➔ **NES**

A child commented that dancing is a technique he/she uses to de-stress. Another child mentioned that counting from 1 to 10 is part of his/her stress relief mechanism.

➔ **NWS**

A child mentioned he/she would smell flowers to relief stress (scent of flowers). Another child mentioned candles. On the other hand, a child said that “Anger” is part of his/her stress relief technique.

➔ **Jordan**

Some children mentioned they would speak with their mothers when they are stressed.

➔ **Lebanon**

Some children mentioned that the Ahlan Simsim program is what makes them relaxed and is part of their stress relief techniques. Also, a child commented that studying is a stress relief technique.

### d. AS Friends Songs/Episodes, Worksheets, and Stories

Children were asked whether they could recall any of the AS Friends stories, worksheets, songs and/or episodes, and if they did, how they felt about them or what was their favorite thing about them. Children across countries were generally able to recall the AS stories, worksheets, or songs/episodes similar to the trends mentioned in the regional section. However, below are the unique findings to children remembering AS stories, worksheets, or songs/episodes:



➔ **NES**

Some children who were able to remember one or some of the AS stories included “The Nest and the Nightingales” and “Who Ate the Sun, By Ma’azooza” stories.

➔ **NWS**

Some children who were able to remember one or some of the AS stories included “Where are the rocks” and “لفتة كبير” stories.

➔ **Jordan**

Several children were able to recall "عين الحجر" story.

➔ **Iraq**

Some children were able to recall the “Ball of Wool” story.

➔ **Lebanon**

Some children said that doing the airplane paper is their favorite activity.

## 2. Children’s Perspective on AS Friends Sessions/Activities

*"I like to share that I love the teacher and I love my friends" – AS child participant in Lebanon.*

Children were asked to express their feelings when they attended the AS Friends sessions/activities. Children’s feedback was like the trends mentioned in the regional section above. However, below are the unique country findings to children’s perspectives on their feelings towards the AS Friends program.

### **With respect to their feelings and favorite activity:**

➔ **NES**

In terms of feeling positive, a child commented that she felt relaxed during the AS friends sessions/activities.

➔ **NWS**

Some children in NWS mentioned their favorite activity was to play with cubes, hide and seek, and playing with toys.

➔ **Lebanon**

Some children mentioned that playdough is the activity that entertains them the most. In addition to two children who expressed that their favorite thing to do is to help out facilitators during the sessions.

### In terms of uncomfortableness/least favorite thing about AS Friends for children:

#### → Jordan

Some children mentioned they did not like to stay still, or be sitting on a chair, but rather kept moving and being physically active. In addition to a child who stated that he/she does not like swings and does not like cooking.

#### → NES

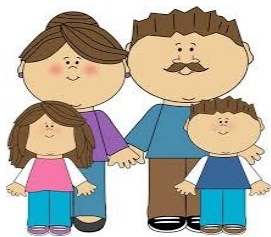
- Though most children responded that they were happy or joyful during the AS Friends sessions when asked, one child said that he gets annoyed when his mother is not with him during the session. Another child mentioned that when he was a troublemaker, the facilitator did not let him draw and it got him upset. In addition to one child who said that his/her friends annoy him/her sometimes.
- Two children mentioned that they were annoyed with some of the other children in the sessions because they felt that they were distant from them. They also mentioned that younger children had difficulty in understanding the sessions and this was another factor that annoyed them.
- One child responded that “Drawing” was his/her least favorite activity, or an activity he/she personally did not feel like doing.

### 3. Suggestions/Recommendations

Children in Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and NWS had no recommendations or suggestions to the AS Friends program. Almost all children across countries had no further responses to share, however, one child in **NES** suggested that he/she would like longer sessions duration.

## Caregivers of Children Perspective on AS Friends program

*“My child can now express her feelings and talk to me” - Caregiver of child in Lebanon.*



### 1. Regional

Caregivers of children who participated in the AS Friends program across countries expressed that their children’s experience and their reaction to the program was overall positive and beneficial to their socio-emotional, educational, and psychological skills. Caregivers agreed that they have seen positive changes in their children’s behavioral patterns, self-esteem, acknowledging and accepting their surroundings, communication, and learning skills. Caregivers also expressed that their children became more creative at home as they color, draw, read stories, and watch AS videos. Caregivers also mentioned that their children would bring worksheets with them back home and draw or color with them.

In terms of communication skills, many caregivers mentioned that their children developed their interaction whether at home or at the center; some of the caregivers struggled with their children being isolated or shy and the program helped enhance their children's communication skills. In addition to also building new friendships at the center and enhancing their circle in terms of having newly built friendships from different nationalities and cultures. Caregivers also noticed changes in their children's learning skills such as being able to recognize different fruit colors or repeat the alphabet faster.

When it comes to whether the AS Friends program responded to children's needs and abilities, all caregivers across countries with more than one child attending the program agreed that the program positively responded to their children's needs and took account their abilities. When asked if they would re-register their children in the program, all caregivers agreed that they would.

Caregivers mentioned that their children were very happy about the facilitators' performance in the activities/sessions and mentioned that facilitators were kind and loving towards them. Furthermore, caregivers have had contact with facilitators, mostly via WhatsApp, to communicate updates about the sessions/activities with their children, and caregivers expressed that the facilitators responses were efficient and effective. Finally, caregivers expressed that their children were comfortable at the center and with facilitators when asked if their children liked or felt comfortable during the AS Friends sessions/activities.

In terms of countries feedback on which age group did the AS Friends program impact the most, caregivers' feedback were almost equally split in which a number of caregivers mentioned that their younger children (aged from 3 to 5 years) benefited more from the program, and several caregivers mentioned that their older children (aged from 6 to 8 years) benefited more from the program. In addition to several caregivers who agreed that the AS program impacted all their children of different age groups.

When it comes to challenges, no caregiver stated that they, or their children faced any challenges with the AS Friends program material nor facilitators' facilitation techniques. In contrast, several caregivers pointed out that the center was far away from their place of living, and some mentioned that the session timings were conflicted with their children's schools or kindergartens' schedule timing. When it comes to recommendations, caregivers suggested to increase the length of the AS Families program, and target older age groups (specifically children above the age of 8 years).

Below are some quotes about caregivers expressing their satisfaction and that of their children with the AS Friends Program:

*"The facilitator says that my child is very sympathetic towards the facilitators and other children. She loves and hugs everyone"* – Caregiver in Jordan

*"The teachers love us, and we feel comfortable, and we learn beautiful and useful things from them"* - Caregivers quoting their children in NES.

*"My teacher is very beautiful, and I love her very much and I love her movements in playing"* - Caregivers quoting their children in NES.

*"I love my teachers and learn and enjoy my time with them"* - Caregivers quoting their children in NES.

*"I learn the lessons with my teachers, and I love them, and their style is beautiful and affectionate"* - Caregivers quoting their children in NES.

*"My child used to get jealous of his sister, but now he plays with her and expresses his feelings, he can show his love to his family"*- Caregiver in Lebanon.

## 2. Caregivers feedback on their children's experience with the AS Friends program

Caregivers in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked if their children would mention any of the activities or sessions they received during their participation in the AS Friends program.

Most caregivers agreed that their children would talk to them, and/or would implement the learnings they have received during their time at the AS Friends sessions similar to the trends mentioned in the regional section above. Below are the unique country findings of caregivers' perspective of their children's response on what they told them about the AS Friends program:

### ➔ **Jordan:**

- The program helped shape the children's linguistic skills as several caregivers in Jordan expressed that the program improved their children's basic English skills such as repeating the alphabet or memorizing simple words.
- One caregiver quoted her child telling her that *"We don't get bored at the center"*.

### ➔ **NES:**

- Caregivers generally expressed how the program encouraged their children to be creative in different aspects, whether it is learning through play, or through expressing emotions.
- One caregiver in NES mentioned that her child loves to draw butterflies and birds as a result of attending the program.

### ➔ **NWS:**

- In terms of the AS Friends program developing children's learning skills, one caregiver in NWS mentioned that her child is now able to differentiate geometrical shapes, colors, and gender.
- As a result of the AS Friends program, one caregiver mentioned that her child became more empathetic towards animals.

### ➔ **Lebanon:**

- When it comes to AS Friends characters, some caregivers expressed how impressed their children were with the show and some mentioned that their children memorized the AS characters in stories including: Maazouza, Ka'aka, Jad and Basma.

### ➔ **Iraq:**

- Caregivers in Iraq expressed similar feedback to those mentioned in the regional section above.

## 3. Change in children's behavioral skills and acceptance towards others

*"Mom, we should not use nasty words, we cannot hit someone."*- Caregiver in Jordan quoted what her child had said to her after attending the AS Friends program.

Caregivers in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked whether they have noticed a change in their children's behavioral patterns and of their acknowledgement and acceptance of their surroundings. Caregivers across countries agreed that they have noticed a positive improvement in their children's behavioral patterns. Below are the unique country findings that caregivers shared in terms of their children's behavioral patterns:

➔ **Jordan:**

- When it comes to some difficulties that caregivers previously struggled with their children, some mentioned their children used to struggle when holding a pen (difficulties in holding a pen correctly) before attending the AS Friends sessions. The AS Friends sessions helped to overcome this difficulty for children, and they were then able to take hold of the pen properly. One caregiver said that her daughter's handwriting became a lot better due to the AS Friends program.
- The AS friends program helped a child and his/her caregiver in terms of the child having "Unhealthy attachment" towards the caregiver as explained by the caregiver; the program shaped the child's behavioral pattern with respect to attachment issues as the caregiver said that this issue was resolved as a result of the AS Friends program.
- When it comes to children acknowledging and accepting their surroundings, one caregiver said her daughter had a habit of picking on people's physical looks such as their hair and how they are dressed; as a result of the AS Friends program, her daughter became more self-aware of this issue and changed this habit.

➔ **NES:**

- In terms of the children's psychological well-being, one caregiver has seen change in her children (more than one of her children attended the program) as they became more psychologically relaxed after attending the AS Friends programs.
- Another caregiver mentioned that her child/ren would play with others without causing any trouble with their surroundings, as they, as described, were troublemakers prior to attending the AS Friends program.
- In terms of children's acceptance of people with disabilities, one caregiver mentioned that her children used to be afraid of people with disabilities, indicating that they could be dangerous or harmful. The AS Friends program helped the caregiver's children in terms of accepting people with disabilities.

➔ **NWS:**

- Caregivers expressed how useful the AS Friends program was to their children, one of its results was that one caregiver said her child used to be very aggressive, however, the AS Friends program helped shape his/her behavior to being less aggressive towards others.

➔ **Lebanon:**

"*We are all brothers*"- Caregiver in Lebanon quoted what her child said to her after attending the AS Friends program.

- The AS Friends program helped develop children's learning to be more expressive. Several caregivers in Lebanon mentioned that as a result of the program, their children became less

*jealous* of their siblings or other children in general, in addition to being less selfish, and are more respectful to the instructions/rules within their homes and daily routines.

- Lebanon shared similar trends to other countries in terms of having children dealing with people with disabilities; however, a unique finding included several caregivers who shared their experience with their children's acceptance of their surroundings including people with disability. One caregiver mentioned that her child used to be distant from a relative of theirs struggling with a shrapnel injury, however, after attending the AS Friends program, her daughter has become more acceptant towards the relative. Another caregiver mentioned that her child feared a neighbor who struggled with a mental illness and now became more acceptant about the neighbor. Also, one caregiver quoted that: *"they now start being more attentive to people with disability"*. Finally, one caregiver said that her child suffers from hemophilia, and is constantly scared of hurting himself, but he feels more confident to interact with other children and feels safe in the center.

➔ **Iraq:**

- In terms of caregivers' perspective on their children's learning skills, two caregivers in Iraq said that their children previously disliked leaving for school, but after attending the AS Friends program, they started liking school and liked learning new skills.
- Another caregiver expressed how fearful her child was from being outdoors, and that the program helped him be more outgoing and started playing outside.
- The AS Friends program helped shape children's understanding and acceptance of others as one caregiver in Iraq mentioned that her child who has Down Syndrome struggled with accepting other children, but saw that children play together at the center and with facilitators as well, and he did not feel any different from them.

#### 4. Caregivers sharing activities their children started doing post-AS Friends program

Caregivers in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked whether there is an activity that their children did not do before and started doing after attending the AS Friends program.

*"Mom, you are doing it wrong, let me show you how to do this [when he thinks his mother is doing something incorrect]"*- Caregiver in Jordan quoted what her child had said to her after attending the AS program.

Caregivers in **Jordan, NWS and NES** responses to activities their children started doing after attending the AS Friends program is similar to the trends mentioned in the regional section above. However, below are the unique findings of which caregivers in Lebanon and Iraq shared in terms of their children doing activities post attending the AS Friends program:

➔ **Lebanon:**

- Generally, caregivers in Lebanon gave positive feedback in terms of their interaction with their children, after their children attended the AS Friends program. One caregiver mentioned that her daughter would ask for an Ahlan Simsim story before her bedtime.

➔ **Iraq:**

- When it comes to caregivers' children's learning skills, one caregiver in Iraq mentioned that his/her child lacked knowledge in writing but developed his/her writing skills after attending the AS Friends program.
- In terms of caregivers' children's communication and interaction skills, one caregiver also mentioned that her children disliked engaging in activities prior to attending the AS Friends program but started being more engaging in different activities due to the AS Friends program.

## 5. Caregivers of children with different age groups

Caregivers in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked that if they had children from different age groups attending the AS Friends program, whether they think one age group benefited more than children of other age group, and whether the AS Friends program responds to children's needs and takes into account their abilities. There were different perspectives from caregivers with more than one child attending the AS Friends program regarding which children age groups benefited more from the AS Friends program.

In NWS, the reasons were that their younger children's participation in the program developed their pronunciation skills. In Lebanon, the reason was that their children have not yet registered in school and the program helps enhance certain educational skills in their young age. For the remaining caregivers who answered older age groups benefiting more from the AS Friends program (specifically 5–8-year-old children), in NES, two caregivers mentioned it was because their older children have the ability to absorb more information than their younger children. In Lebanon, caregivers who said that their older children benefited more was because they were more aware of the activities provided during the AS sessions/activities. However, in NES, NWS and Lebanon, some caregivers expressed that all their children of different age groups benefited equally from the AS Friends program.

Caregivers in NES, NWS and Lebanon expressed the positive impact that the program left on their children in terms of being inclusive to all children without discrimination and engaging children of different backgrounds, races, or traditions into activities together.

## 6. Caregivers' suggestions/recommendations about the AS Friends Program

Caregivers were asked if they have any recommendations or suggestions around the AS Friends topics, activities, materials, timing, duration, location or facilitators. Aside from the regional recommendations mentioned above that were similar across countries, below are the unique country recommendations:

➔ **Jordan:**

- One caregiver suggested that the program should be open to register a child more than once, as repetition is beneficial for children.
- Some caregivers suggested providing summer programs for children to participate in during their time off school.

→ **NES:**

- Several caregivers suggested to increase the educational content of the program including Arabic and English languages.
- Caregivers (count is unknown) suggested including additional sessions on encouraging children to love and respect their siblings, and to cooperate and communicate positively with their caregivers.

→ **NWS:**

Below is a list of suggestions provided by one or two caregivers per suggestion in NWS:

- Have a reception where children can wait for their parents after sessions are conducted.
- Include transportation to the AS centers for children.
- Provide psychological sessions for children.
- Have one AS Friends session per week, instead of three, but for longer hours.
- Have wider spaces in AS centers.
- Provide more gifts for children.
- Deliver sessions to develop better pronunciation skills for children (by pronunciation the caregiver means how a word is pronounced).

→ **Lebanon:**

- Several caregivers suggested to increase the educational content of the program including Arabic and English languages.
- Give children homework to do after sessions.
- Deliver awareness sessions such as love of siblings, staying safe in the streets, and not accepting food or anything from strangers.
- Add more activities on Lego and playdough.

## Facilitators Perspective on AS Friends Program



### 1. Regional

*"We aim at a social ladder that accepts all children of each other. It was a wonderful interaction"* – Facilitator in NES

**Facilitators working under the AS Friends program expressed that they enjoyed their role in educating children through the AS Friends content material.** Besides, they have had previous experiences prior to their role in the AS program with children, including being enrolled in academic institutions and/or working with children from different sectors. Facilitators enjoyed their role because they were able to interact, communicate, play, and educate children participants. Most facilitators across countries mentioned that being part of the AS Friends program made them happy because they experienced children's happiness through providing sessions/activities.



**When asked about their interaction with children during sessions, facilitators' feedback was overall positive as they were able to engage and facilitate sessions smoothly.** Facilitators also expressed that the interaction among children during sessions was rather positive and even when an issue took place, facilitators would build strategies such as encouraging older children to help younger ones when an activity is taking place. In addition to seeing children enhance their skills through several aspects by the end of the program and be able to see these children express themselves emotionally, as the program tends to focus on developing children's socio-emotional skills through aspects of learning, playing, storytelling and movement.

**In terms of their favorite activities, facilitators expressed that "Stress Relief Techniques" and other activities that offer space for children to express their emotions, whether on their own or through the feeling's cards, was among their favorites** because it allowed children to be open and express their emotions freely. Also, facilitators had a role in shaping children's socio-emotional skills as facilitators expressed that they would interact with children and ask them about their feelings. Facilitators relied on the feeling's cards and stress relief techniques to help children be expressive, in addition to methods of storytelling, video content or movement, and they expressed that those methods were also helpful in enhancing children's interactive skills when expressing feelings. In NES and NWS, facilitators expressed that children would talk about their feelings and express their concerns of being surrounded by difficulties in such conflicted areas.

**Furthermore, all facilitators who dealt with children from different backgrounds including differences in nationality or race, agreed that the interaction among children was overall positive,** as children engaged, played, and supported each other throughout sessions/activities. Even when faced with minimal issues such as children of different nationalities or gender, facilitators stated that they would encourage children to interact and play together through communication, and/or activities including storytelling. Therefore, facilitators did not face challenges with children of different backgrounds.

**In terms of facilitating children of different age groups, facilitators were able to manage sessions through encouraging the older children (mainly aged from 6 to 8 years) to help younger children (aged 3 to 5 years) when an activity is taking place.** Though facilitators expressed that younger children needed more attention and explanation, they were able to facilitate sessions without facing challenges and have mentioned that the interaction of children of different age groups was overall positive.

Also, facilitators across countries had different perspectives in identifying the most impacted age group(s) from the AS Friends program. For instance, Jordan, NWS and NES shared a common trend of the AS Friends program impacting mainly children of age group from 4 to 6 years. However, several facilitators stated that the program impacted all age groups equally.

**The most engaging activities for 3 to 5 year-old children from the facilitators' perspectives** across countries included stories (some facilitators preferred short over long stories), "What's in the Box" and "Your Food in Colors" activities, motor or physical activities that included active movements, and coloring/drawing. In contrast, **facilitators said that the least engaging activities for 3 to 5 year-old children** included long stories/storytelling; an example of long stories mentioned by NES facilitators was "Elmo's Activity" and "Four Seasons" stories. Some reasons mentioned by facilitators was because children could get confused or not understand the story concept when it is very long. **For older children aged from 6 to 8 years old, facilitators' perspective of their most engaging or enjoyable activities** which were common across some countries included "Let's Find the Differences", "What's in the Box", "Patterns/Alphabets/Numbers" and storytelling activities. In contrast, **the least engaging activities from**

**the facilitators' perspectives among children aged from 6 to 8 years old** which were common across countries included stories/storytelling activity.

**Facilitators across countries had similar answers when asked about what was their favorite activity to conduct.** Their answers mainly included storytelling, coloring/drawing (including the worksheets provided during AS Families sessions), and AS video content/AS show on television. When it came to their least favorite activity to conduct, facilitators across countries said that some stories were long and children got bored after a while of telling these stories, in addition to some facilitators who found video contents to be the least enjoyable during sessions. However, many facilitators expressed that there was not an activity they enjoyed the least.

**Furthermore, when it came to facilitators' perspectives on the training process for the AS Friends program, facilitators across countries expressed that the training enabled them to enhance their knowledge and helped them implement the program sessions with children better,** in addition, facilitators practiced ways to implement the activities with children during those trainings. Facilitators also stated that the training held prior to implementing the AS Friends program was age appropriate, contextual, and relevant to support their interaction with children during the sessions. Finally, most facilitators also expressed that the AS Friends content material was well developed, and this led to delivering the sessions/activities as per the plan provided by the technical management team.

## 2. Facilitators' experience with the AS Friends program

Facilitators in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked if they were able to deliver sessions as per the plan, and whether the objectives of the program were met from their perspectives. Facilitators across countries agreed that they were able to deliver the sessions and that the objectives were met. Below are the unique country findings that facilitators expressed in terms of their experience in delivering the AS Friends program:

### → **Jordan:**

- In terms of content delivery, one facilitator mentioned that she was able to deliver the sessions to a certain extent as children were more focused when they first arrived. Therefore, she would delay the playing/singing part until the second part of the session and provide the more advanced material at the first part of the session.
- In terms of AS Friends material, one facilitator mentioned that one of the sessions "Your Food in Colors" was well explained, however, it was very long. She, however, managed to deliver it per the plan.
- In terms of targeting children, one facilitator mentioned that she exceeded her target by conducting the sessions to 60 children instead of 30 (her original target).

### → **NES:**

- Due to the unstable security situation in Syria, two facilitators pointed out that they were unable to have control on the transport vehicle and transfer of materials.
- The AS Friends training teaches the importance of inclusivity of children of different backgrounds and/or with disabilities. One facilitator pointed out that he learnt to implement the AS Friends

program activities with children with hearing, linguistic and visual disabilities through trainings provided prior to the AS Friends program implementation.

- In terms of interacting with children during sessions, one facilitator mentioned that sometimes children got distracted which delayed the session activity timings. However, the facilitator would try to avoid the delays by implementing easier activities first such as coloring, then the longer activities next as "Maze" activity.
- Because several children spoke different languages, a facilitator pointed out that it was challenging to implement activities with younger children (did not mention what age) who knew little or no Arabic.

➔ **Lebanon:**

- The AS Friends program targets children of different age groups. One facilitator said she/he would implement activities as per the plan 90% of the time. However, sometimes the activity is more difficult to younger age groups. The facilitator stated an example of "video of friends", whereby children aged 3 to 5 years did not understand the video like the older children did, and that the names of the characters were difficult, so the facilitator had to repeat the video several times to younger children.
- Another facilitator said that the activities are organized and clear, however mentioning that it was more challenging for some age groups. The facilitator added that the instructions in the handbook were clear for her/him to deliver the sessions.

➔ **NWS & Iraq:** Facilitators expressed similar trends to those mentioned in the regional section above.

### 3. Facilitators' favorite activity from the AS Friends program

Facilitators in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked what their favorite activity was and why.

Below are the unique country findings:

➔ **Jordan:**

- Facilitators in Jordan said that the "غذاؤك بالالوان/Your Food In Colors", "شجرة المجتمع", "Airplane papers" and "هدية تيتا نور/Mama Noura Gifts" were among their favorite activities.

➔ **NES:**

- Facilitators in NES said that the "غذاؤك بالالوان/Your Food In Colors" was among their favorite activity.

➔ **NWS:**

- In NWS, different facilitators mentioned different activities/stories/worksheets/topics that they said is their favorite, including: "Summer trip to Arab lands" because this activity enhances children's knowledge of different cultures and traditions which will impact their communication skills (as explained by one facilitator).

- One facilitator added "Learn through play" activities because they are inclusive of children with disabilities, as well as include group discussions and group work.
- One facilitator added "Bait al Bulbul" because children enjoy it, and it gave children ways to deal with their fears as their country usually goes through conflicting circumstances.
- One facilitator mentioned "Let's find the differences" activity, saying that it lets children get engaged as well as be aware of their senses such as hearing or smelling.
- Lastly, one facilitator mentioned that any activity including movement is enjoyable for children.

➔ **Lebanon:**

- In Lebanon, one facilitator said patterns was his/her favorite activity because they get children excited and is applicable to all age groups. Also, one facilitator said videos were his/her favorite activity to deliver.

➔ **Iraq:**

- In Iraq, some facilitators mentioned the "Community Tree | شجرة المجتمع" as their favorite activity, in addition to one facilitator who mentioned "My new Friend" topic/activity is his/her favorite activity.

#### 4. Facilitators' perspective on delivery of content and activities to children with disabilities

Facilitators in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked if they conducted sessions that had children with disabilities. Facilitators across countries agreed that the AS Friends material was inclusive towards children with disabilities. Below are the unique country findings in terms of some facilitators' perspectives on AS Friends content delivery to children with disabilities:

➔ **Jordan:**

Some facilitators in Jordan stated that they worked with children struggling with disability, such as delay in speech, hearing and understanding. Among these facilitators, one mentioned she would allow the children to communicate through their visual gestures and focus on such skills to develop. In addition to one facilitator who facilitated one child who had learning difficulties who struggled to recognize shapes and drawings, the facilitator made sure to sit with her individually when conducting a learning activity and would also label visible points in the worksheet to help her trace the shape/drawing, and then would ask the child to repeat it on her own. Also, one facilitator mentioned that if she notices a child with weak skills, or difficulties in conducting a learning activity, she would make them feel like "it is okay" and help them develop whatever skill they are missing.

➔ **NES:**

One facilitator stated that "for high-degree disabilities", the facilitator was not able to deliver the AS Friends sessions for those children, indicating that they may cause harm to themselves or/and other children as well. One facilitator mentioned he worked with a child who needs a hearing aid, or has a hearing issue, in addition to a child with a motor disability. One facilitator mentioned that she facilitated a child with a walking disability. Another two facilitators stated that they facilitated a child with visual

impairment. One of them said that: *"We had to present an activity based on audio and video, with an explanation of the characters and events in the video (focusing on audio)"*.

**→ NWS:**

One facilitator said that she facilitated a child with hearing problems, so she focused on delivering visual content for him/her. Another facilitator mentioned she dealt with a child who had vision impairment, saying that the material fits the needs of children with disabilities and the child was able to benefit from the AS Friends program. One facilitator mentioned that she/he dealt with children who had issues in holding a pen or paper, but this did not impact them in terms of being able to receive activities nor did it isolate them.

**→ Lebanon:**

A facilitator mentioned having two children with disabilities in which he/she delivered the sessions in a clear way for them. Another facilitator mentioned that the AS Friends content was not suitable for one child who had a mental disability.

**→ Iraq:**

Some facilitators expressed that the AS Friends material is fit for children with disabilities depending on the disability they had, indicating that not all types of children with disabilities would be able to understand the material.

## 5. Facilitators feedback on what can be added to the training

*"Of course, I had no experience with providing sessions to children or classroom management, so I learned everything from the training"* - Facilitator in Lebanon

*"I remember that the training included everything like discussions, content application, schedules and theoretical and practical examples"* - Facilitator in Lebanon

Facilitators in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked if they would add anything to the AS Friends training process to be more beneficial for them. Below are the unique country findings in terms of some facilitators' feedback to the training process:

**→ Jordan:**

- Add video content to the training material to show as an example to implement the program.
- Add a technological element to the program, because children keep evolving and technology is enhancing, adding that this element would also require to increase the number of training days.
- In terms of the number of trainees, a facilitator mentioned that it would be better to have less trainees within the educator's training session (have 10-12 trainees only) to have more time to practice (role play).
- Have more training days to learn from each other's experiences as educators.

➔ **NES:**

- Like Jordan, a suggestion from some facilitators was to also increase the number of training days; however, in NES their reason was because there were some aspects to the training they felt they would want to learn more about.

➔ **NWS:**

- Allocate activities to support people with disabilities with practical applications through scenarios.

➔ **Lebanon:**

- Amend AS Friends material to fit age criteria in terms of disaggregating content for children aged from 3 to 4 years together, 5 to 6 years together, and 7 to 8 years together.
- Include refresher trainings on how to deal with children and how to overcome challenges during sessions.
- One facilitator specifically stated: *"Provide more than one training, where we discuss all the details with the senior quality manager after finalizing the sessions on how to overcome challenges"*.

➔ **Iraq:**

- For the technical team that trains facilitators, it is important to take into consideration that each child has special developmental age and special reactions.

## 6. Facilitators' feedback on Ahlan Simsim Friends resources

Facilitators in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked about AS Friends resources in terms of language, usability and whether they encountered any difficulties using them. In NWS, Lebanon and Iraq, facilitators stated that the resources provided for them in terms of activities manual, resource guide, play materials and tools were available for them and they did not encounter difficulties in terms of their usability or language. Most facilitators in Jordan and NES have also expressed similar feedback to the rest of the countries; however, below are their unique findings:

➔ **Jordan:**

- A facilitator mentioned that not all AS Friends stories were provided for her when she requested them.
- In terms of material printing, one facilitator said that she had to print AS Friends materials on her own expenses.
- In terms of material guides, one facilitator stated: *"There has to be coordination between the guides, and some things are repeated in some guides"*.

➔ **NES:**

- In terms of organization of materials, one facilitator in NES stated: *"But the papers come stapled without any protective material, so they get torn"*.

## 7. Facilitators' perspective on AS Friends effect on children of different age groups

Facilitators in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked which children age group they thought the program impacted the most. Some facilitators, specifically in NES and NWS, stated that children of all age groups enjoyed AS Friends activities equally. Below are the unique country findings that facilitators found the AS Friends program to be most impactful to certain age groups:

### → **Jordan:**

- In Jordan, different facilitators had different opinions on the AS Friends program effect on different age groups. Facilitators mentioned that children aged from 4 to 5 years (one facilitator, common trend with NWS), 4 to 6 years (one facilitator, common trend with NES), and 6 to 8 years (one facilitator) were the most affected by the AS Friends program.
- One facilitator mentioned that older children get a little bored.

### → **NES:**

- In NES, facilitators also had different perspectives on which children's age groups were mostly affected by the AS Friends program. They thought that children aged from 3 to 5 years (one facilitator, common trend with Lebanon), children aged from 4 to 6 years (one facilitator, common trend with Jordan), children aged from 4 to 8 years (one facilitator), children aged from 6 to 7 years (one facilitator), and children aged from 7 to 8 years (one facilitator) were the most affected by the AS Friends program.

### → **NWS:**

- Most facilitators said that the AS Friends program affected children who are 5 years and above.
- One facilitator mentioned that it impacted children aged from 4 to 5 years old (common trend with Jordan).
- One facilitator mentioned that it was clear that some activities had a bigger effect on certain age groups than other activities, saying that children aged from 6 to 8 years were more engaged in activities that included competition, in addition to creating airplanes out of cut out papers of which they were able to learn more than those who were younger. However, she said that younger children enjoyed stories more as they enhanced their imagination, and they were able to relate with the characters of the stories.

### → **Lebanon:**

- Two facilitators mentioned that the AS Friends affected the 3 to 5 age group (common trend with NES).
- One of them stated it depends on the activity; some of the activities were very easy for 7 to 8 years old children. However, the facilitator said that 90% of the time, all age groups were affected by the AS Friends program.
- One facilitator said that children aged from 5 to 7 years were enjoying the sessions more but stated that it depends on the activity.

### → **Iraq:**

- Facilitators said that children aged from 5 to 8 years benefited the most from the program.

## 8. Facilitators' perspective on AS Friends most and least engaging activities for children of different age groups

Facilitators in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked whether there were certain activities that children of specific age groups engaged the most and the least, and what was it about those activities that seem to facilitators more or less enjoyable or engaging for children. Facilitators expressed similar trends to those mentioned in the regional section above. Below are the unique country findings that facilitators shared in terms of activities that children of specific age groups engaged more or less in.

### a. Sessions most engaging to children aged from 3 to 5 years

#### ➔ **Jordan:**

- Nutrition, fruits (colors/shapes).

#### ➔ **NES:**

- Activities such as "I Imitate/Say and You Guess" and anything that revolves around animals in general.

#### ➔ **NWS:**

- "Let's find the Differences" activity.
- "Family Tree" activity – facilitator said children loved this activity because they are attached to their families.
- "Bake Cake with Friends" – facilitators said because children love sweets.

#### ➔ **Lebanon:**

- Songs and videos – facilitator said because children enjoy technology and screens.

#### ➔ **Iraq:**

- Facilitators in Iraq shared similar trends to those mentioned in the regional section above.

### b. Sessions least engaging to children aged from 3 to 5 years

#### ➔ **Jordan:**

- "Let's Find the Differences" activity – facilitators said that in this age group, children were not able to understand the idea of the activity.
- "Number Cards and Letters" – facilitator stated that they are not part of this age group's academic system in schools/kindergarten.

#### ➔ **NES:**

- Feelings activity – facilitator said because children of this age group do not understand it and may not be able to express their feelings.

Facilitators in NWS, Lebanon, and Iraq expressed similar perspectives to the trends mentioned in the regional section above.



c. Sessions most engaging to children aged from 6 to 8 years

➔ **Jordan:**

- The “Cheerful Friends” activity as older children liked being challenged and are naturally more curious.
- Drawing and storytelling activities.

➔ **NES:**

- The “Tree of the Maze” activity as facilitator said it creates good spirit and competition between children of this age group.

➔ **NWS:**

- “Rope Pulling” and “Family Tree” activities.

➔ **Lebanon:**

- Activities that revolve around families, friends, and feelings in general.

➔ **Iraq:**

- Facilitators in Iraq shared perspectives that are like those in the regional section above.

d. Sessions least engaging to children aged from 6 to 8 years

➔ **Jordan:**

- AS Friends videos – the facilitator said because they did not pay attention to the videos.

➔ **NES:**

- Simple activities that do not require effort such as the fruit colors; the facilitator said because children of this age group seemed to not be enjoying such activities.

➔ **NWS:**

- Facilitators in NWS expressed perspectives like the trends in the regional section above.

➔ **Lebanon:**

- Though some facilitators in Lebanon expressed similar feedback about stories/storytelling activities to the regional section above, a facilitator commented that some stories are built to be delivered for children who are 3 years old, and older children found them to be easy.
- “Elmo and His Friends” video – facilitator said because the characters’ names were difficult for children.

➔ **Iraq:**

- Facilitators agreed that there were no activities that children of this age seemed to engage or enjoy less in.

## 9. Challenges/difficulties facilitators encountered with AS Friends Program

Facilitators in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked if they faced challenges or difficulties with the AS Friends program. Most facilitators across countries agreed that they did not encounter difficulties while implementing the AS Friends program. However, below are the unique country findings of which some facilitators shared in terms of challenges faced with the AS Friends program.

### → **Jordan:**

- In terms of the availability of activity tools, a facilitator mentioned that the dough supplies were limited to children.
- When it came to the facilitation of sessions, a facilitator said that it would sometimes be difficult to educate younger children when their parents are around, as this causes a distraction for them.
- In terms of the timing of the sessions, a facilitator mentioned that the sessions took place very early and it was difficult for him/her to go the center early.

### → **NES:**

- In terms of facing difficulties with educating children, a facilitator mentioned that "Elmo Making a New Friend" video had character names that children would find hard to pronounce.
- In terms of storytelling, a facilitator mentioned that some stories were not suitable for younger children as they found such stories difficult to understand.
- When it comes to operational challenges, two facilitators mentioned that facilitating an activity in Al-Hol camp was challenging due to the camp getting closed more than once, affecting the number of children and ongoing maintenance work, which led to the suspension of activities as a result of the long distance between AS Center and their tents.
- Same facilitators also commented on the location sites indicating that some ECD centers or sites were not suitable to conduct sessions in, including the 'health center' when there are emergency cases resulting in fear or panic occurring among children. Also, the presence of the center within the public street (traffic crisis) poses a danger to children.
- Difficulties in conducting sessions/activities for some facilitators included limited time length with a large number of children to facilitate. One facilitator said that it is hard to deliver 30 sessions in 10 days only. Other challenges from some facilitators included that the session time conflicted with school time, so they had to change the session time to accommodate, in addition to lack of commitment or non-compliance in terms of attendance and narrow spaces (especially for activities that included movement).
- In terms of facilitating sessions for children with different languages, some facilitators commented that the language is easy for the Arabic component but difficult for the Kurdish component.

### → **NWS:**

- In terms of AS Friends sessions/activities, a facilitator commented that the "Patterns" activity was challenging for all age groups (3-8 years). Another facilitator commented that airplane out of paper cuts took a long time to explain to children. Also, one facilitator commented that the "Maze" activity had limited time length, indicating that it needed more time to conduct as an activity.

**→ Lebanon:**

- In terms of having difficulties conducting sessions at the center, a facilitator commented on the electricity issues and internet connection being a challenge. Another facilitator commented on the logistics and difficulties faced in terms of session timings conflicting with school opening.

**→ Iraq:**

- Iraq facilitators did not encounter any challenges with the AS Friends program.

### 10. Facilitators' recommendations/suggestions for the AS Friends Program

Facilitators in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, NWS and NES were asked if they had any suggestions to improve the AS Friends program around content, location, duration or activities. Below are the major highlights of which facilitators shared in terms of where they would like to see improvements within the AS Friends program.

**→ Jordan:**

- One facilitator commented that the resources were delivered late, so she suggested having them on time.
- Increase the number of activities including sports events. The facilitator commented that it would make children more excited to come to the AS centers.

**→ NES:**

- Recommendations on session activities included adding topics for children with behavioral issues, simplifying the materials for 3 year-old children, and adding content material on "values and non-bullying" for all children.
- In terms of having children who speak different languages, one facilitator commented that the AS Friends materials must be provided in all the languages spoken in the community.

**→ NWS:**

- When it comes to recommendations on AS Friends activities, facilitators commented that more stories/storytelling activities should be added to the curriculum as there are only a few stories.

**→ Lebanon:**

- In terms of center accessibility, a facilitator commented to provide transportation for children to the centers.

**→ Iraq:**

- Facilitators mentioned that caregivers requested to extend the length of the AS Friends program.