



# SMILEY CLUBS

## INTERNAL REVIEW FINAL REPORT

Yerevan 2025

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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This review is the result of the collective efforts, commitment, and cooperation of all those involved. We hope that the findings and insights from this review will serve as a valuable resource to inform and support the continued development and well-being of children.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>REVIEW LIMITATIONS.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH FACILITATORS.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>FEEDBACK COLLECTED FROM CHILDREN.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL DIRECTORS.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL TEACHERS.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>STANDARD QUALITY CHECK.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>78</b>

## SUMMARY

Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS), known as Smiley Clubs (SCs), have been a central program of the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) for over two decades. Initially launched in Yerevan dormitories, the program has significantly expanded in recent years to cover locations across the country.

The primary aim of the SCs is to support children affected by conflict or those from vulnerable families by providing educational assistance, safe environments for play, and opportunities for social interaction. This initiative plays a vital role in helping children cope with challenging circumstances, promoting resilience, and enabling continuous learning in a secure setting. Targeting children aged 6 to 14 from both displaced and host communities, the SCs are designed to foster social cohesion and integration. Activities offered include homework support, psychosocial support sessions, and a variety of socio-cultural events.

To assess the effectiveness of the SCs and provide recommendations for similar interventions, an internal review was initiated focusing on three key components of the program: educational access and attainment, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and social cohesion and integration. The review was conducted across 30 SCs and included input from 253 parents and caregivers, 102 volunteers and educators, 27 school directors, 13 teachers who interact with children daily were interviewed; however, they are not directly involved in SCs as facilitators, four Marzpetaran<sup>1</sup> representatives, and more than 250 children aged 6–14.

Data collection was carried out using pre-developed questionnaires administered through face-to-face interviews and group discussions. A child-friendly approach using smiley-face visuals, was applied to gather feedback from children in an accessible and engaging way. As baseline data was not available, most of the information gathered was qualitative, and thematic analysis was used to interpret the results. Throughout the process, attention was given to achieving theoretical saturation by ensuring both code saturation and meaning saturation were considered during data collection and analysis.

Overall, the findings indicate positive impact of the SCs. Parents highlighted educational and psychosocial benefits, emphasizing enthusiasm, improved academic performance, and positive behavioral changes in their children. The review findings reveal high levels of satisfaction among parents and caregivers regarding their children's experience in the SCs, with 60 out of 102 respondents rating the experience as “very good,” 31 as “good,” and 11 as “average” and none rated it negatively. Eighty-three per cent felt their expectations were fully

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<sup>1</sup> Regional Administrations of Armenia

met, and 67 per cent observed educational improvement, citing enhanced reading, handwriting, independence, and motivation.

Related to changes in emotional well-being, since participating in SC activities, 66 per cent of parents and caregivers observed improvements in their children's emotional well-being, while 23 per cent reported no noticeable changes and 11 per cent selected "Don't know." Before attending SCs, children were described as "tense," "in fear," "depressed," "aggressive," "feeling down," "very bad," "not stable," "stressful," and "deeply discouraged." After participation, they were reported to be "calm," "more communicative/sociable," "adapted," "happier," "in a good mood," "more open," and "active."

In terms of support to families, parents and caregivers highlighted that the SC program significantly supports them by helping children complete homework and providing a secure, supportive environment that improves children's behavior. Regarding the work of the volunteers and educators 66 parents and caregivers rated volunteers and educators as "very good," some suggested enhancing teaching methods, improving group management skills, and involving more adult volunteers, with 89 per cent expressing no safety concerns about the clubs.

Similar results were shown from the focus group discussion. Out of 15 group discussions, parents in 10 groups prioritized the educational aspect, with 9 expressing positive opinions, particularly appreciating homework assistance and noting improvements such as "My child knows English better now" and "My child can write the letters now." Some parents emphasized that homework assistance allows children to have more free time at home. However, a few parents noted no significant educational changes but acknowledged that children stay in the SCs with joy.

Regarding psychosocial support, 10 groups prioritized this topic, with 9 reporting positive feedback. Parents observed that children are more relaxed, engaged, communicative, active, and in a good mood after attending SCs. Some noted improvements in interpersonal relations and discipline, with comments like "It gives peace of mind and social interaction to children" and "Children communicate and interact here." Parents expressed satisfaction that children prefer coming to SCs over other activities.

Suggestions for improvement included enhancing the psychosocial component by involving psychologists for one-on-one or group work, especially for older children experiencing maturation challenges. Additionally, parents recommended seminars on various topics and emphasized the need for psychological support.

Feedback was also collected from volunteers and educators to gather comprehensive information about the intervention and to assess how well-prepared they are for managing the SCs and working with children. Volunteers and educators described academic support as the primary activity in SCs, focusing heavily on homework assistance to promote academic

achievement. Besides academic support, sessions include various games, art, singing, dancing, theatre, movie watching, and occasional physical and healthy lifestyle activities. Psychosocial support was insufficient within the interventions.

Training participation among volunteers and educators is relatively low, with many only attending a single three-day meeting before the centers opened. Most expressed a strong desire for further training, especially in psychological support, communication with children, and child protection standards. Most volunteers and educators (85 per cent) reported not receiving supervision during their work in the SCs, with only a small number having discussions with coordinators or leaders. Additionally, parents are not involved in the program and referral mechanisms are not part of the programs.

Nevertheless, volunteers and educators have also observed positive changes in both the educational attainment and emotional well-being of the children. Most educators and volunteers (91 per cent) reported that SC activities positively impact children's educational attainment, highlighting improvements such as completed homework, better learning progress, increased motivation, and support for parents who cannot provide tutoring. Additionally, 76 per cent observed positive changes in children's psychological and emotional states, noting increased confidence, social openness, reduced aggression, and overall improved mood and adaptation to the school environment.

The feedback received from children also indicates that they enjoy their time spent in the Smiley Clubs. They appreciate doing homework, playing, engaging in crafts, and spending time with volunteers and educators. The following word cloud illustrates the responses received from children about what they enjoy most in the SCs:



## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

The current focus of the SCs on academic support aligns positively with the overarching operational strategy to ensure safe and equitable access to education for vulnerable children. However, to fully realize the potential of CFS as envisioned by IFRC guidelines, it is recommended to broaden the scope of activities to include psychosocial interventions, play, socialization, and skill development. Harmonizing the schedules and activities across all SCs will ensure consistency and quality, while upgrading physical spaces, subject to funding, will create safer and more welcoming environments for children.

Capacity building for facilitators is critical to the success and safety of the program. Despite the important role facilitators play, training participation has been low, especially among volunteers without prior child-centered education. It is essential to implement comprehensive initial and ongoing training covering psychological support, child protection, and the 'do no harm' principle. Furthermore, adherence to a clear Code of Conduct and active supervision by qualified mentors will help maintain high-quality interventions and safeguard children's well-being, particularly for volunteers lacking professional backgrounds in education or psychology.

To ensure that activities meet children's evolving needs, establishing robust assessment mechanisms is vital. Regular needs assessments will allow the program to adapt and incorporate psychosocial support alongside academic activities. Training facilitators on structured assessment tools and documenting observations will improve data quality and enable evidence-based decision-making. Additionally, impact assessments at multiple levels (output, outcome, and objective) will provide specific evidence of the program's effectiveness and support future resource mobilization. Collaboration with education experts and child psychologists is advised to design tailored assessment instruments.

Strengthening referral mechanisms is another priority to guarantee that vulnerable children receive specialized care when needed. Mapping available child-centered services, enhancing volunteer training on Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI), and improving coordination with local authorities will ensure efficient referral pathways. ARCS's PGI focal point and supervisory staff should actively monitor and support the referral process. Including referral guidelines in the emerging ARCS Child Safeguarding policy will formalize procedures and promote consistent practice across centers.

Improving documentation and consent practices is also essential. Current consent forms focus narrowly on photo permissions and should be expanded to clearly explain data collection, storage, access, and sharing protocols. Standardizing documentation formats and record-keeping across all SCs will enhance monitoring and reporting quality, supporting program transparency and accountability.

Engaging parents and caregivers more actively in the design and implementation of SC activities will strengthen the program's community roots. Beyond invitations to meetings, regular training and awareness sessions can empower caregivers to support their children's learning and psychosocial development. Similarly, establishing functional feedback mechanisms for children, parents, and community members will foster meaningful participation and continuous program improvement. Expanding and maintaining feedback channels such as suggestion boxes and regular surveys will encourage open communication.

Increasing program visibility through consistent community awareness efforts is crucial. Many parents and even schoolteachers have limited understanding of the SCs' objectives and ARCS's role, which hinders broader support. Strengthened communication strategies will enhance local ownership and recognition of the program's value.

Lastly, enhancing coordination with local authorities and other stakeholders remains an important area for growth. Regular updates and information sharing with regional education units and local government officials will increase ARCS's visibility and credibility. Improved collaboration can lead to joint initiatives, shared methodologies, and greater integration of educational and psychosocial approaches within schools and communities, ultimately benefiting the children served.

## INTRODUCTION

The Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) has been operating child friendly spaces (CFS), known as Smiley Clubs (SC), since 2001. Initially launched in dormitories in Yerevan and Kotayk region, the program significantly expanded in 2021 in response to conflict and displacement from Karabakh, extending its reach across Armenia.

According to the IFRC's Operational Guidance for Child Friendly Spaces<sup>2</sup> in Humanitarian Settings, CFS is a safe environment where children can connect with peers, engage in play, access educational activities, and learn to cope with risks in their surroundings. These spaces are designed to be inclusive, promote equality, and foster social cohesion. Additionally, CFSs are participatory spaces for children affected by natural disasters or armed conflict, where integrated programming, such as recreation, education, health, and psychosocial support, can be delivered, or access to services facilitated<sup>3</sup>.

ARCS's Smiley Clubs are designed to meet the needs of children affected by conflict or living in vulnerable situations in Armenia. The program offers educational support, safe play areas, and opportunities for positive social interaction. These spaces play a vital role in supporting children's well-being and resilience by providing a secure environment where they can continue learning and participating in structured, meaningful activities. Serving children aged 6 to 14 from both displaced and host communities, Smiley Clubs focus on fostering integration and social cohesion. Activities include homework support, psychosocial support (PSS), and cultural and social events. Overall purpose of the review is to assess the effectiveness of the SCs programs focusing on the following three areas:

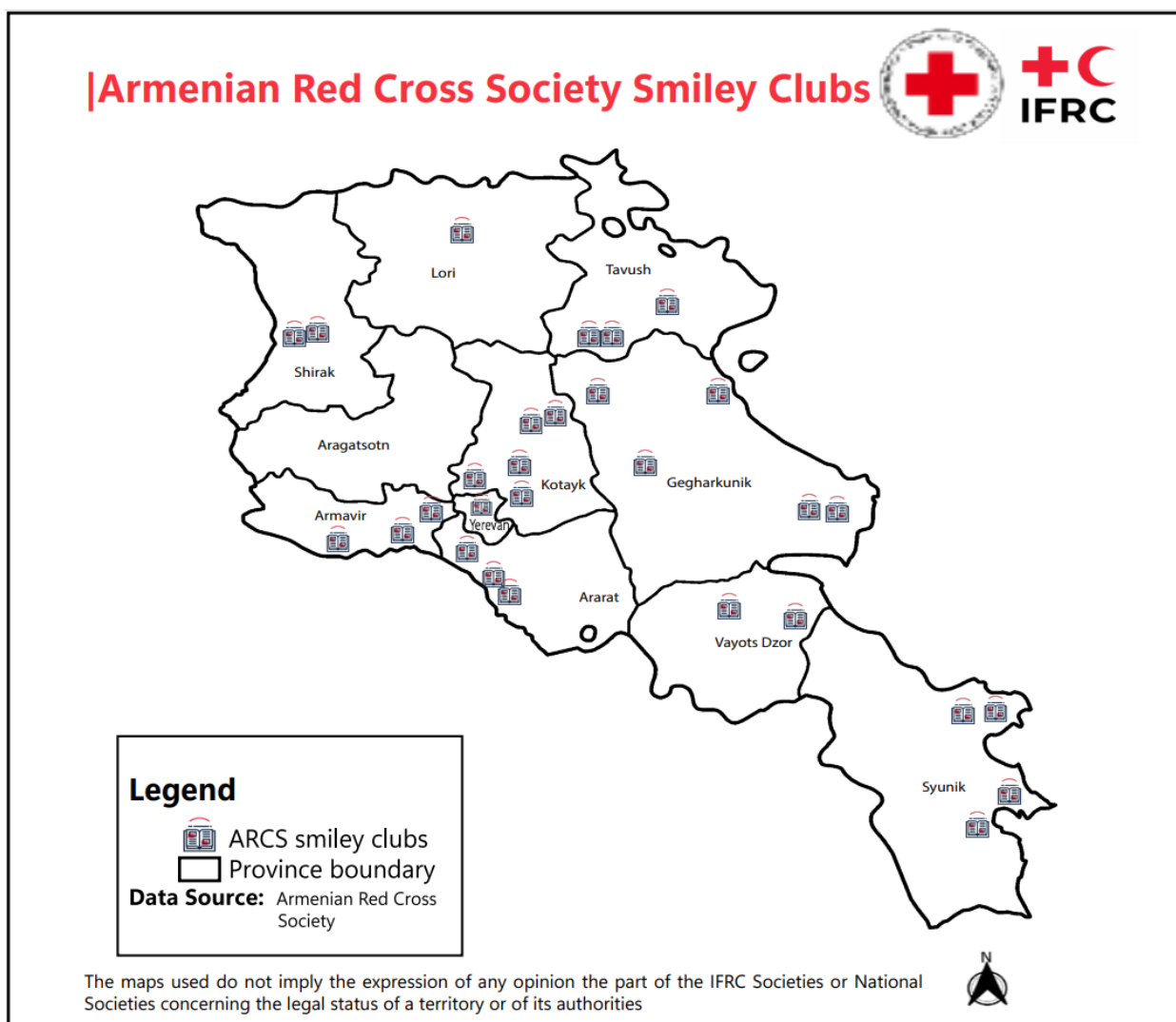
- **Education access and attainment:** Evaluating the program's effectiveness in improving educational and learning outcomes for participating children.
- **Mental health and psychosocial support:** Assessing the impact on children's mental health, social emotional skills, and overall resilience.
- **Social cohesion and integration:** Analyzing how the program fosters social cohesion and integration between children and families displaced from Karabakh and host communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Operational Guidance for Child Friendly Spaces in Humanitarian Settings, World Vision International and IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support, Copenhagen, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Evaluation of child friendly spaces: Tools and guidance for monitoring and evaluating CFS. World Vision Inc, 2015.

The review covered 30 SCs. Although an initial list of 34 SCs was received from ARCS, four SCs were found to be non-operational during data collection and were therefore excluded from the review<sup>4</sup>. The map below illustrates the geographical distribution of the SCs that were visited and included in the review:



<sup>5</sup> (Picture 1: Geographical distribution of SC that were visited and included in the review)

<sup>4</sup> A detailed list of the Smiley Clubs included in the review is provided in Annex A.

<sup>5</sup> There are two SCs in Yerevan

## **REVIEW LIMITATIONS**

Despite the best efforts of the review team, several challenges and limitations influenced the scope and depth of the review. While multiple activities were initially planned and outlined in the inception report, some could not be implemented due to time constraints and limited human resources supporting the review. For example, the literature review, which would have contributed to a deeper understanding of the concept and essence of Smiley Clubs, was not conducted. This remains an important exercise for future reviews or program implementations.

In addition, challenges related to an ongoing institutional crisis limited access to documentation on earlier program phases. As a result, a comprehensive document review could not be undertaken.

A Lessons Learned workshop was also planned as part of the review to gather feedback and perspectives from key stakeholders. However, due to a shift in focus during the preparatory discussions, the workshop was not conducted. Despite this, valuable insights were gathered through interviews with parents and caregivers, volunteers and educators, teachers, and school directors, which enriched the findings of the review.

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

### PUREPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

Within the SC review semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents and caregivers of children attending SCs. Interviews were face-to-face and were possible via phone calls. The primary goal of the interviews was to get feedback from parents and caregivers on the impact of the SCs on the educational attainment of children, as well as on the psychosocial well-being and integration of children.

The list of children attending the SC was received by ARCS, containing a total of 1,727 names. The sample size was calculated based on a cleaned dataset of 1,484 children, after removing duplicate entries and records with missing values. Sample size has been calculated based on the formula described in the Inception Report, which is the following:

$$n = \frac{N \cdot z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{(E^2 \cdot (N - 1) + z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p))}$$

Where:

- n = required sample size,
- N =population size, **1484** in case of this review,
- p = estimated proportion of attribute present (0.5 for maximum variability),
- z = z-score (1.96 for 95% confidence level),
- E = margin of error (e.g., 0.05 for ±5%).

After applying for the formula **306** children were included in the list, parents of which to be interviewed.

"Since the majority of the collected data was qualitative, data saturation served as a key guiding principle for the review. Theoretical saturation was reached after conducting approximately 30–35 interviews. However, data collection continued to ensure representativeness. In total, interviews were conducted with 108 parents and caregivers. Of these, six participants were excluded from the analysis because their children had only recently joined the SCs and they lacked sufficient information to contribute meaningfully.

Additionally, two interviews were excluded due to extensive missing data. As a result, the final analysis was based on 100 completed interviews.

The reduction in the number of completed interviews was also due to challenges encountered during phone outreach. Approximately 70 per cent of the parents and caregivers from the initial list were not included in the review for various reasons. These included not answering the phone, being unavailable due to work or household responsibilities, the child no longer participating in the SCs, or incorrect contact information provided in the list.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### Contributing to:

**Question 1:** How effective are the SCs in improving formal educational outcomes for both displaced and host community children?

**Sub question 1.1:** To what extent have children improved their learning outcomes and performance in schools?

**Sub question 1.2:** How has participating in SCs activities impacted the social behavior of children both in and outside of school?

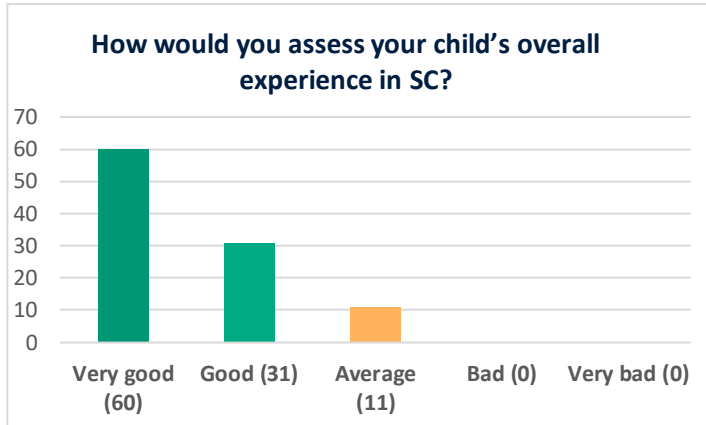
**Sub question 1.4:** To what extent parents or caregivers are involved in the design and implementation of SC activities?

**Question 2:** What impact does participation the SCs have on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of both displaced and host community children?

**Question 3:** How does SC contribute to social cohesion and integration within the communities it serves?

**Sub question 3.1:** To what extent are children integrated into the communities?

**Sub question 3.2:** How does intervention impact the families of the children, including their integration into the community?



(Figure 1: Assessment of children overall experience in SC)

Parents and caregivers were asked to assess their child's overall experience in the SCs. The majority of respondents rated the experience as 'very good'—out of 102 responses, 60 selected 'very good,' 31 selected 'good,' and 11 selected 'average.' Notably, none of the interviewed parents or caregivers rated the experience as 'bad' or 'very bad.'

The review team further inquired whether parents and caregivers were aware of the project, its objectives, and the reasons for ARCS's involvement in the intervention. Among the responses, the majority, 46 participants, identified the project as focused on homework assistance. Four respondents mentioned psychosocial support aimed at helping children relax. Nine parents and caregivers stated they were unaware of the intervention's purpose. Five responses related to recreational activities, and another five mentioned the provision of general education and developmental opportunities for children. The remaining 33 respondents either indicated a general understanding of the project's aim without specifying details or chose not to answer.

Further responses from parents and caregivers indicate a general satisfaction with the SCs, with children attending enthusiastically. Some specific comments include the following:

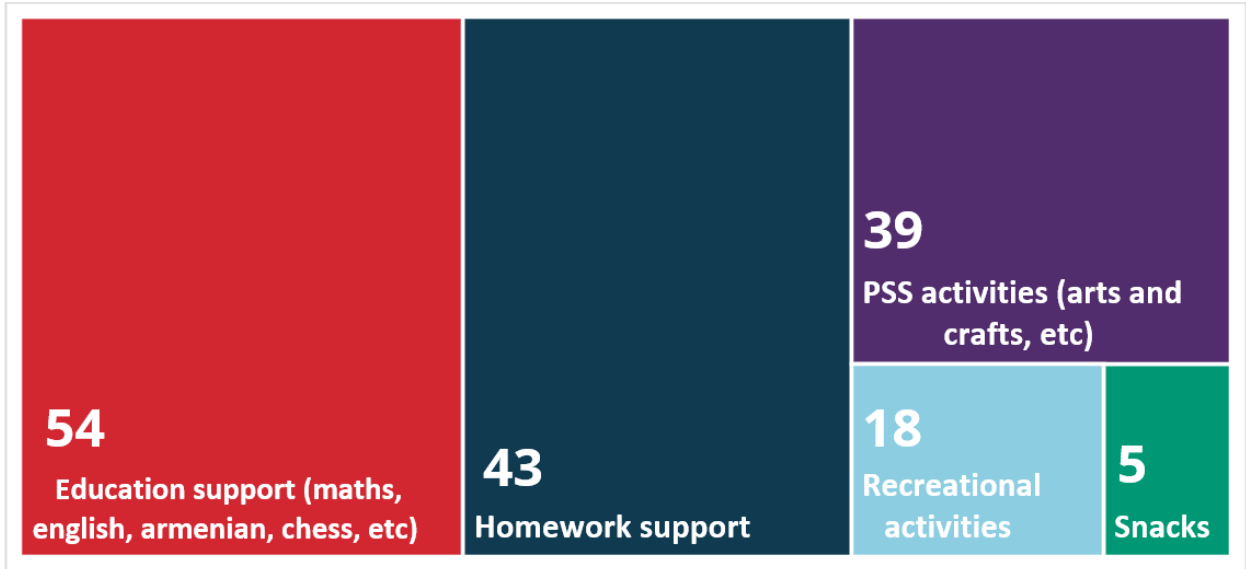
- *"Children go with love, attend all the classes, it's a great program, and we are very satisfied,"*
- *"Child is very satisfied, goes gladly, comes home with her homework done, and has started speaking in literary Armenian,"*
- *"It's easier for me to send my child to the Smiles Club than to school. I leave the child in safe hands. They disconnect from their phone, come here, and find it interesting. They say the lessons are engaging,"*
- *"Only positive things: children are calmer and impressed by everything,"*
- *"The child is very satisfied and only shares positive things,"*
- *"They come home with good impressions and attend with love,"*
- *"They come back excited, love it when dry food is provided, and even bring some to share with their family,"*

- *“When they come home, they’re happy that they played games, but they complain about being very tired, since after school, when they do homework, they don’t get a chance to rest,”*
- *“It provides education. I am displaced from Karabakh, and the program really helps with integration as well. The children become more open and engage in group work. My daughter used to be very shy, but she has become much more relaxed. They also really love the excursions: some of the children have never even been outside their neighborhood.”*
- *“On those days, they become very excited. They even skip classes to come to the Red Cross and choose not to go elsewhere just so they can come here. They’ve participated in the camps, and the staff are very caring,”*
- *“SC teachers are very caring and paying attention to details,”*
- *“Children usually are in a good mood when they attend sessions,”*
- *“They attend the club with their friends, and the experience is positive,”*
- *“They are very satisfied, play games, and engage in interesting daily activities. There is a strong desire to return. They insisted on coming last year, and this year, they wanted to come again.”*

To understand the reasons why parents and caregivers chose to enroll their children in the SCs, respondents were asked to identify which SC activities they value the most. Additionally, they were asked to specify separately which activities their children enjoy the most while attending the SCs.

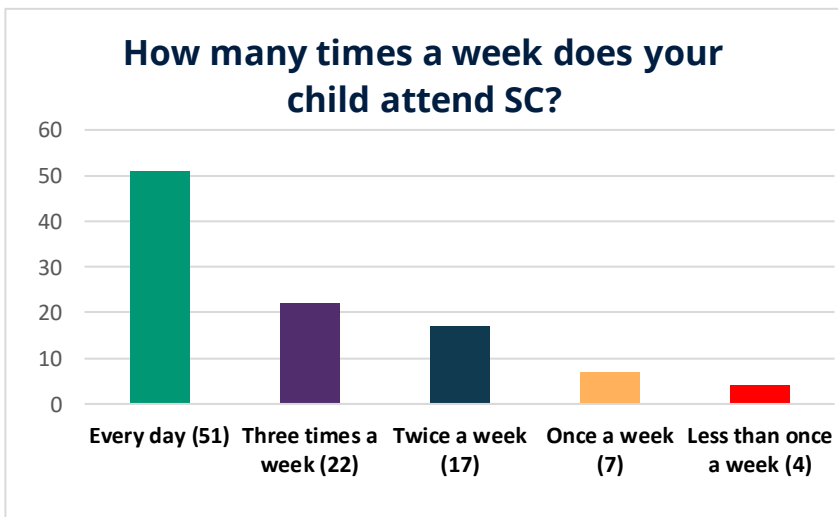
Responses from parents and caregivers indicate that the education component (54 responses) and homework assistance (43 responses) remain the top-priority activities within the SCs. Psychosocial support activities were also identified as important by many parents, with some highlighting recreational activities and the provision of snacks during sessions as valued components.

To understand why children are enrolled in the SCs, respondents were asked to identify the activities they value most and those their children enjoy the most. Responses indicate that the education component (54 responses) and homework assistance (43 responses) are the highest priority activities. Many also highlighted the importance of psychosocial support, while recreational activities and the provision of snacks during sessions were noted as additional valued components.



(Figure 2: activities parents value the most in SCs)

Additional responses from parents and caregivers highlighted various reasons for their children’s participation, including the desire to attend because their friends are involved, the support the program offers to parents, opportunities to participate in camps, and other similar motivating factors.



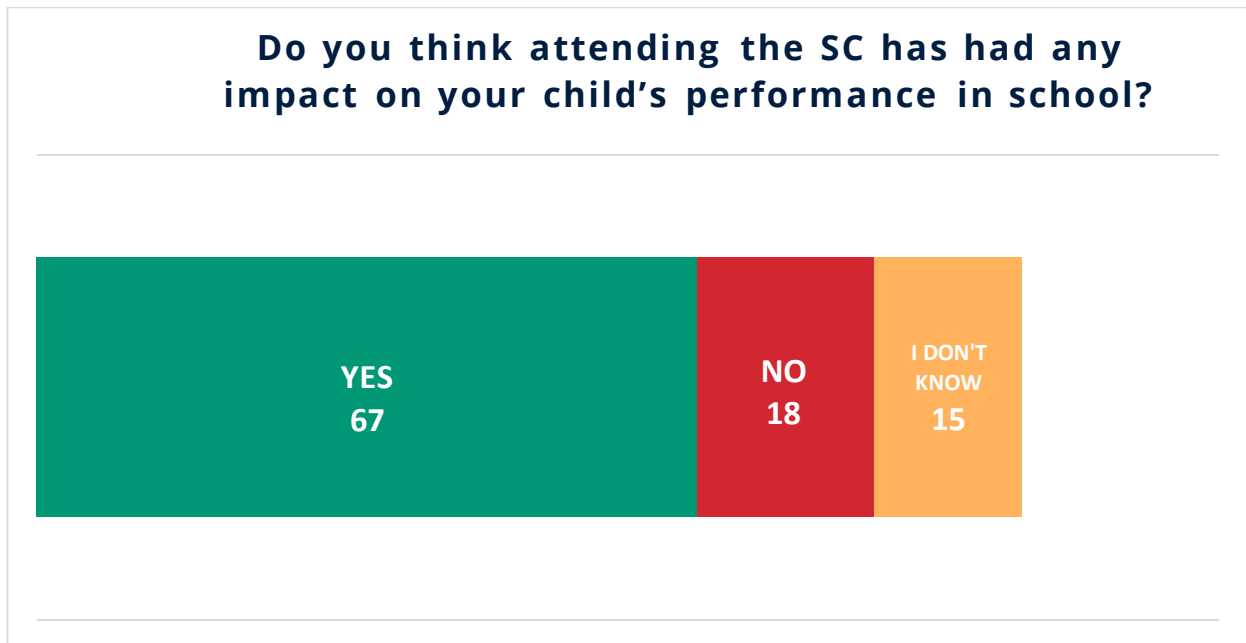
Eighty-three per cent of respondents reported that their expectations of the SCs were fully met, while 16 per cent stated their expectations were only partially met. Many parents and caregivers explained that they had primarily anticipated homework support and academic assistance for their

(Figure 3: Attendance of children)

children. Some respondents noted that they had no specific expectations and viewed the outcomes as already exceeding what they had hoped for. Others emphasized the psychosocial benefits, expressing a desire for their children to feel more relaxed and to improve their social interactions.

The responses indicate variations in attendance patterns based on SC schedules. Approximately 50 per cent of children attend SC sessions daily, followed by 22 per cent who attend three times a week, and 17 per cent who attend twice a week. Feedback from volunteers and educators suggests that the absence of a standardized plan or intervention schedule contributes to these differences, as school leaders independently determine the timing of SC activities, resulting in varying attendance rates.

In line with one of the main objectives of the review - to assess potential changes in children's educational attainment: the review team sought feedback from parents and caregivers.



*(Figure 4: Impact of SCs on children's performance in schools)*

Out of 101 respondents to the review, 100 provided inputs related to their children's educational attainment, with one response missing this information. Among those who responded, a significant majority, 67 per cent, reported observing positive changes in their

children's educational attainment. Eighteen per cent did not notice any changes, while 15 per cent were unsure or did not know how to respond.

Follow-up questions were asked to gather more detailed insights from parents and caregivers about the specific changes they had observed. Many reported improvements in school performance, such as: 'was not good in English, but now it got better,' 'started learning well,' and 'grades have improved.' Others noted external validation, mentioning that 'teachers are happy with the performance.'



Some specific quotes from respondents include the following:

- *"My son didn't want to learn Russian or even open the book, but now he has started learning it with interest and graduated school with excellent results."*
- *"Handwriting has improved, their skills have developed, reading has become better, and they are eager to learn."*
- *"Before attending the Smiles Club, they didn't read well, couldn't understand what they read, and would forget it. After starting to attend, they began learning with interest, reading more fluently and with comprehension."*
- *"In terms of grades, their language skills have improved, and they communicate better."*
- *"Only good things — before attending, they used to do homework with me, but now they either do it independently or stay in constant contact with the teacher."*
- *"Made progress in the subjects they didn't use to study before."*
- *"There is progress, and our relationship has also improved."*
- *"They have become more independent and organized."*
- *"They come after completing their lessons; I'm happy there is someone to help them do their homework."*
- *"Child was taking tutoring sessions, but now he is not attending and became more active."*
- *"They do their homework independently, there is no atmosphere of fear, and they come home with their lessons done."*

Three respondents acknowledged observing changes in their children's educational attainment but did not attribute these changes to participation in the SC sessions. One parent noted, 'My child takes additional sessions; we are not relying on the Red Cross.' Another explained that their child is in the first grade and that it was too early to assess progress at the time of the interview. The third respondent shared that while their child had always been a good learner, their love for learning had noticeably grown stronger.



In addition to improvements in educational attainment, several parents and caregivers observed positive changes in their children's interest in education. One parent noted that their child "started to take classes with a sense of responsibility." Another shared that "children understand the lessons better and get more motivated because of it." Other respondents mentioned that their children now attend classes with enthusiasm, have developed a love for learning, and show excitement about acquiring new knowledge.

Similarly, respondents who did not observe any changes in their children's educational attainment (18 per cent) were asked to provide explanations. While some simply stated that they had not noticed any changes, others offered more detailed responses. A few examples of these responses include the following:

- *"Whatever they learn, we do it at home too; we teach the same things, and there are even things that we do only at home."*
- *"The homework is not done well; they should do it more."*
- *"It's the same, I haven't noticed any progress. They only partially complete the exercises and don't finish them. When they come home, I help them finish."*
- *"The child hadn't had any educational problems before."*
- *"My child learns well without Red Cross."*
- *"I do not send my child to SC, they come only for games and drawing. They dance and play chess."*
- *"I don't send my child because the homework was done incorrectly."*

Fifteen per cent of respondents indicated that they had difficulty answering the question and responded that they "do not know". Some of them further provided explanation mentioning that *"I see a little progress; they mostly come for leisure,"* and *"I struggle to answer the educational part, but my relationship with my child has changed."* Some specific answers were the following:

- *“My children don’t attend homework preparation sessions. I send them to separate tutoring sessions.”*
- *“My children go to separate tutoring sessions, they have English. My children don’t attend the homework preparation sessions, and I’m not sure the homework will be properly done.”*
- *“My children were taking tutoring sessions in parallel.”*

The review team also asked parents and caregivers for suggestions and recommendations to improve the educational services and better address children’s learning needs. Fifty-three per cent of respondents indicated that they would add or change certain aspects of the program. Meanwhile, 20 per cent stated they had no suggestions or selected “don’t know” as their response.

Parents and caregivers suggested modifying the program’s approach. Some emphasized the need for a more individualized approach, while others recommended involving specialists or professional facilitators in the program. Notably, the suggestion to engage specialists primarily came from dormitory residents, where facilitators are mostly teenage volunteers. Additional recommendations included expanding the curriculum to include more subjects such as foreign languages, mathematics, computer skills, and increasing the number of instructional hours.



To assess whether attendance and participation in the SCs have impacted children’s psychosocial well-being, particularly their emotional and behavioral health, the review team asked parents and caregivers to describe their children’s psychological state before and after attending the SCs. This question was primarily posed to displaced respondents, while local respondents were asked to note any changes attributed to SC participation.

Regarding psychosocial well-being prior to attending the SCs, 63 responses were collected. These indicated that many children were experiencing tension, fear, depression, poor sleep, overwhelm, aggression, stress, and shock. Some respondents characterized their children’s condition as “very bad,” while others described it as “normal.”

Since participating in SC activities, approximately 66 per cent of respondents observed improvements in their children’s emotional well-being, while 23 per cent reported no noticeable changes, and 11 per cent selected “Don’t know.” The table below presents a comparison of children’s emotional conditions before and after attending SCs, based on feedback from parents and caregivers:

Before attending SCs (after the displacement)	After attending SCs
They seemed tense	They are calm
They were in fear	They have become more communicative/sociable
They seemed tense	They are adapted
They did not want to go to school, they were depressed, not a good sleep	They are calmer and communicative
They felt low and sad	They are more active
Normal	They are happier
Not stable, and had some insecurities	They are calmer and communicative
Very bad	More open
Aggressive, stressful	Calmer
They were feeling down	More open and communicative
Good	They are happier, they attend school with joy
Very bad	Calmer
Normal	Calmer
Normal	Calmer and communicative
Good	In a good mood
Very bad, stressful	Their psychological state hasn’t completely improved, but they are very happy
Normal	More open
Very bad	They feel better, calmer
Very bad	They are calmer
Initially it was very challenging	The children are now communicating well and are very active
Aggressive	Calmer

Having fears	Active, communicative, new friends
They were deeply discouraged	They are calmer, more open
They were deeply discouraged	Now they feel freer and want to go places on their own
Stressful	Calmer
Very bad	Happier now

The responses clearly indicate significant improvements in the psychosocial well-being of children, as reported by parents and caregivers. Most respondents noted that their children are now calmer, more communicative, open, and happier. The table also shows that even some parents who initially described their child's condition as good observed positive changes following participation in the SCs. Below are some specific responses that illustrate these positive developments:

- *“Moving toward the positive — at first they were fearful and disoriented, but now they go to school willingly and with joy.”*
- *“Their desire to attend the SC has increased.”*
- *“The child demonstrates increased enthusiasm and attentiveness during lessons.”*
- *“They are no longer restless. Before attending, they used to say, 'I can't do anything,' but now—even when they struggle—they say, 'I'll do it,' and they are noticeably calmer.”*
- *“We see significant changes; they are freer and more active.”*
- *“They exhibit greater mental freedom, have become more friendly, and show increased social engagement.”*
- *“We have noticed more behavioral changes; my child was withdrawn before, but now they are more open and interact with others.”*
- *“We have noticed behavioral changes; they are more relaxed and less self-conscious.”*
- *“I have noticed behavioral changes; they are more relaxed/free.”*
- *“When my child first arrived, they were constantly involved in fights, but now they have settled in with the other children.”*
- *“They are active now, do their lessons independently, and socialize with others.”*
- *“They are excited, more active, free, and calm. There is a warm atmosphere here.”*

Among those who did not observe any changes in their child's psychosocial well-being, some explained that their child was already in good psychosocial condition prior to attending the SCs, while others reported no noticeable changes.

The Review Team gathered opinions and suggestions from respondents on potential additions to the intervention that could enhance its impact on children's psychosocial well-

being. Around 43 suggestions were received, 60 per cent of which was related to the increasing the psychosocial services and mainly involving psychologists in the program. Parents and caregivers suggested to add *“more frequent visits from the psychologist would help the children interact more and feel comfortable talking with them,”* to have an *“individual approach from the psychologist, rather than group sessions, would help them*

Quote from a parent:

*“Beyond formal education, I consider a child's psychological stability essential. Without a calm and balanced inner world, their ability to envision a clear future is compromised, and their capacity for learning is diminished”*

*open up more.”* Responders also suggested that *“there should be psychological talks/therapy outside of lesson time, and a psychologist and social pedagogue should be included in the program. This would help avoid conflicts and encourage the children to take responsibility for their actions,”* and that *“there should be a bit more psychological games and individual conversations. I'm taking the children to a private psychologist.”* One of the parents suggested to have *“group discussions, especially with the boys, about behavior.”* Another parent mentioned *“I've asked for a psychologist to come. My child is showing nervous behavior which is something acquired. The stress has affected my child, and I want to help him/her overcome it.”*

In addition to changes in psychosocial well-being, parents and caregivers were asked whether they observed any changes in their children's interactions with family members. Thirty-five per cent of respondents reported improvements, while 45 per cent did not notice any changes, and 20 per cent were uncertain or selected “don't know.” Among those who observed changes, many noted that their children had become more communicative. One parent shared, “Before, they used to argue a lot with my other children, but now they say they're being taught not to argue.” Another parent remarked, “Since they come home with their homework already done, they interact with us more.” A third parent highlighted behavioral changes, stating, “They bring home their handmade crafts and share their snacks with their brother or with me.”

Regarding community integration, an overwhelming 95 per cent of respondents stated that their children are integrated into the community. Of these, 97 per cent mentioned that their children have friends within the community (both local and displaced)<sup>6</sup>.

Responses from parents and caregivers indicate that the SC interventions provide significant support. Several parents noted that the program helps save time, while others highlighted

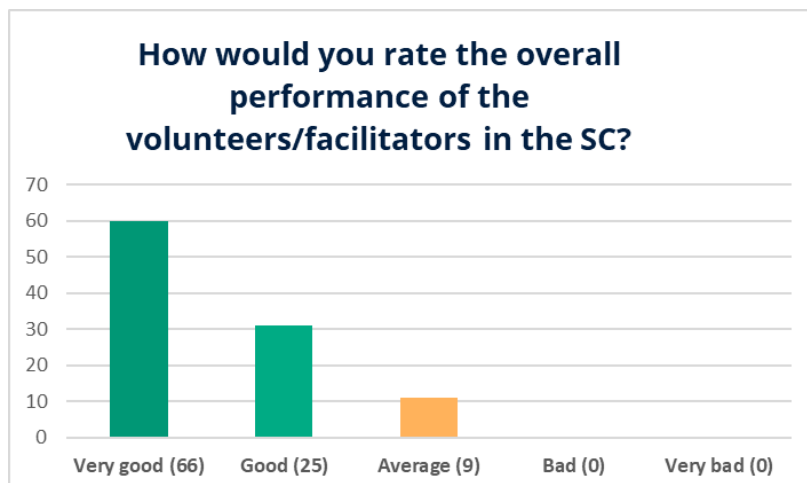
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<sup>6</sup> The question was asked to both displaced and local respondents. Displaced respondents were asked whether their children play with local children and the local respondents were asked whether their children play with children from displaced families.

that it offers them the opportunity to work. Some also mentioned that it allows them to spend more quality free time with their children. Below are some specific responses illustrating these benefits:

- *"They come home with their homework already done, we just need to supervise. It's a big help, especially since I work and didn't have time before."*
- *"I am a mother of multiple children - even one hour of support is a big help for me."*
- *"This support has been very helpful for me. I'm unable to dedicate enough time to assist with homework, and it also allows me to save the money I would have spent on tutoring and redirect it toward other essential needs."*
- *"Since they now come home with their homework already done, we're able to spend more time together—there's a lot free time."*
- *"The fact that they now spend less time on the phone and watching TV is already a big advantage."*
- *"Even when I'm unable to collect my children on time, I feel reassured knowing they are in a secure and supportive setting."*
- *"As a working parent, it's a relief that my child comes home with their homework completed."*
- *"Since the homework is completed in advance, we're able to spend more time communicating, and my child has become noticeably calmer."*
- *"We manage to get everything done. We also work."*
- *"Red Cross has become a helpful hand."*
- *"Great change has been in terms of communication, they didn't interact much even at home and tended to withdraw. Even giving out backpacks has been a big help. They have a lot of needs and want many things. This support has been a great help—a real lifesaver."*
- *"I am also taking care of my ill mother; this is a great help for me."*

Parents and caregivers were asked to evaluate the overall performance of volunteers and educators and to provide suggestions for improvement. Sixty-six per cent of respondents rated their work as “very good,” 25 per cent as “good,” and nine per cent as “average.”



(Figure 5: Performance of volunteers)

To enhance the effectiveness of educators and volunteers, parents and caregivers suggested strengthening the educational support component of the intervention—specifically, placing greater emphasis on teaching the subject matter rather than solely assisting with homework. One parent mentioned *“the games are good, it’s great that they play, but I wish more focus was put on homework, so the child comes home having fully learned their lessons,”* another mentioned *“they should explain often instead of just giving writing tasks to copy”* and another mentioned *“teach the lessons more thoroughly and not only focus on homework. For example, they could read the lesson with the children, include tests, and do more additional activities.”* Additional suggestions focused on improving educators’ and volunteers’ general skills in working with children and managing groups, particularly in understanding children’s individual strengths and weaknesses. Respondents also recommended balancing tolerance with firmness when needed. Specifically, a respondent from the Abovyan dormitory suggested including adult volunteers, noting that peer volunteers sometimes lack the resources to effectively assist with homework and group management. The rest of the responses were very positive highlighting that volunteers *“are really good and treat the children very well,”* *“they do their job excellently,”* *“they know how to do their job.”* Other comments have also been recorded such as that parents *“are very satisfied because the teachers themselves are the ones teaching, and that’s why we’re happy”* and *“if children come willingly, it already talks about teachers and that it’s because of them.”*

Eighty-nine per cent of respondents stated that they have never had concerns about the safety and security of the Smiley Clubs. One respondent was unsure, while only nine per cent expressed concerns. Of these, six responses came from dormitory residents and related specifically to volunteers’ ability to manage the groups, noting that since most volunteers are from the same building, parents feel they sometimes lack the skills to effectively control the group of children. One concern was coming from the community living on the borderline.

The other two responses were referring children being “naughty” and needing more attention.

Since the implementation of CFSs requires a comprehensive approach that involves parents and caregivers through various forms of engagement, ranging from organizing activities for them to collecting their feedback, the Review Team assessed the extent of parental and caregiver involvement in the implementation of SCs. Twenty-three per cent of respondents reported some form of involvement, while 77 per cent indicated they were not involved. Among those involved, four parents mentioned occasionally visiting SC activities, two reported supporting camp activities, eight participated in parental meetings, and four attended sessions with psychologists. The remaining respondents did not specify the nature of their involvement.

To assess the willingness of parents and caregivers to become more involved in the SC, 34 per cent expressed a desire to increase their participation, 41 per cent indicated they were not willing or ready to be more involved, and 25 per cent responded with “I don’t know.” Some respondents noted that they have relevant professional backgrounds, such as teachers or instructors in dance and music and expressed interest in supporting the SCs in those capacities. Others did not specify a particular role but emphasized that greater parental involvement would strengthen the connection between schools and families and provide additional support to educators.

Seventy-two per cent of respondents reported receiving information about the Smiley Clubs from volunteers and educators, while 23 per cent indicated that they did not receive any information, despite considering it useful. Four per cent were unsure. Several parents suggested the need for more detailed information, particularly regarding the specific activities their children participate in within the SCs.

All parents and caregivers (100 per cent of respondents) expressed a strong desire for the continuation of the SC. They highlighted that ongoing operation of the intervention would continue to support children’s educational development, particularly in homework assistance and improving learning outcomes. Additionally, many parents emphasized the psychosocial benefits, noting that the SCs provide a space where children feel free and can build confidence.

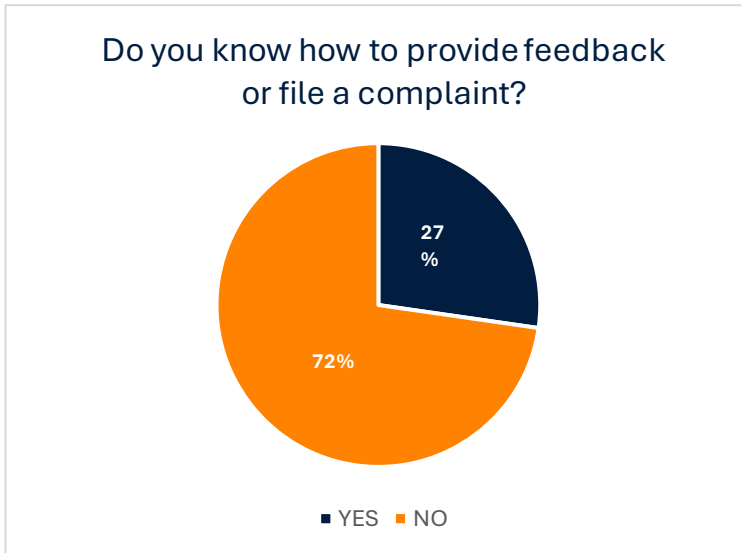
Some of the specific reasons cited for supporting the continuation of the program include:

- *“There is a strong desire for continued participation, as the Smile Club has a very positive impact on the child.”*

- *“There is a strong desire to continue attending the Smiles Club, as it has a very positive impact on the child — they are calmer now and showing improvement educationally as well.”*
- *“So that they stay off the streets and engage in useful activities.”*
- *“We are very happy because the children are learning and engaging in useful and meaningful activities.”*
- *“So that they feel free and gain self-confidence.”*
- *“So that they develop in the future and become good professionals.”*
- *“They need educational and psychological support; they do not spend much time in phones and in streets.”*
- *“My child attends the club with great joy. They even told one of their subject teachers not to be upset about their absence, because they feel free and more comfortable at the Red Cross center.”*
- *“The camp has been a great support. The children have shown positive changes and have become more organized. I used to check their school bags myself, but after the camp, they have become more independent and responsible in managing their schoolwork.”*

Additionally, parents and caregivers were asked to talk about the hopes they have about their child’s future. Quite substantial portion – 26 responses received were referring to education, as parents want their children to study well, receive higher education and become a skilled professional in the future. Some of them mentioned their child to be a good person, some of them specified that such as being a doctor, a sportsperson, musician, dancer etc.

The Review Team also gathered feedback regarding cultural and community events, including awareness of such events, children’s participation, and suggestions for improving their implementation. Twenty-seven per cent of respondents were aware that cultural events were being organized at the centers and confirmed their children’s participation. Thirteen per cent stated that no such events had been organized, while 16 per cent were unsure whether events took place. The remaining 33 per cent offered suggestions to enhance event organization. Parents commonly recommended organizing more cultural and community activities. For example, one parent stated, “I would like such programs to exist so that they help us connect more closely with our culture,” while another noted, “I want there to be activities because there aren’t many opportunities for children to stay engaged in the city.” Additional suggestions included organizing more outings to the city, especially given the border area context, and increasing the number of events to ensure children can fully enjoy their childhood.



(Figure 6: Awareness of feedback mechanism)

Overall, feedback from parents and caregivers indicates that the organization of cultural and community events is inconsistent across the SC with some centers regularly hosting such activities while others do not. Additionally, parents and caregivers reported that they primarily receive information about the SCs through school channels, including directors, teachers, and classmates.

Seventy-two per cent of respondents reported that they did not know how to contact ARCS in case of questions, concerns, complaints, or to provide feedback, while only 27 per cent indicated that they knew the appropriate contact methods.

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

### Contributing to:

**Question 1:** How effective are the SCs in improving formal educational outcomes for both displaced and host community children?

**Sub question 1.1:** To what extent have children improved their learning outcomes and performance in schools?

**Sub question 1.2:** How has participating in SCs activities impacted the social behavior of children both in and outside of school?

**Sub question 1.4:** To what extent parents or caregivers are involved in the design and implementation of SC activities?

**Question 2:** What impact does participation the SCs have on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of both displaced and host community children?

**Question 3:** How does SC contribute to social cohesion and integration within the communities it serves?

**Sub question 3.1:** To what extent are children integrated into the communities?

**Sub question 3.2:** How does intervention impact the families of the children, including their integration into the community?

## METHODOLOGY

Since the data acquired from parents was qualitative, the thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. To systematize the data and be able to analyze it thematic coding has been applied to the raw information collected from parents. The coding was done manually, since the available software are not supporting Armenian language and even when using the software, the coding should be done manually. The coding was generated following the purpose of the review (educational impact, psychosocial impact and integration), as well as codes were created based on the raw information. The coding was done with the following logic:

- **The Label/Code:** The manually given code and theme.
- **Positive, Negative, Suggestion** and **Yes/No** (whether parents expressed positive or negative opinion on the topic, or the theme exists or not, or parents are suggesting something).
- **Explanation and Indicator:** The definition or explanation on how the theme occurred.
- **Example quote:** Direct examples of the quotes that parents mentioned during the discussion.

### Generated codes according to the purpose of the review

**Educational Impact:** Any changes, opinion, comments regarding the educational attainment of children or interest in education.

**Improving education component:** Any suggestions that parents expressed related to the educational component/activity of the intervention.

**Psychosocial impact:** Any changes, opinion, comments regarding the psychological, emotional and behavioral state of children according to parents.

**Improving psychosocial support:** Any suggestion that parents mentioned related to the psychosocial support activities in the SC.

**Integration/Social Cohesion:** When parents mentioned that children come here to be together and go things together.

### Codes generated from the raw information

**Financial impact:** The code captured how the program reduces the financial burden on families providing free of charge services allowing them to save resources or direct them to cover more immediate needs.

**Recreational activities:** The following code refers to all the activities besides educational, psychological and integration support children receive at the center. This refers mostly to various games and plays, arts and drawing sessions, chess and other activities.

**Preferred space for children:** This code refers to the fact if children enjoy coming to the SCs.

**Programme awareness:** The codes occurs when parents mentioned about the community knowing anything about the intervention.

**Professional support:** This theme occurs when parents expressed opinion about the specialized professionals being involved in the intervention.

**Physical conditions:** This theme occurs when parents mentioned or expressed opinion about the physical conditions of the SC.

**Cultural preservation:** The occurs when parents mentioned that the SCs are a good to ensure the dialect and the identity of children are kept.

**Support to Parents:** How the SCs assist parents in their daily activities and any other way.

**Improving General education:** Any suggestions that parents mentioned related to the general education component meaning talk and trainings on the general topics directed to the general development of the child.

**Improving Skill Development:** This refers to various games and recreational activities that can be organized in the SC besides the educational support. Any activities that parents suggested adding to the SC.

**Improving Integration and social cohesion:** Any suggestion that parents made to add as an integration activity.

**Physical improvement:** Any comments and suggestions that parents expressed related to the psychical situation of the SCs.

**Improvement of Food provision:** Parents had comments or suggestions related to the food provided in the SCs.

**Improving child engagement:** Any suggestion that parents made related to the engagement of children in SCs.

**Improving discipline management:** When parents mentioned something about the discipline in the center.

**Cultural and social events:** The code refers to any social and cultural events they parents gave feedback or suggested an improvement.

**Summer camp.** Any feedback or suggestion that parents mentioned related to the summer camp activities.

**Training for parents:** This code occurs when parents expressed interest in organizing training for them specifically within the programme.

**Parent engagement:** This code occurs when parents expressed opinion and thoughts about their engagement in the SCs.

**Parent contribution:** This code occurs when parents expressed a desire to continue somehow to the SCs and donate something.

**Safety and Security.** This code refers to the information, opinion, concern or a comment related to the safety and security of the SCs.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

To get general feedback on the activities implemented in SCs and get suggestion from parents and caregivers, in several communities, discussion held in a group format. Overall, 15 group discussions held with participation of total 145 parents and caregivers in six regions. Initially, 30 group discussions were planned to be conducted covering initial number of 45 SCs<sup>7</sup>. Based on the data received from ARCS, for 34 SCs 22 group discussion were planned, involving those having more than 20 children attending the center. After conducting around six<sup>8</sup> group discussion saturation has been reached, however, to ensure the representativeness of the SCs the review team continued conducting group discussions conducting overall 15 group discussions. The following table represents the desegregation of the participants according to the region, gender and being displaced or local:

N	Region	Number of Participants	Female	Male	N of displaced Participants	N of Local Participants
1	Ararat	13	13	0	9	4
2	Gegharkunik	35	34	1	20	15
3	Kotayk	27	26	1	20	7
4	Syunik	44	42	2	18	26
5	Vayots Dzor	19	19	0	10	9
6	Yerevan	15	13	2	5	10
	<b>Total</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>71</b>

The purpose of the group discussions within the review was to gather a general information and understand the parents and caregivers feedback on the impact of the intervention. Therefore, general questions have been designed rather than highly specific ones. Questions covered parents and caregivers' general opinion on the programme, how they think community benefits from this intervention, how the parents and caregivers benefit themselves and of course what suggestions they have in terms of improving the quality of the programme and impact. Examples of some of the questions are the following:

<sup>7</sup> According to the Evaluation Inception Report and calculated based on the initial data provided.

<sup>8</sup> According to the academic literature, saturation is reached after conducted focused group discussions with homogeneous 4-8 groups (Retrieved from: Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social science & medicine*, 292, 114523.)

- *What has been the most useful or helpful aspect of the program for your child?*
- *Has anything changed in your community because of the SCs? If so, what?*
- *How have the SCs benefited your family or helped with your daily priorities?*
- *Would you like this center to continue operating? If so, in what format would you prefer?*
- *What are your thoughts on the cultural events held at the SCs? Is there anything you would add?*

The discussion was not strictly structured, which gave flexibility for parents to concentrate on the topics that they found most relevant. Hence, the discussion naturally shifted from one topic to another considering based on the areas of importance for participants.

**Education access and attainment:** Evaluating the program's effectiveness in improving educational and learning outcomes for participating children.

Education attainment has been a core topic for the review; however, it has been discussed more on some communities than in others. Out of 15 group discussions parents in 10 groups prioritized educational aspect while the discussion in others focused more on the psychosocial and other aspect of the programme. Out of 10 groups, 9 groups expressed positive opinion and thoughts on educational component of the programme. Specifically, parents and caregivers were mostly satisfied and pleased about the homework assistance, and they have noticed changes in the educational attainment of children. Some of the parents are mentioned that their children are doing better at school, stating that *"My child know English better now."* One displaced parent/caregiver stated that she sees the good progress in learning and education outcomes as she mentioned that *"My child did not go to first class in Karabakh, but I see a good progress, my child can write the letters now."*

Some of them are satisfied only by the homework assistance as they mention that *"Children are now doing their homework independently, as it is explained to them at school. I am very satisfied with this,"* or *"We are satisfied. It's good that they do their homework and prepare for lessons, so we don't get angry at home."* Some of the parents/caregivers also emphasized that when children do their homework at home, they have free time at home to play or relax. For example, some of the parents mentioned that *"since they do their homework here, they have free time to play at home."*

In two centers some of the parents/caregivers mentioned that they do not recall any changes in the education aspect in children, however at the same time they emphasized that children stay in the SC with joy. In one center parents mentioned that *"It's not possible to improve education significantly in one hour. We haven't noticed any changes in the education aspect for the children, but they really enjoy it."* One parent/caregiver from other center mentioned that

*"In case of my daughter, I do not see any changes, but she stays here with pleasure"* and the other one mentioned that" Even if parents and caregivers did not record any changes in the educational outcomes, they still mention that children enjoy spending their time in SCs.

At the same time in two groups the importance of the professional support was mentioned. Parents expressed satisfaction that homework assistance is done by schoolteachers and that schoolteachers are involved in the programme, emphasizing that "good that qualified professionals are working."

Only in one SCs parents were generally did not see any changes related to the education aspect, as well as they were not satisfied with the quality of homework assistance. No specific example was recorded related to this statement.

### **Suggestions regarding Education Attainment**

When discussing the possibility of improving the SC activity, parents came up with various suggestions, although parents and caregivers did not have many points to add related to homework assistance. Some of them suggested prolonging hours in the SCs and add more subjects such as foreign languages<sup>9</sup>, keep SCs running during summer breaks, some of them suggested to expand the programme and add those children who are doing well in schools.

Nevertheless, many suggestions came in terms of improving general education component. Some of the suggestions were discussing various age-appropriate topics with children, involve more educational games rather than leisure games, watch movies and analyze them in terms of giving children life skills. Parents also suggested adding robotics workshops, chess classes, having a theatre club. In one community parents mentioned that will be good to conduct safety and security trainings for children since the village they live is borderline. They stated that *"since we live in borderline, there is a need to prepare children for emergency situations, so they know how to behave properly—both psychologically and in terms of how to help those around them."*

**Mental health and psychosocial support:** Assessing the impact on children's mental health, social emotional skills, and overall resilience.

In ten groups the psychosocial aspect of the programme has been prioritized as a topic of discussion. In nine groups out of ten, the feedback was positive. Some of the feedback that received was that parents noticed changes in children as they are more relaxed, they are

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<sup>9</sup> According to the information from the field, schedules of the SCs differs from community to community.

more engaged, open and openly communicate with each other, they are more active and when they come back from SCs they in a good mood. Some of them also noticed changes in the interpersonal relations and that children became more disciplined. One of the parents mentioned that *"It gives peace of mind and social interaction to children. After war they have gone through lots of stress."* Other responses received such as *"For example my child was shy and opened up now, as psychologist works with her/him"* and *"There are children here who are very closed and when they come here, they communicate and interact."*

In parallel to psychosocial support in their groups parents and caregivers emphasized that SCs remain a referred space for children. Parents expressed general satisfaction from SCs and mentioned that children prefer coming to the SCs rather than taking part in other activities in the community, *"children are waiting to come to SC"*. The following examples can illustrate the mentioned:

- *"My child takes part in other clubs as well, but when she/he does not come here start crying."*
- *"My child come here better than her/his dance club. Here, everyone is her friends."*
- *"The most important thing is that children eagerly and with motivation wait to come to SC. And when we see photos, we can tell that children are happy."*
- *"They come here with more joy than school."*

Integration and social cohesion as a discussion topic has been prioritized only in two groups. Parents mentioned that SCs are *"very important for the adaptation," "opportunity for integration"* and that *"it seems like a new family is being formed here."* Parents were mostly referring to the fact that children do interesting things here and what is the most important is that they interact with each other, they make new friends and do things together.

### **Suggestions related to the psychosocial component**

One of the main suggestions from parents was about improving the psychosocial component of the programme. In seven groups parents prioritized the existence of this component as there is a need for that. Parents suggested including psychologists into the programme who would work with children with one by one or in a group. One of the parents mentioned that psychologists will specifically be beneficial for those children in higher classes as they are going through important stage of maturation and they are in a transitional and challenging period in their life. Additionally, school does not have a psychologist or a special pedagogue. Parents also suggested conducting seminars for children on various topics including sexual education. Parents considered psychological support essential especially in Jermuk, considering the conflict clashes in September 2022. Parents mentioned

that after the event there are children who have issues with sleep, and they can easily be frightened from a little sound. One of the parents also mentioned that the programme will not sustain longer focusing on the education component. Parents mentioned that *"they help children with educational part, however, will be good to include psychological support to change the environment a little. With only homework assistance the project will not be sustainable for long."* Parents also mentioned about the need of psychological services also in Yerevan Dormitory, specifically mentioning that *"It would be good if psychologists can pay visits here, children are very aggressive here."*

Some of other phrases that have been recorded during the group discussions are the following:

- *"May be child in not opening up and expressing themselves at home, however they will start taking with psychologist."*
- *"Every person needs psychological support; we will also take part."*
- One parent mentioned that her child lost his father due to the war and asks questions, but she doesn't have answers to them. Also, she mentioned that her daughter always thinks that it is not safe for them here.

### **Other types of support such as recreational activities**

In four groups parents and caregivers provided positive feedback regarding the recreational activities, mentioning that children enjoy activities such as art sessions, chess playing, various games. Some of them also consider that it is good that such activities are available since they keep children busy. Several suggestions have been from parents regarding the recreational activities to expand them. One of the parents eager to have craft making sessions that after children can organize exhibitions and sell them. Additional clubs that parents expressed to add to the schedule were theatre club, national songs and dances, clay and embroidery sessions. One of the parents suggested addition various games with a specific aim to enhance children analytical and critical thinking.

In one of the SCs, parents also mentioned that the centers are also helping to preserve their culture (one displaced parents), as children come here and speak their dialect, mentioning that *"they speak our dialect, they keep the dialect."*

In two groups parents and caregivers mentioned about the importance of free of charge services. One parent mentioned that *"For example, I have to pay AMD 10,000 for English classes, here, my child participates for free."*

In two centers, parents provided negative feedback regarding the psychical conditions of the room. They mentioned that there is no heating in the room and that the furnishing is bad.

In three groups parents and caregivers tackled on the programme awareness referring to the fact that parents are not fully aware about the aim of the centers and programme and the community does not know that such programme exists. One parent mentioned also that community has negative opinion about the programme, mentioning that *"in the beginning there were parents who had a negative opinion about the centers, but the positive side was that children had a desire to take part in the SC."* One of the parents also mentioned that *"I had difficulty convincing my child to come. He was saying that he is not behind with classes why should he come, and I explained that it's for the children from Artsakh, and he quietly joined."* In one of the groups parents also suggested including those children in the Smiley Clubs who are not falling behind and are doing well, considering that this will help to decrease the negative attitude towards centers.

### **Supporting Parents**

In ten group discussions participants discussed that the centers are assisting parents with their daily activities. Parents mentioned that this is a great support with homework, as *"not all parents know the subject, for example I cannot explain English grammar"* and *"parents doesn't have time to teach the lesson. Instead of taking the child elsewhere, they bring them here."* Other parent mentioned that *"just the fact that they come home with their homework done is already a big thing."* Additionally, feedback received from parents that this is a great help for working mothers, as some of them mentioned that *"while I'm at work and before I come to pick up my child, they don't stay idle—they do their lessons until I take them home."* Other responses also received from parents how centers support them and some of them are the following:

- *"We are satisfied because they do our work for us (referring to helping kids with homework) and we have time to do our own tasks."*
- *"It gives me the opportunity to work."*
- *"I work in the school; my child comes to SC and I can work until she/he finishes."*
- *"I have an a toddler, so I have time to take care of them."*
- *"It also helps because there is no pressure at home, and moms don't get frustrated, when kids are not doing homework at home."*
- *"Parents are more relaxed and better in the relationship with their kids."*
- *"With the support homework process is not painful."*
- *"For example, I don't have someone who helps me. If SC wasn't available, I don't know what I would do. There is an after-class program at school, but it's paid."*

## **Discussion around Cultural and Social activities**

During the group discussion, there was also an opportunity to talk about the cultural and social events and get participant feedback and suggestions for improvement. As assumed from the general discussion not in all group's parents were able to remember whether such type of events was organized within the Smiley club, although in five groups parents mentioned that such event has happened. On one group parents mentioned that it has been planned but some issues arose, and it has been cancelled. Therefore, the main discussion was focused on the listening to parents and getting their opinions and suggestion what such type of activities can be organized. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that parents in some groups mentioned about the summer camps that were organized in schools and in dormitories.

In 12 groups the discussion evolved around the suggestion on improving the component. The main suggestions were to organize more excursions and such events, as opportunities are lacking in the community. Some suggestions were heard around organizing hiking activities, theatre and movie events.

## **Parents Engagement**

During the group discussions their engagement has been discussed with them and if they are interested in supporting SCs in any way. Generally, two types of responses were received from parents and discussion participants: one related to their engagement and contribution to the SCs and the other related to training that potentially can be organized for them. In ten groups parents' activity discussed the possibility of engagement in SCs. Regarding the parent's engagement, one of the parents mentioned that she would like to be involved in the SCs as a volunteer, as there are many talented parents that can do some activities for SCs and the other one mentioned that she is ready to assist with organization things. One parent mentioned that she already has been engaged in SCs during the summer camps. Regarding engagement responses also received about getting more updates as parents are interested to know more what is happening in SCs. One of the parents also mentioned that being more involved will help to strengthen the parents and child relations.

In two groups parents mentioned that they are ready to contribute to the implementation of the SCs. One suggestion was related to the renovation of the room that if we have renovated room, we are ready to bring things for the room, for examples toys. In the other group one of the parents said that she is ready to donate her piano to the SCs if music sessions are planned to be organized.

Parents have also suggested organizing training sessions for them. Three responses received about organizing parenting sessions/training for them. One of the parents mentioned to organize *“seminars on working with children in transition age, as well as training on self-management for children and parents.”*

### **General suggestions**

In three groups parents and caregivers suggested making psychical improvement of the room. Participants suggested renovating the room, change the setup of the room to have the room which is comfortable. One of the parents mentioned that *“It will be good to have a cheerful and Smiley room. Room that is different than a school environment.”*

Only in one group parents suggested that volunteers be stricter with children as sometimes they are too friendly with them<sup>10</sup>.

Related to the provision of food, only one group discussed it. Parents suggested providing hot meals as that will allow children to stay longer after classes.

### **Security Concerns**

During the group discussions, security issues and concerns were addressed, specifically whether parents and caregivers had any concerns about the safety of their children while attending the SCs. In most groups, parents did not express any concerns regarding security and safety. In one school, parents stated, *“there are no concerns with safety since third-party individuals do not enter the school. There is control within the school.”*

However, in two schools, parents did express security concerns. One school is in a borderline community, and the other is situated next to a military base. In the borderline community, parents suggested organizing safety and security sessions for children, as well as preparedness training to help them understand how to respond both physically and psychologically in case of a crisis or disaster.

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<sup>10</sup> This was a suggestion in one of the dormitories where only volunteers are engaged in the programme.

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH FACILITATORS

### PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

#### Contributing to:

**Question 6:** Are SC volunteers and facilitators adequately equipped for the implementation of SC activities?

**Face-to-face semi-structured interviews** were conducted with volunteers and educators involved in the implementation of SC activities. The primary objective of the interviews and data collection was to gather comprehensive information about the activities conducted within the SCs and to assess how well-prepared the educators and volunteers are to facilitate these sessions. Additionally, the aim was to identify gaps in knowledge, training, and information in order to inform the development of a targeted skill-building and capacity-strengthening plan.

The initial data was collected from the ARCS and raw data of **414** volunteers and educators were received. After the cleaning of the data and removing the duplicates, the data was **352** for the sampling. As proposed in the inception phase the sample for the semi-structured interviews was selected based on the sampling formula:

$$n = \frac{N \cdot z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{(E^2 \cdot (N - 1) + z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p))}$$

Where:

- n = required sample size,
- N = population size, 1484 in case of this review,
- p = estimated proportion of attribute present (0.5 for maximum variability),
- z = z-score (1.96 for 95% confidence level),
- E = margin of error (e.g., 0.05 for ±5%).

Based on the applied formula, a total of 196 interviews were recommended to be conducted during the review. Accordingly, 196 volunteers and educators were randomly selected from each region to ensure that the interviews provide comprehensive coverage of all SCs

identified during the inception phase<sup>11</sup>. Following this approach, between four to seven volunteers and educators were selected per SC.

Since most of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews was qualitative, data saturation was used as a guiding principle during the data collection process. After conducting around 30<sup>12</sup> interviews the “theoretical saturation”<sup>13</sup> has been reached (including the code saturation<sup>14</sup> and meaning saturation<sup>15</sup>).

Nevertheless, since the initial 30 interviews covered only four SCs, data collection was continued to ensure regional and SC-level representativeness. However, the number of interviews conducted in each region was subsequently reduced. Additionally, in the last six SCs, data was collected through group interviews using the same semi-structured questionnaire<sup>16</sup>.

Eventually, **102** volunteers and educators participated in data collection.

The data analysis was conducted using thematic coding, as much of the information was obtained through open-ended questions. Codes were developed based on the objectives of the review and the general themes that emerged from the data.

The following codes were generated based on the interviews:

**Academic support:** The primary activity conducted in the SCs was providing homework assistance and supporting children in improving their academic performance.

**Games:** In addition to homework assistance, a variety of activities were implemented in the SCs. These included board and table games, active games, intellectual games, and other recreational activities aimed at supporting children's psychosocial well-being and development.

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<sup>11</sup> 34 SCs were submitted by ARCS during the inception phase.

<sup>12</sup> The claim that the saturation has been reached was based also on the academic research findings, as systemic analysis of various qualitative interviews that the code saturation is being reached within nine interviews and meaning saturation is usually reached within 16-24 interviews.

*Retrieved from: Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. Field methods, 18(1), 59-82.*

<sup>13</sup> Theoretical saturation is described as “the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical construct reveals no new properties, nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory”

<sup>14</sup> The “Academic support” code which was developed based on the purpose of the review repeating in 100 per cent of the interviews conducted.

<sup>15</sup> Meaning saturation has also been noticed since in all interviews and conversations were around the same topics and very few additional topics appeared.

<sup>16</sup> The qualitative parts were done based on the group responses and for the quantitative part individual responses were collected in a group, so it does not impact the data of the overall review.

**Psychosocial support:** Activities that are implemented to support the psychosocial wellbeing of the children attending SCs.

**Recreational activities:** Activities such as art sessions, singing, dancing, theatre, working with beads.

**Homework is done:** This theme emerged when facilitators discussed the impact of SC on children's educational attainment, noting that their homework is completed before they go home.

**Children are learning well:** This theme occurred when facilitators discussed the impact of SC on children's educational attainment, mentioning that they have noticed that children started learning well after attending SCs.

**Support to parents:** This theme emerged when facilitators noted that SCs are also highly beneficial for parents, as some lack the time to support their children at home, while others need to pay for such services.

**Children come with joy:** This theme emerged when discussing the impact of SCs, with facilitators noting that children attend SCs with joy, are motivated, and eagerly anticipate their sessions.

**Other activities:** Other activities that volunteers and educators mentioned doing in the SCs as part of the curriculum.

Since the interview included more than 30 questions related to various topics the rest of the coding has been done according to the specific question and theme.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

To understand the general curriculum of the SCs, volunteers and educators were asked to describe a typical day and the activities conducted within the centers. Analysis of their responses indicates that academic support is the primary activity implemented in SCs. This includes assisting children with their homework and addressing their educational needs, with a strong focus on promoting academic achievement. From the data collected, academic support was mentioned at least 70 times, followed by games (40 mentions), recreational activities (24 mentions), physical activities (5 mentions), psychosocial support (3 mentions), and other activities (12 mentions).



(Figure 7: Activities implemented in SCs according to volunteers and educators)

The primary focus of activities in the SCs is on supporting children's academic achievement, particularly through homework assistance. While the specific subjects for support vary across SCs, the main areas covered include Armenian language, mathematics, English, French, and Russian, core subjects within the school curriculum. In some cases, additional subjects such as biology and nature were also mentioned. Interview responses highlighted that an individual approach is often taken for each child, with activities tailored to their needs and interests. Several respondents noted that children themselves express a desire for help with their homework, which further guides the structure of the sessions. Additionally, some responses indicate that parents also place emphasis on homework assistance and show trust in the schoolteachers. According to several volunteers and educators, children attend SCs with joy and enthusiasm. One participant shared, "Children attend with joy. Initially, they expected the lessons to follow a traditional format, but after attending, they realized the sessions were organized in a more engaging and entertaining way." During the interviews, four volunteers emphasized that they intentionally organize the sessions in a non-formal manner to make them distinct from regular classroom settings.

**The primary focus is on academic support, as this is a key request from parents.**

Volunteers and educators also mentioned incorporating games and recreational activities alongside academic support. When referring to games, they described various types, including intellectual games, board games, and other active games played with children. Additionally, participants highlighted recreational activities such as art sessions, singing, dancing, working with clay and beads, using colorful materials, preparing theatre performances, and watching movies. Four volunteers noted including physical activities as breaks from homework sessions, often involving sports games. Two volunteers also mentioned conducting healthy lifestyle sessions for children.

### Intervention plan

Additionally, volunteers and educators were asked whether they follow a specific plan of intervention. Of the respondents, 53 per cent indicated that they do have a plan in place, 45 per cent reported that they do not follow any specific intervention plan, and one participant stated they were unsure. Since the closed ended question does not give us details on the intervention plan<sup>17</sup> and various participants might have understood the questions differently follow up open ended question have been asked to understand the process of designing the intervention plan and implementing it. Based on the content analysis the process preparing the plan is the following:

- 16 responses were received that the plan is being developed with the leader. Related to preparing the plan with the leader some additional comments were received that *"it is basically homework assistance," "we do not have it written, but we discuss with the leader verbally," "we also discuss it together," "we discuss it between us, RC gave us freedom to decide what to do."*
- 24 responses were received that the plan of intervention is based on and corresponds the school curriculum.
- 25 volunteers and educators mentioned that they prepare the plan on their own or based on the discussed in the group, following the needs of children and according to the learning process. Related to this several specific responses received such as *"we discuss and approve the plan at the beginning of the academic year, we discuss with the group and approve it. We do not discuss it additionally with the RC," "we know what we must do since it is homework assistance," "we prepare it, we do not discuss it with the Red Cross" "We decide on activities each day," "we usually plan it with the primary school teachers," "we make the plan based on the need of the each child."*
- Other responses were also received, such as *"there is no specific plan," "the plan and the arrangement we discussed it with RC, when the volunteer will come and when the teacher will be," "if it is required we do it, but it is based on the homework assistance," "all the*

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<sup>17</sup> Can be referred as plan of action, SC curriculum, etc

*process is based on the games so it is interesting for children," "plan will create mess and tension, it is good to give freedom to facilitators," "it is not that we know can we have to for the whole year, but we follow the needs of the day," "red Cross is not approving we have freedom," "each subject has its own leader and they prepare it separate for each subject."*

The responses indicate that SCs do not receive a specific plan of action from the Red Cross; instead, they are given full autonomy to plan their daily activities. Nevertheless, based on the answers to the first and second questions, it is evident that most action plans are primarily centered around homework assistance and games. Other essential components typically associated with CFS, such as psychosocial support and broader protection activities, are generally absent. Furthermore, there is no unified approach or standardized curriculum guiding the development of activities across SCs.

### **Need and Impact assessment**

As part of the SC review, the review team explored the assessment processes related to the selection of children, the choice of topics, and the overall basis on which the intervention was developed. This line of inquiry aimed to understand whether and how needs assessments had been conducted to inform program design. The team used a combination of closed-ended questions, followed by open-ended questions, to gain deeper insights into these processes. The responses were the following:

- Ten per cent of the respondent mentioned they do assessment every day,
- 18.3 per cent of the mentioned the did assessment prior starting the intervention,
- Five per cent bi-weekly,
- Two per cent once a week,
- Two per cent once a month and
- Around 61 per cent gave other responses.

Other responses received from the respondents include:

- At the beginning when the project started,
- Beginning of the academic semester and year, once in an academic year,
- Leader did it or leader knows it,
- We are in contact with parents, schoolteachers,
- We did not do it,
- We use a platform; we send it, and parents fill the form out,
- Based on the needs and desires of children.

Additionally, one of the specific responses was *"we do not need assessment, we know they are socially vulnerable children. We involve them based on the parent application forms."* Other

responses received was *"assessment was done with the UNICEF, when starting the project. It was done with parents and with children separately," "since there is project, there is no need to do need assessment, children tell us what to do depending on their interests."*

A follow-up question was asked regarding the tools typically used for assessments. The responses revealed that there is no standardized or systematized approach in place. Some participants indicated that they do not have any formal tools for conducting assessments. Others mentioned using informal methods such as verbal communication - asking questions directly to the children or the group - as well as relying on observations such as *"observing that there is a need for something, for example, improving writing skills"*, discussion with parents and schoolteachers. Responses were also received that they know children as they teach them, and they already know their needs. For example - *"I am teaching children at school, we know them, we know what they need."*

Similarly, information was gathered regarding impact or result assessments. The data collected indicate that, much like with the needs assessments, there is no unified or systematic approach to evaluating results. The responses varied widely and included the following:

- 17 per cent mentioned that do impact assessment daily,
- 9 per cent monthly,
- 8 per cent only at the beginning of the project,
- 8 per cent weekly,
- 60 per cent provided other responses.

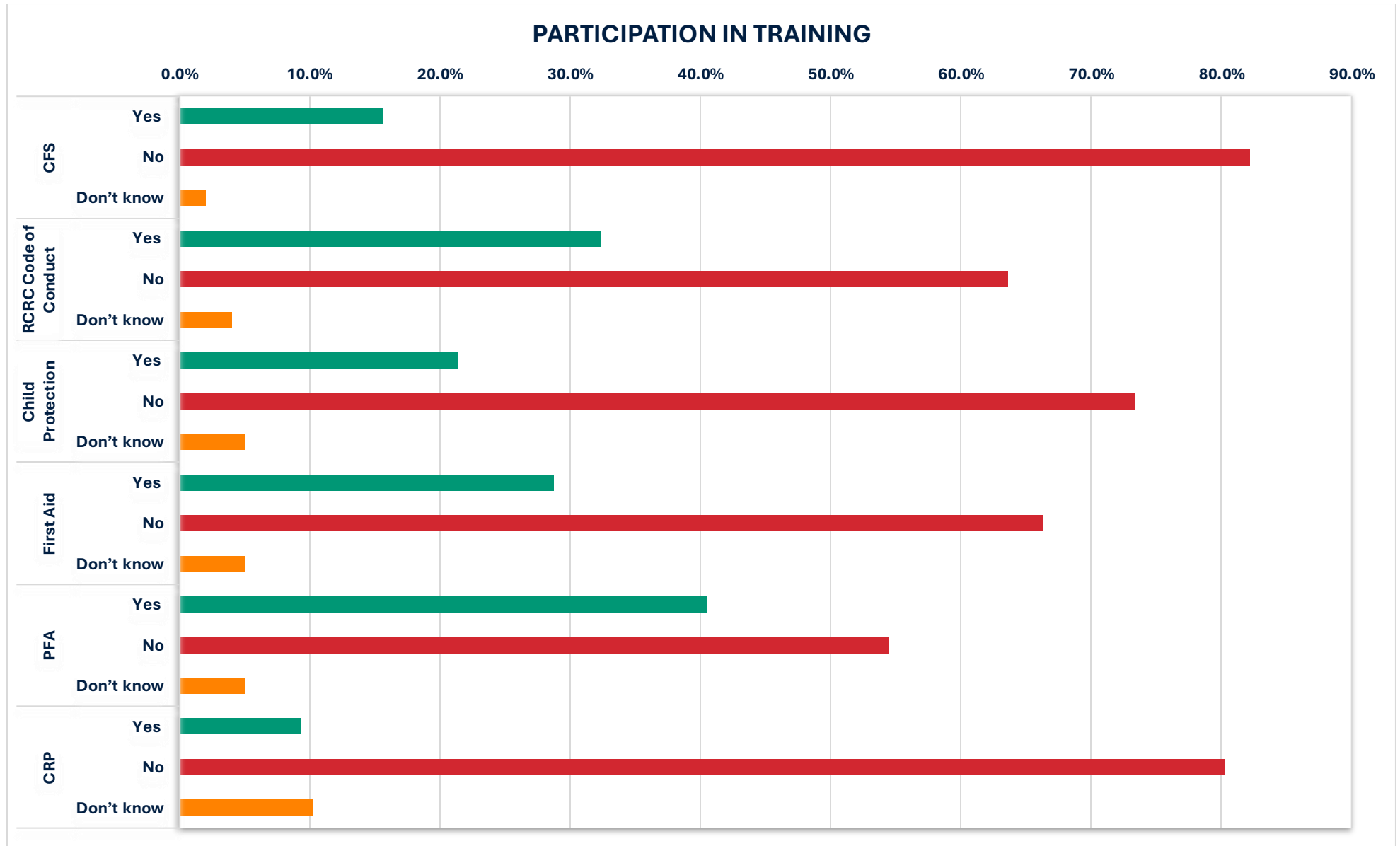
Other responses indicated that formal assessments or evaluations are not conducted. Instead, respondents mentioned alternative approaches such as asking children, teachers, and parents, as well as observing behavioral changes in children to gauge results. Additional responses included the following:

- *"We they come inspired/motivated, this is how we know,"*
- *"We use descriptions, at the beginning and at the end of the day we see what we have,"*
- *"Last year we did report, we haven't done it this year,"*
- *"We don't do it daily, however we did it during the summer camp,"*
- *"During the work, we don't do it in a written form, but we use words,"*
- *"Once monitoring was done and it was done with parents,"*
- *"We do it every day, we ask questions from their materials to see if they have learned it or not."*

Regarding the tools used to assess the impact of the interventions or to reflect on how well a session went, it is evident that no formal tools are currently in use. Instead, volunteers and educators rely on verbal communication, observations, and informal discussions to gauge the effectiveness of the sessions.

### **Capacity building of facilitators**

To assess whether volunteers and educators are equipped with the necessary knowledge and resources to conduct activities in the SCs, the review team also collected information about their participation in relevant trainings. The data focused on core CFS-related topics, including specific training on CFS, the RCRC Code of Conduct, Child Protection, First Aid, PFA, and CRP. The chart below illustrates the results.



(Figure 8: Results of responses received from volunteers and educators on the participation of trainings)

The data clearly shows that participation in training for volunteers and educators is relatively low. Regarding the training on CFS, 12 respondents provided further clarification, and the responses of eight participants indicate that they were referring to the three-day organizational meeting held before the implementation of the centers. Additionally, when asked a follow-up question about which child protection standards they have been introduced to and are currently using, the participants struggled to identify any specific ones.

The review team further explored the topics and trainings that volunteers and educators mentioned as being beneficial to enhance their ability to conduct SC activities. Many respondents expressed a desire to participate in training to develop their skills, and a variety of topics were noted. Notably, around **17 responses** highlighted an interest in **psychological training**, as volunteers were keen to understand the psychological aspects of working with children, particularly given the presence of displaced children in the groups. Other topics also piqued the interest of volunteers and educators, including the following:

- Communication with children,
- Training on ethics and hygiene in schools,
- Working with children with special needs,
- First Aid,
- How to facilitate a group,
- Disaster Risk Management,
- Non formal education,
- Any trainings related to the Child Friendly Spaces, emphasis on the methods of work.

A very good insights have been received from one of the educators, as she was mentioning that will be good to enhance knowledge on the “topics on disorders such as attention deficit and hyperactivity, including receiving guidance on how to differentiate these conditions in children. Sometimes, issues run deeper than they appear—what a teacher perceives as a “disruptive child” may be a child with an underlying condition that is not immediately visible. Additionally, it would be beneficial to learn how to work with children with autism and to develop more psychology-focused programs. As well as training on understanding children's behavior would be valuable.” One other interesting response was that “new methods and mechanisms are needed to maintain the attention of today’s generation, as traditional classes are not engaging for them. We need to adapt and innovate our

Topics on disorders such as attention deficit and hyperactivity, including receiving guidance on how to differentiate these conditions in children. Sometimes, issues run deeper than they appear—what a teacher perceives as a “disruptive child” may be a child with an underlying condition that is not immediately visible. Additionally, it would be beneficial to learn how to work with children with autism and to develop more psychology-focused programs. As well as training on understanding children's behavior would be valuable

approaches to working with children to make learning more interactive and appealing.”

### **Supervision and mentoring**

The topic of supervision was also discussed with volunteers and educators. Since supervision was a new concept for many participants, it was explained to them what the term means, why it is necessary, and the role of supervisors. According to the data, 85 per cent of respondents reported not having supervision sessions when conducting SC activities, while 13 per cent indicated they do have supervision, and one per cent stated they did not know the answer. Those who responded “yes” primarily referred to discussions with coordinators, either from the HQ or regional branches.

A follow-up question was asked regarding with whom participants discuss difficulties or any questions related to the implementation or interventions. This was an open-ended question, and 27 responses were received, while the remaining participants either skipped the question, had difficulty answering, or stated that they do not discuss these matters with anyone. Of the 27 responses, 21 mentioned discussing difficulties with the leader, while 5 indicated they consult with the coordinator. Other responses included discussions with fellow group members and other organizations.

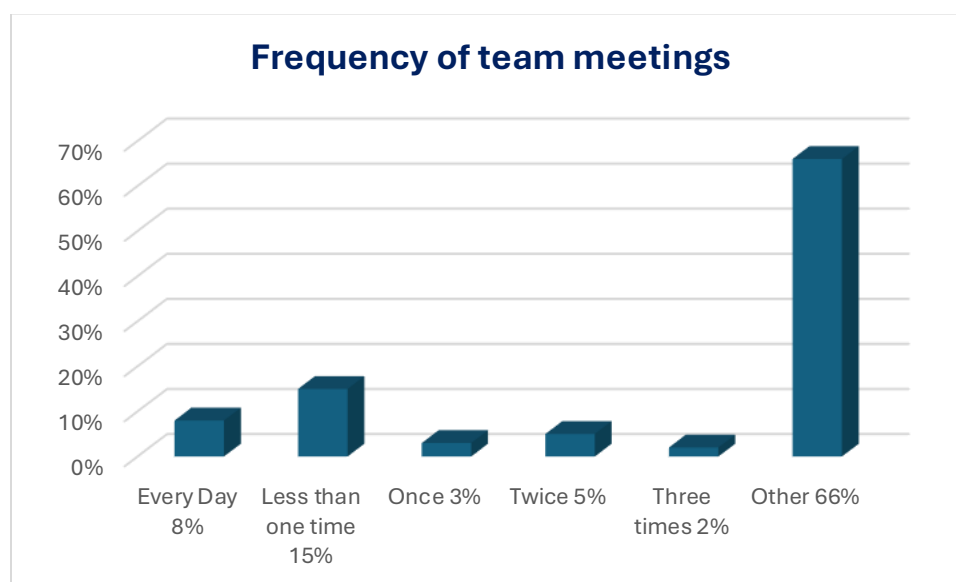
The question related to supervision was included in the questionnaires due to its integral role in the implementation of such activities. Supervision is an ongoing activity which aims at strengthening the capacities of the staff and facilitators on a regular basis. The guidebook of IFRC on the implementation of Child friendly spaces specifies that “All managers, staff and volunteers should receive an initial training, followed by capacity building over time through training, supervision and mentoring. This enables them to keep children safe and promote their psychosocial well-being. It also brings opportunities to develop new skills and take up new challenges, enriching the work done within the CFS. The format, length and frequency of training and supervision vary depending upon local circumstances.” Based on the responses received from the review participant volunteers and educators, supervision has not involved in the implementation and has not been regular practice. To prove this the review team was supposed to check if that has been part of the initial programme or not within the document review, however since limited number of documents were submitted considering the institutional crisis, the full review has not been possible.

For future programming, it is recommended to integrate a supervision component into the program, especially considering that some volunteers in the SCs may not have specialized education and may require guidance when working with children. Additionally, various challenging cases may arise, such as children’s psychological or protection issues, which would require the attention of facilitators. Supervision or mentoring is crucial, as

psychosocial well-being remains a key component in CFSs. Furthermore, supervision is essential to support the well-being of both educators and volunteers.

### Organizational and team meetings

In parallel, the review team also inquired about how often volunteers have team meetings to discuss organizational matters or other issues related to the implementation of SC activities. The responses were as follows:



(Figure 9: Frequency of organizational meetings)

The majority, 66 per cent of the total interviewed provided different responses. Eighteen responses were identical, stating that meetings did not take place. Nine responses indicated that only the leader participated in meetings, while others mentioned that communication mainly occurred via social platforms, Zoom, or that meetings happened only once a year or at the beginning of the program. The data clearly show a lack of consistency in organizing meetings with volunteers and educators involved.

### Referral mechanisms

Considering the comprehensive approach of the CFSs, the review team also inquired about the established referral mechanisms. During interviews, it was observed that participants were unsure how to answer the questions, as referral mechanisms had not been a regular practice within the program. Approximately 80 per cent of participants either did not know

the answer or skipped the question. The rest of the respondent provided some inputs some of which was that they mostly work with the Territorial Center for Psychoeducational<sup>18</sup> support. The need for establishing referral mechanisms became evident during field visits, as the review team encountered several cases where children required specialized support. Additionally, there were instances where a comprehensive assessment was necessary, and the children were referred for attention from specialists. One of the children was an attendee of the SC who regularly participated in its activities, while the other was not involved in SC but was a student at a school where SC activities are implemented.

The stories of two cases are the following<sup>19</sup>:

**Case 1:**

**During the visit to a school devastating news was received that a 14-year-old female student has taken her own life. The volunteers confirmed that she was not involved in the Smiley Clubs. Teachers described her as a quiet and cheerful student who attended school regularly, showing no visible signs of distress. Her behaviour gave no indication of the internal struggles she might have been facing, making the tragedy even more surprising and shocking. However, some individuals speculated that there may have been underlying issues at home, possibly involving abuse.**

**Case 2:**

**During the evaluation visit to the school, police officers were observed on the area. Later, the school director explained that a mother and her three children, who were participating in the Smiley Clubs, had been taken to a shelter in Yerevan. When speaking with the teachers, it became clear that they had consistently noticed the children appearing stressed and arriving at school in a poor mood. According to the teachers, the Smiley Club was the only space where the children felt comfortable enough to engage, either with the staff or with their peers. Further information revealed that the family, comprising the mother and her three children had been living with the children's stepfather, who had been continually abusing them.**

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<sup>18</sup> Centers are territorial branches of The Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center, which is a non-commercial organization aiming at organizing, coordinating and developing methodologies for the inclusive education in Armenia.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the cases are slightly modified.

## Parent engagement

During the interview, further discussion focused on the involvement of parents and caregivers in SC activities, considering that, according to IFRC guidance, CFS can also help enhance the capacities of caregivers. Around 58 per cent of the respondents mentioned that no activities are being organized for parents. 42 per cent (around 42 parents) of the respondents either remembered activities that have been organized for caregivers or provided some ideas on what can be organized for them. Out of 42 educators and volunteers 11 answered that ARCS psychologists visited the SC and organized a seminar or a psychological session for parents and seven of them mentioned that they usually have meeting/discussions with parents. Three participants mentioned that they also invite parents to take part in camp activities or events. One participant mentioned that *“they organize special meetings with parents to gather their feedback, listen to their suggestions, and address any complaints they may have.”*

The rest of the respondents could not remember anything that have been organized for parents; however, they came up with ideas what can be organized for parents, some of the ideas are the following:

- *“Parents would join with great enthusiasm, but such an initiative has not been implemented yet.”*
- *“Parents in our community tend to be somewhat passive; however, we are actively working to establish communication with each of them.”*
- *“Sometimes we organize interesting activities, and we could also invite parents so that children can present their work to them.”*
- *“We can encourage parents to become volunteers by creating initiatives that allow them to actively participate.”*
- *“We currently do not have any initiatives for parents, yet there is a significant gap in parenting skills. Sometimes, parents overprotect their children, and they do not fully understand their anxiety. Even when they do recognize it, they often lack the tools to address it effectively. It would be beneficial to provide consultations on how to support children in managing anxiety and fears.”*

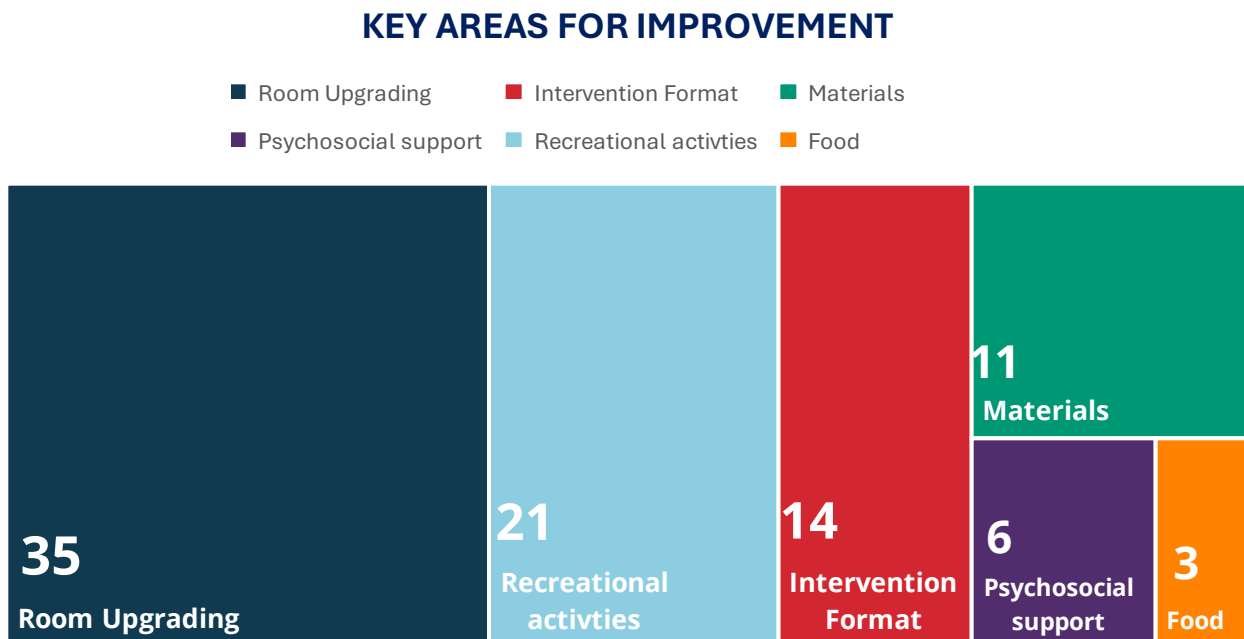
## Availability of Resources

In terms of the availability of resources and material which are used to run the sessions 62 per cent of volunteers and educators mentioned that they have enough resources to run sessions, 37 per cent of respondents mentioned that they do not have enough resources and one per cent mentioned they do not know. Those who have responded no requested

additional resources such as stationary or new materials, as it is the same every time. During the conversation respondents also mentioned that they do not have handbooks and guidebooks and will be good to have one. Additionally, at the beginning of the review when conducting physical check observation, it no handbooks and intervention materials were observed in the rooms. However, at the end of the review SC already received several handbooks.

### Possible areas for improvement

During the interviews the Review Team discussed about the changes and additions that volunteers would bring to the SCs. The question was opened ended and after the thematic analysis of the inputs here is the summary of key areas of improvement:



(Figure 10: Key areas/suggestions for improvement)

According to volunteers and educators, the key area for improvement is upgrading the rooms, with 35 responses highlighting this issue. Volunteers suggested enhancing the room conditions, specifically recommending renovated spaces that differ from typical classrooms, as well as ensuring the availability of equipment for various activities. Additionally, around 21 suggestions were made regarding the inclusion of more recreational activities, such as adding both indoor and outdoor games. One of the volunteers mentioned that *“there should be more developmental games, and when providing a game, it would be good to also give*

*instructions on how to conduct it.” One other volunteer mentioned that “intellectual games and mental arithmetic could be worked on to develop speed and attention, as well as concentration. By giving additional knowledge, we can enhance skills, rather than just focusing on homework assistance.” One volunteer mentioned that “she would like the format to focus more on individual development, including music, chess, and clubs. There should be activities that develop fine motor skills. A handicrafts group would be great, where children could later sell their handmade items.”*

Volunteers also suggested modifications to the format of the intervention. Some recommended increasing the number of volunteers involved, extending the schedule with additional hours, and raising the number of children in the events to ensure that no one feels left out. Others proposed organizing homework assistance in smaller groups and incorporating more developmental exercises, rather than focusing solely on homework support. One volunteer suggested organizing activities specifically for parents. One input from the educator was that *“The format of the program should be changed to one that attracts children, something more engaging. Now, this is lacking. The children who come are primarily those who have difficulties in their studies, and the environment provided does not motivate them. The desks are the same, they come and go from the same desks. They had promised something different, but it hasn’t materialized so far, so the motivation is lacking. I would like it to be non-formal education with opportunities for presentations and activities.”* Additionally, one other volunteer stated that *“we would change the monotony. We are trying to make it beautiful on our own initiative. Will be good to receive instructions from the RC.”*

One educator suggested to have *“frequent training sessions and discussions, where we can share our thoughts in order to improve the quality of our work.”* Several suggestions were received regarding increasing the number of materials provided including handbooks and guidebooks.

Six responses highlighted the need to improve the psychosocial component of the program, including self-reflective exercises, consultations with children, and integrating psychological assistance. Additionally, two volunteers suggested involving specialized professionals in the program, such as a speech therapist and a specialist working with children with special educational needs.

### **Impact of SC on the educational attainment of children**

At the end of the interviews the Review team gathered feedback from educators and volunteers whether according to them how the SC activities impact overall educational attainment of children. In total, 86 responses were received. 91 per cent of the responses

indicate a positive change, nine per cent indicate no change. Thematic analysis indicates that those who have been mentioning positive change were mainly referring to the following themes:

- Homework is done (17 responses),
- Children are learning well (12 responses),
- This is support to parents (11 responses),
- Children come with joy (11 responses),
- General education (4 responses),
- Use of non-formal education (4 responses),
- Teachers notice changes (3 responses),
- Other (12 responses).

Related to the theme **“homework is done”** – volunteers and educator were mentioned that that impacts greatly in terms of assisting children doing their homework, as they go home with homework done and they come to classes ready which eventually impacts their educational attainment, and children have time at home to play. Related to the theme **“children are learning well”** educators were mentioning that they have notices changes in terms of children doing better at school, they are falling behind their peers. One of the educators mentioned that *“we had children who did not know letters and it was difficult to fill that gap during the regular classes. We have filled the gap and now they write the letter.”* Another significant impact that the intervention has in term of educational attainment is that it **supports parents** as sometime parents do not have enough time, they need to pay for additional tutoring but here they receive free of charge services. Another indicator that educators considered a great impact is that **children are coming with joy**, meaning that children are motivated, they wait until the SC sessions will start, they do not miss the sessions. Some other responses were also received in terms of providing general education opportunities for children as the intervention is based on the non-formal education approach and they learn many new things, and children become more disciplined and responsible. Other responses included that we are keeping displaced children under the attention, children make new friends, teachers gave good feedback, etc.

The respondents were also asked whether, in their opinion, the SC intervention aligns with the educational needs of children. **Ninety-one per cent of the respondents** felt that the intervention meets these needs, **while nine per cent disagreed**. Those who believed the intervention addressed the needs noted that parents are often overwhelmed, and without support for the children, there would be an educational gap. They also mentioned that the program follows the school curriculum, which helps meet the children’s needs, with some children even struggling to recognize letters. On the other hand, those who felt the

intervention did not meet the needs primarily pointed out that one hour per week is insufficient to cover the children's educational needs

### **Impact of SCs on the psychological, emotional state of children**

Regarding changes in the psychological state of children, a total of **84 responses** were received. Of these, **76 per cent of respondents reported noticing changes in the children's psychological state and attributed these changes to the SC intervention.** Meanwhile, **19 per cent of respondents did not observe any changes**, and **5 per cent did not know how to answer.**

Regarding those answers which were about seeing changes in psychological state of children, referring emotional state and behavior, the following general response were received: children are now more relaxed, they are adapted to the school and new environment, they are more open and openly communicate with other and express their opinions openly, they are more active during the classes, they are not shy to ask questions, they are more confident, their mood is good, the aggression is decreased, they are more tolerant, friendly and collaborative.

**Some of the specific answers related to the impact of SC activities on children, here are the following answers:**

“Some children who were initially very reserved began to engage more actively, and by the time we held the camp, they attended on their own without the presence of their parent,”

“Some girls who were initially shy have become more open and now actively support one another,”

They have become more confident—no longer feeling bad in class when they haven't completed their homework. They are also more open in communicating with each other. Displaced children are no longer showing signs of depression,”

“We had children who were withdrawn, but now they have made friends,”

“They have become like a small family, looking out for and supporting each other,”

“We have children who exhibit aggressive behavior, but when they come to the SC, their behavior improves noticeably,”

“They are more open now and no longer feel shy about raising their hands or asking questions when they don't understand something,”

“There was a girl who initially did not communicate with us, but over time, she has shown significant progress and has started to open up,”

“They are thriving. Children who were once withdrawn have become more open, and vulnerable children without a mother or father are now engaging more. They have developed a sense of trust, as if with a close family member,”

“A Red Cross psychologist worked with children at the branch. There was a boy who was often in a bad mood, but now he is engaging and communicating with his peers,”

“There is a relaxed atmosphere. It's different from the classroom—children feel free, breaking out of their shells and expressing their desires. They feel at ease. Initially, the children from Artsakh were withdrawn,”

“They communicate openly now, and the SCs have helped them integrate into society,”

“A space has been created for the children where they can relax, interact with their schoolmates, make new friends, and become more sociable.”


Similarly, a total of **78 responses were received regarding the integration of children**. Of these, **75 responses indicated that the children**, particularly the displaced ones, have successfully integrated, while three responses were unrelated and addressed different issues.

According to responders *“children adapted quickly with no integration issues, as they had already worked with them prior to the Red Cross project.”* Additionally, there are no integration issues as *“children are adapting quickly to the new environment, and the locals are open, making it easy for them to integrate.”* According to some responses *“there is no differentiation between local and the displaced”* and SCs help children to integrate as they are all together, as well as school contributed great efforts in making sure children feel welcomed.

## FEEDBACK COLLECTED FROM CHILDREN

As part of the Review, feedback was also collected from children attending the Smiley Clubs. The purpose was to understand how much they enjoy the current activities, specific activities they like most or least, and to gather their suggestions on additional activities they would like to see included.

Over 250 children participated in the feedback collection, which was conducted in group settings. The following methodology was used to gather feedback from the children.

		
What do you like most about the SC and the Red Cross? What makes you feel happy or good when you come here?	What do you think we could do better at the SC? Are there any new activities or things you would like us to add?	Is there anything about the SC that you don't like or enjoy as much?

Children were grouped by age: 6–10 years and 11–14 years. They were encouraged to freely express their thoughts and opinions. For the younger age group (6–10 years), children were given the option to write or draw their responses. After the group work, each group presented the outcomes of their discussions to the others.

The feedback was analyzed using the general methodology of the review, which was thematic analysis. Based on this approach, the following key themes emerged from the children's feedback:

- **Education Support:** *This theme occurred when children referred to the educational aspects of the Smiley Clubs, including homework assistance, classes, or other activities related to learning and knowledge development.*
- **General Education:** *This theme occurred when children spoke about education aspects in general terms, such as having vocational orientation sessions, having excursions, etc.*
- **Psychosocial Support:** *This theme emerged when children spoke about their interactions with teachers and peers, the time spent together, and the overall positive and supportive atmosphere within the Smiley Clubs.*

- **Recreational Activities:** This theme emerged when children mentioned engaging in leisure activities such as playing games, singing, dancing, doing craftwork, and other fun, non-academic activities.
- **Integration:** This theme emerged when children spoke about spending time together, interacting with their friends, and feeling positive or confident within the Smiley Clubs.
- **Teachers and Volunteers:** This theme emerged when children provided feedback about their interactions with teachers or volunteers, including their experiences and perceptions of these individuals.



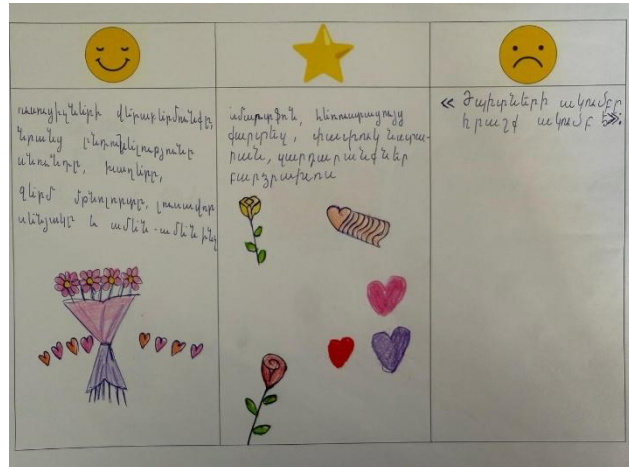
Based on the analysis of what children like most about the SC, a total of **136 responses** were received. Of these, **55 referred to education support**, **38 to recreational activities**, **13 to psychosocial support**, **11 to integration**, **16 to teachers and volunteers**, and **3 to food**. Several other responses were also received, including mentions of the Red Cross and general positive feedback like “Everything.”

Regarding education support, children mentioned that they enjoy doing homework at the centers and appreciate the teaching approach and atmosphere. Some children also highlighted their favorite subjects, which include Armenian Language, Russian Language, and Mathematics.



When collecting feedback, the review team also asked whether there are any activities or elements that children would like to see added to the curriculum of the SCs. A variety of responses were received, with most children referring to **recreational activities (36 responses)**. Other suggestions included **general education (16 responses)**, **educational support (11 responses)**, **physical education (11 responses)**, **peace-related activities (2 responses)**, and **other ideas (25 responses)**.

Regarding educational support, children mainly expressed the desire for more homework assistance sessions. They also showed interest in vocational and career orientation, practical exercises, and more opportunities for camp activities, excursions, and competitions. Children provided a wide range of suggestions related to recreational activities, including the wish for new and engaging games, dance, singing, and chess sessions, as well as equipment for watching movies and cartoons. A notable number of responses related to physical activities, with children requesting more outdoor games and sports. Two groups of children expressed a desire for peace.



There were also various other responses, such as: “we don’t have anything to add,” “we enjoy the sessions and don’t want the SC to end,” request to go ice skating, desire for better room conditions and many other individual suggestions.

Children were also asked to share what they like most and what they do not enjoy about the SC. Common responses included: “We don’t like it when we don’t play games,” “when teachers get angry,” “when we don’t stay at the Red Cross,” and “spending less time at the Smiley Club.” On the positive side, some children responded with comments such as “there are no complaints, we like everything” and “There is no reason for sadness.”

## INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL DIRECTORS

### PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

#### Contributing to:

**Question 5:** How effectively is the intervention coordinated with relevant stakeholders?

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with **27 school directors**, recognizing them as key stakeholders in the program. The purpose of these interviews was to gather their overall perspectives on the program, to identify any observed educational and psychosocial changes in children attending SCs, and to assess the value that SC brings both to the schools and the wider community. The interviews utilized open-ended questions to encourage detailed and insightful responses.

The feedback from school directors on the SC program has been **very positive**. One director shared, *"I have a good opinion about the program. I would like it to be more publicized, and for the RC to be more consistent so that we can achieve a final outcome."* This highlights the desire for greater **visibility and consistency** to continue the programme and enhance the coordination to maximize the program's impact.

The program's role in closing **learning gaps** was described: *"They participate in group sessions, and for those who have fallen behind, the gaps are filled through homework support. The children return home with their homework already done. They also disconnect from Facebook for at least a few hours and engage in additional aesthetic and educational activities"* and *"Children from Artsakh needed this support, as they had not attended school for a long time."* Another director mentioned, *"It addresses an educational issue, especially in a border village like ours. For those who are falling behind with the new standards, their needs are being met through the SC."*

The program is seen as both **useful and productive**. One director stated, *"Positive — every day after classes they do serious work; there are children who eagerly look forward to it."* The role of volunteers was also highlighted: *"They come with pleasure; the volunteers conduct lessons and help with schoolwork."* The positive impact on children's **emotional well-being** was also recognized: *"It is very good for the children's emotional well-being."*

**Children's enthusiasm and participation** were frequently mentioned. One director said, *"Positive — the children participate with great enthusiasm. They are not only involved in homework preparation but also learn rules of behavior. There has also been positive feedback from the parents."* Another remarked, *"Very positive and motivating — the children attend with joy and actively participate in all the sessions. There is a warm and welcoming atmosphere."*

The **development of children's interests and engagement** was confirmed by another director: *"Positive — children's interests are developing. They are engaged, we are satisfied with the program, and their level of involvement has increased."*

The social benefits of the program were also acknowledged: *"It is good that they work together with the local children, making integration easier and creating a safe environment for interaction among children of different ages. The Smiles Club has become a part of the school and is fully involved in the homework support process."*

During the assessment one center was not operating, nevertheless the director shared, *"I have a positive opinion. Currently, the center is not operating at the school due to renovations, but we hope to start again in a week."* **Cooperation** is welcomed across the board, as expressed by another director: *"Any kind of cooperation is welcome so that we can make the children's day enjoyable."*

School directors' involvement and awareness of the SC schedule vary depending on their roles and responsibilities. Approximately 76 per cent of the school directors reported being involved in the Smile Club activities to some extent, while the remaining directors indicated no involvement. Some directors indicated that their knowledge is limited because they coordinate with the leader and primarily rely on their updates.

Some of them play a supervisory role, visiting the SC frequently to oversee activities and provide organizational support. Some directors do not engage directly in day-to-day organizational processes but remain involved by feedback and assisting in problem-solving when issues arise. Overall, directors maintain some level of involvement that supports the smooth functioning of the SCs.

The Review Team asked school directors to reflect on the value that the SC program adds to their schools. Overall, responses highlighted that SCs provide significant benefits by supporting schools in their efforts to enhance children's education. One director noted, *"The Red Cross program is only in our school; it's free for children and provides them with lessons."* Another emphasized the program's role in fostering inclusion, stating, *"The integration of the children, especially those from Artsakh, became more effective."* Another director described the initiative as, *"a great program for offering help and lending a hand — a very humanitarian form of support. We take care of the children."*

Additionally, one school director appreciated the ongoing collaboration with the Red Cross, highlighting its strong reputation and reliability: *"Another program has been successfully completed in collaboration with the Red Cross, an organization with a strong reputation."*

The directors expressed a very positive attitude toward SC in terms of adding value to the community. One of the directors emphasized the great humanitarian value noting: *"I have a*

*very positive attitude toward the activities of the ARCS. Humanitarianism is a very important value in our time. It holds great educational significance and serves as a symbol of compassion. People are in need, and they receive support.*" Based on the overall feedback received, it is evident that SCs provide significant value by supporting children and their families with educational assistance, ensuring that children have access to learning opportunities. Additionally, SCs create vital opportunities for children living in socially disadvantaged conditions to receive supplementary education, particularly where parents lack the financial means to provide such support. Furthermore, in some communities where recreational activities are limited, SCs effectively address this gap by offering much-needed recreational opportunities for children. One director noted that *"It is extremely necessary for the children of the community. They should also visit museums, but there is a transportation issue in the village."*

Several other important opinions were shared by the directors regarding the value the SC bring to the society, which are the following:

- *"It makes the parents' job easier—they don't have to worry about where to send their children for tutoring."*
- *"Socially vulnerable children are actively involved, reducing inequality."*
- *"The burden on parents is reduced, particularly for families with children in difficult social conditions."*
- *"In contrast to extended-day programs that require payment (for example, 10,000 AMD), Red Cross services are provided free of charge, which is highly beneficial."*
- *"There is no type of structure for leisure activities in the community—there is no cultural center; the only facility we have is the school."*
- *"The main change is in the lives of the parents, as they feel reassured knowing that their children are in a safe place and at the same time are learning new things."*
- *"The community is socially vulnerable and not financially capable. Although the community has other pressing needs—such as issues with transportation, heating, and water—this program becomes a form of support for families."*
- *"It provides a smart generation to the community, which is important for the development of the community."*
- *"An educated generation, educated society."*
- *"It is mainly the socially vulnerable group that attends the SC, as the community lacks recreational centers."*
- *"It is a great support for parents. Although there is an after-school program at school that is even free for children from Artsakh, they still prefer to attend the SC."*
- *"Socially vulnerable groups attend the SC, and there are no other entertainment or recreational spaces available in the community."*

- *“The more educated and intelligent the children of the community are, the higher the quality of the community will be.”*
- *“Socially vulnerable groups also attend and participate in the after-school tutoring sessions — there is a real need for it.”*

Some of the school directors also mentioned some feedback they received from parents and caregivers, saying that they give positive feedback, and they are satisfied from the program. According to them some of them even asked to raise the number of hours and increase the number of children attending SCs. One of the directors mentioned that “parents expressed regret that the SC doesn't operate on Saturdays - I think that alone speaks volumes about how positively they view the program.” Another one mentioned that “parents especially those who work — are very satisfied with the program, as it helps ease at least one burden for them.”

School directors have observed significant **positive changes** (87 per cent of the total) in children after attending the SCs. Children who were **previously isolated** have become integrated and are now communicating more freely with their peers, showing better adaptation to the social environment. They have become more responsible and for some SCs bridge the gap between the home and school. Unlike those who do not participate and tend to be more reserved, children in the club benefit from a non-judgmental and relaxed atmosphere without rigid grading, which makes them feel freer and more at ease. Teachers have noted that children who used to be withdrawn have grown in self-confidence. Academically, progress is evident as the club supports children with lower abilities by providing extra attention, helping them become more prepared for classes and more integrated within the school community. Almost all directors expressed a need to continue the implementation of the SCs.

School directors were asked to share the challenges and difficulties they encountered in implementing SCs from their perspective. Those who responded primarily highlighted issues related to appropriate space, **renovation** needs, and **coordination** with the ARCS.

Regarding **renovations**, several directors noted that while the ARCS had initially promised to carry out renovation work, this did not materialize. In terms of space, some directors explained that SCs had to be run in other schools due to their own facilities being under renovation through a state program. Others expressed concern about the lack of a dedicated room for SC activities. Another one mentioned that *“the classroom has problems, there are issues with the equipment, heating is insufficient, and there is no water. The children bring water from home themselves.”*

About **coordination**, the primary concern expressed by school directors was the lack of adequate guidance and support from ARCS. One director noted that they had not received

any guidebooks, or structured intervention plans from ARCS, and as a result, had to rely solely on their own experience to organize activities. Another director echoed this sentiment, stating that it would have been helpful to receive guidebooks or handbooks to better understand how to implement the activities. They also mentioned the absence of organizational meetings with ARCS, which led to frequent miscommunication, with different team members providing inconsistent information. Additionally, one director reported challenges in communication, highlighting that ARCS staff were often unavailable and unresponsive to phone calls.

School directors also provided several suggestions for improving the SC program. These recommendations primarily focused on improving the **physical space, enhancing the program content, changing the provided food**, and offering appropriate **remuneration for volunteers**.

Regarding SC spaces, one director proposed **establishing a playground for children**, while another recommended **creating bright, colorful, and child-friendly rooms** that are larger in size and equipped with appropriate furniture and educational materials.

In terms of program content, multiple directors suggested revising the **intervention schedule and expanding the range of activities**. Specific ideas included introducing music and cultural clubs, incorporating behavior change programs, offering specialized in-depth training, and providing career orientation sessions. Additionally, they recommended organizing outdoor activities such as hikes, as well as educational visits to theaters and museums. Some also emphasized the importance of developing structured programs with dedicated materials to enhance the overall learning experience.

Two directors **suggested revising the food options provided** to children, recommending changes to improve their quality or suitability. One mentioned *“the food—or more accurately, the sweets—we provide are unhealthy. They often arrive close to their expiration dates, with very little time left. You could even say we’re poisoning the children. If we had been informed from the start, we might have found an alternative solution regarding the food”* and the other one said, *“the food could be changed to provide healthier and more purposeful meals.”*

Another suggestion was referring to the **remuneration** that volunteers receive mentioning that the amount is very small. Directors suggested increasing the amount considering that it is an encouragement for volunteers.

At the end of the interview, directors were asked what they are willing to invest in for the continuation of the Smiley Clubs. Based on their responses, the schools, within their capacities, are ready to invest human resources, space for activities, materials, and their time.

## INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL TEACHERS

Interviews were conducted with schoolteachers who are teaching the children in schools but are not involved in the Smiley Clubs as facilitators. Data collection was quite challenging, as most of the teachers working with the children were already involved in the SCs. Nevertheless, interviews were successfully conducted with 13 teachers. Out of the 13, two teachers were not familiar with the ARCS program, so the analysis will be based on the remaining 11 interviews. The aim of the data collection is to capture their observations on the impact of the SCs.

To understand how much teachers know about the program and what their opinion is, teachers that they know that the program is coordinated by a dedicated team of teachers who follow a structured schedule to deliver lessons in various subjects including Armenian, French, Russian, and more. It offers children valuable opportunities to complete their homework, engage in creative clubs, and participate in summer camps. Many children also take part in subject-specific activities tailored to their needs.

One teacher, who used to be an RC member previously shared positive observations from the village: children attend the program with joy and enthusiasm. Both younger and older children benefit from the support, whether through homework help, drawing, or reciting poems. The teacher noted that children, including those displaced from Artsakh, are well cared for and provided with necessary school and art supplies. The sessions are engaging and personalized, catering to individual abilities and needs.

In addition to academic support, children enjoy singing, dancing, playing games, and excursions, creating a lively and inclusive environment. Teachers use innovative methods to ensure effective learning, and overall, the program is seen as a vital resource, especially for displaced children in the community. The responses indicate that teachers perceive the SC primarily as a place for homework assistance and recreational activities.

Teachers have observed **improvements in the educational outcomes** of the children participating in the program. The children come to class better prepared, follow the school schedule, and demonstrate increased motivation and confidence in their learning.

Importantly, the program also **reaches displaced children**, offering them a stable and inclusive educational space. Children who were previously struggling now show remarkable progress. As one teacher shared: *“The students who were previously lagging now say things like, ‘We learned this from the Red Cross.’”* This reflects the **positive association and impact** of the program on children’s learning experiences.

Teachers note noticeable academic progress, particularly in literacy: *“A few children have shown noticeable improvement in reading skills.”* Other teachers highlighted the transformation in their children: *“Both of my children (meaning children in class) couldn't recognize letters before, and even in that regard they've been helped — they've started to speak and express their thoughts. They write now, draw — you can clearly see their progress.”* Some of the other responses are:

- *“Yes, I've noticed — they come prepared for lessons and are active during classes.”*
- *“I see progress — our volunteers work with care and love, and they also help with the homework.”*

Related to the changes about the psychological well-being of children Several teachers reported that initially, many children were experiencing depression, emotional distress, reluctance to attend school, and frequent crying. Over time, however, these children began to adapt to their environment. Teachers observed improvements such as better communication skills, increased tolerance, and greater emotional freedom. Some noted that children, who were once scared, now freely express their thoughts without hesitation.

Several other teachers highlighted that children have become more friendly and confident, with one teacher mentioning feeling less embarrassed when students raise their hands in class. Despite these positive observations, three teachers mentioned they had not yet seen any noticeable changes, noting that children typically adapt quickly or that changes were not apparent at this stage. Overall, many teachers perceive a positive psychological shift among the children, reflecting progress in their emotional well-being and social interactions.

The teachers noted that the children have integrated well and adapted quickly, with no major issues observed during the integration process.

Additionally, teachers think that Smiley Clubs are useful to them, particularly in helping children come to class with their homework already completed, which significantly eases the teaching process. Teachers have observed that students arrive better prepared and more focused, allowing for smoother lessons. One teacher noted, *“In my class, there are 33 students, and I can't manage to give attention to everyone during one lesson - but here, I'm able to provide an individual approach.”* This tailored attention not only supports academic progress but also strengthens the connection between children and their teachers. According to educators, the approach enhances communication and helps students feel more engaged in their learning journey.

## STANDARD QUALITY CHECK

Within The SC review standard quality check was conducted to ensure SCs are well established. The checklist was filled in place when visiting psychically the centers and have been filled with the leader of SCs and via observations. The questions of the checklist were developed based on the specificness of the SCs implemented by ARCS and they mainly were developed based on the CFS Quality Standard checklist from “Evaluation of Child Friendly Spaces<sup>20</sup>.”

The check was conducted in 30 SCs. (The checklist which has been used can be seen at the end of the section). Out of 30 SCs 27 are in public schools, two of them are in dormitories and one is in the state library building.

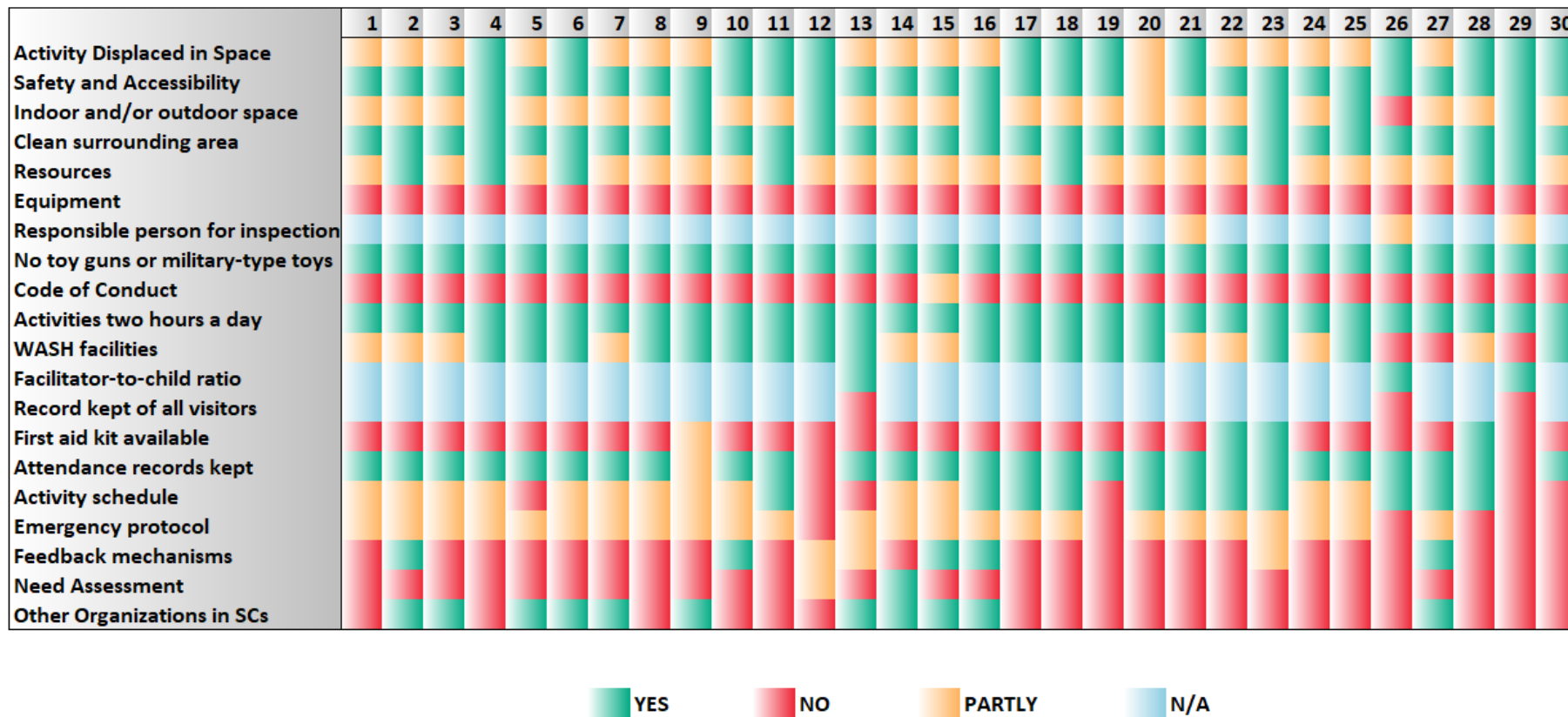


From the analysis it is visible that not all SCs are displayed in a specific space, meaning that there is a sperate room or space is allocated for only SC activities. Only 13 SCs out of 30 has a specific space dedicated for Sc activities, including three SCs implemented directly by ARCS (Yerevan and Abovyan dormitories and ljevan SC). The rest of the SCs are implemented in schools, and due to the limited availability of rooms/classrooms in the schools the SC activities are running in different spaces, and most of them are regular classrooms.

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<sup>20</sup> “Evaluation of Child Friendly Spaces” – Tools and guidance for monitoring and evaluating CFS, developed by Columbia University, Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision

### SMILEY CLUBS



21

(Figure 11: Results of standard quality check)

<sup>21</sup> Numbers from 1 to 30 represent the schools where the physical checks took place.



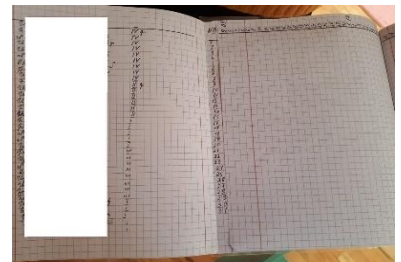
Regarding safety, all SCs were considered secure except for two, one of which is located near a borderline school and the other one near military base. This particular school, situated approximately two kilometers from the border on a hill, poses some safety concerns. Although the road is in good condition, adverse weather conditions such as winter snow or rain can create accessibility challenges for both staff and children. In terms of accessibility, the SCs are open to all children who meet the eligibility criteria and require support. However, the schools are not adequately equipped to accommodate children with disabilities, and there is currently no specific data available on the participation of children with disabilities in SC activities.

Regarding the physical environment, only seven SCs had designated outdoor spaces that were adequately equipped for various activities, including games and sports. One SC, located within the state library building, does not have any outdoor space. The remaining SCs are based in schools, which generally have outdoor areas where children can play; however, these spaces are either poorly equipped or not equipped at all. Notably, the surrounding areas of all SCs were observed to be clean and well-maintained.

In terms of resources, including materials, stationery, and books necessary for activity implementation, all Smiley Clubs were sufficiently equipped to organize activities. However, it is challenging to assess the overall sufficiency of these resources, as they are provided based on individual requests rather than a predefined agenda or schedule. Resource availability varied between SCs, with some having relatively more materials and others less, making direct comparison difficult. Importantly, no gun toys or military-type toys were identified in any of the SCs.



Regarding human resources, all Smiley Clubs had sufficient educators and volunteers involved. Assessing the adequacy of human resources was not applicable for this review, as the format of these Child-Friendly Spaces differs from





those typically organized in emergency situations. In schools, the number of educators and volunteers involved is mostly fixed, typically totaling around 12. In contrast, dormitories and ARCS SCs generally have about 5 volunteers working with groups of approximately 10 to 15 children, which can be considered as sufficient. The SCs marked as “partly” resourced are those without an involved psychologist, despite the importance of the psychosocial component in the intervention. Even in SCs where psychologists visit and participate, their level of engagement varies, and there is no unified approach to delivering psychosocial support across the centers.

In addition to the available resources, no specific equipment has been provided to any of the SCs. Therefore, the question regarding the appointment of a responsible person for regular equipment inspection is considered non-applicable.



At least two hours of activities are available in all SCs, and attendance sheets are maintained in most of them. Only two SCs did not have attendance sheets available. However, the format and management of attendance sheets varied between centers — some received standardized sheets from ARCS, while others prepared their own.

Regarding the activity schedule, it was not consistently available across all SCs, and there was no unified approach to its preparation. The schedule mainly focuses on homework assistance, with some sessions dedicated to craft work. According to feedback from volunteers and educators, the activity schedules are typically prepared by volunteer leaders, with limited involvement from ARCS. Among the SCs directly managed by ARCS and staffed only by volunteers, an activity schedule was available only in Ijevan, while it was missing in the Abovyan and Yerevan dormitories.



No visitor records have been maintained in any of the SCs. Since 27 out of the 30 SCs are located in public schools, these schools are considered secure, with limited access for outsiders due to the presence of security personnel who monitor movement within the

premises. For the three SCs organized outside of school buildings, visitor records are also not kept; however, for security reasons, it is recommended that such records be maintained.



First Aid kits were available in only three SCs, and in one SC, the leader mentioned having a kit but was unaware of its location. The remaining centers did not have First Aid kits. Considering that the activities are conducted with children, it is important to have necessary First Aid materials readily available in all centers to ensure safety.

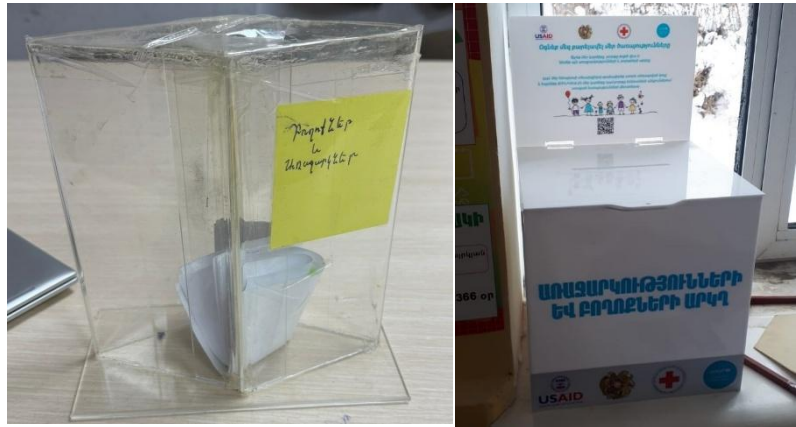
No SCs had emergency protocols in place. While all schools have mandatory emergency protocols, these are not present in the classrooms or SC rooms. In the dormitories, emergency protocols were also not available. For safety and security reasons, it is recommended that emergency protocols be established in SCs and that educators, volunteers, and children receive proper instructions.

Additionally, a Code of Conduct was found in only one school, where it was implemented on the initiative of the school itself for classroom use.

Regarding WASH facilities, three SCs out of 30 did not have access to them. These included one dormitory in Yerevan, one SC in Ijevan located in the library building (which had a facility but children could not access it), and one SC in a school where the WASH facility was outside the school and was under renovation by UNICEF at the time of the visit.

Feedback from volunteers and educators, along with physical inspections, indicated that no comprehensive needs assessments had been conducted. Only one SC leader presented questionnaires completed by parents and caregivers prior to joining the SC. Another SC leader mentioned conducting an assessment using digital tools but could not recall the exact method. In all other SCs, no form of needs assessment was carried out, and educators primarily decided independently which activities to include in the schedule.

Regarding the feedback mechanism, feedback boxes were available in only four SCs. However, these boxes were originally set up for a UNICEF program and have not been updated since the funding ended. Additionally, volunteers and educators have not received training on how to collect feedback, and the feedback provided has not been analyzed. As a result, the boxes are currently not being used to collect feedback. In three SCs, volunteers independently initiated feedback collection and set up boxes on their own. In the remaining centers, there was no feedback collection system in place.



During the Quality Check, the Review Team came across the consent forms that are signed by parents and caregivers, which are as follows:

«Հումանիտար աջակցություն Լեռնային Ղարաբաղից տեղահանված բնակչության կարիքներին և ինտեգրմանը» ծրագիր  
«Ժպիտների ակումբ»  
ՀԱՅՏ  
Երեխայի գրանցման թիվ \_\_\_\_\_

Դպրոց \_\_\_\_\_  
Ես \_\_\_\_\_ ս. խնդրում եմ իմ երեխային \_\_\_\_\_  
ին, ընդգրկել \_\_\_\_\_ մարզի \_\_\_\_\_ համայնքում ՀԱՅՏ  
«Հումանիտար աջակցություն Լեռնային Ղարաբաղից տեղահանված բնակչության կարիքներին և ինտեգրմանը»  
ծրագրի շրջանակներում գործող «Ժպիտների ակումբ»-ում:

Սույնով տալիս եմ իմ համաձայնությունը՝ «Ժպիտների ակումբ»-ի աշխատանքների ընթացքում իմ  
երեխային լուսանկարելու համար:

Դիմող՝ \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ /  
Կոնտակտային հեռախոս՝ \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ "202

From the sample reviewed, it is evident that parents and caregivers currently give consent only for taking photos during the classes, which is the sole document signed by them. However, these documents do not constitute proper consent forms, as they do not cover consent for the collection of personal and sensitive data. A comprehensive consent form should clearly outline what information is being collected, the purpose of collection, how and where the data will be stored, who will have access to it, and under what circumstances the information may be shared with third parties. It is therefore recommended to revise the consent forms to include these essential elements.

**Standard Quality checklist questions:**

N.	QUALITY STANDARD	YES/PARTLY/NO
1	Children’s work displayed in space.	
2	SCs are safe and accessible for all children.	
3	Indoor and/or outdoor space for children is available (for team and sport games).	
4	The surrounding area of SCs is clean (clean of rubbish/trash, broken glass etc.).	
5	Resources (both material and human) are properly identified to run Safe space.	
6	Equipment for all activities is available in good condition (e.g. toys not broken).	
7	One person responsible for daily inspection of equipment and keeps record, register.	
8	No toy guns or military-type toys.	
9	Code of conduct displayed in picture or word form (in a child-friendly way).	
10	Activities available two hours per day, three days per week.	
11	WASH facilities, including drinking water, toilets are properly maintained and hygienic.	
12	Facilitator-to-child ratio is adequate.	
13	Record kept of all visitors.	
14	First aid kit available (and stocked appropriately).	
15	Attendance records kept (and are up to date/current).	
16	Activity schedule prepared in advance of use (At least one week before, gets approved by supervisor. Activities separately for boys and girls are available).	
17	Emergency protocol clearly outlined and documents (i.e. in word or picture form).	
18	Feedback mechanisms are available.	
19	Need Assessment Conducted.	
20	Other actors working in the school.	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### INTERVENTION PLAN

From the responses of the review participants, it is clear that the activities within the CFS are primarily designed around academic support. The objective of the Operational strategy of EA is to *“support safe, continued, and equitable access to education for affected populations, especially children and young people, vulnerable and marginalized groups.”* Hence, from this perspective, focusing primarily on academic support is a positive approach. Nevertheless, several parts of the strategy mention CFS, which is a broader term encompassing a variety of activities such as play, psychosocial themes in play to enhance psychological well-being, socialization, and skill development. Additionally, considering the IFRC's guidance, which places psychosocial well-being at the core of CFS, it would be beneficial to enhance the schedule of the centers to include more psychosocial and psychological interventions.

Additionally, it is advised to harmonize the work of all SCs. It is visible that available schedules differ from one another.

Since most of the responses from the interview's facilitators were about the upgrading of the room, will be better, up on the availability of the funds to ensure the centers are properly settled.

### CAPACITY BUILDING OF FACILITATORS

From the responses of the interviewed volunteers and educators, it is evident that participation in the trainings is quite low. Child-friendly space facilitators play a crucial role in ensuring the safety and well-being of children. To promote the best interests of children and ensure that activities are implemented in line with the 'do no harm' principle, it is essential to continuously invest in the development of facilitators' skills and qualities. This is particularly important for volunteers without relevant backgrounds. The majority of facilitators involved in the SCs are schoolteachers with specific education in the field, and they are assumed to regularly receive training and be familiar with child-centered approaches. It is also crucial to ensure that Red Cross volunteers are trained in child-centered approaches. As highlighted in the previous sections and in the IFRC CFS Guidebook, 'all managers, staff, and volunteers should receive initial training, followed by ongoing capacity building through training, supervision, and mentoring.' According to the data collected, more than 80 per cent of the volunteers did not undergo initial training when they began facilitating the SCs. It is also crucial to prioritize the training of volunteers and educators on key topics such as psychological assistance, child development specifics, child

protection and many others. While facilitators may not be able to resolve all issues children encounter, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills will enable them to recognize concerns and make appropriate referrals.

Additionally, it is essential that facilitators do understand the key principles and ideas of child protection and we aware of and act in accordance with the code of conduct. Again, referring to the IFRC Guidebook “a Staff Code of Conduct is therefore essential for all CFS in fulfilling child protection policies. It sets standards for behaviour to ensure children’s safety and well-being.”

At the same time, it is essential to engage mentors and supervisors in the process to ensure the quality of interventions, particularly given that psychological well-being is at the core of CFS activities. Involvement of supervisors will be especially important for volunteers without a relevant background in education, psychology, or general work with children.

## **ASSESSMENT**

It is recommended to establish and enhance assessment mechanisms to ensure that activities are aligned with the needs of the children. Although the current educational activities are in line with the school curriculum, conducting regular needs assessments is essential to confirm that the interventions are effectively addressing the children needs. This is particularly important for designing psychosocial interventions, aiming at increasing the psychological and social well-being of the child. Furthermore, developing tools for assessment and providing training for volunteers and educators on using these tools would be beneficial. According to their responses, volunteers and educators assess the needs of children primarily through observation, but these observations are not consistently documented. Conducting assessment will also ensure informed decision making and additionally involvement of children and caregivers into the design of the programme.

Apart from the needs assessment, which is essential for designing interventions, it would be beneficial to conduct impact assessments at the output, outcome, and objective levels. This will ensure that the educational and psychosocial changes in children are documented based on data, rather than assumptions. Furthermore, having specific results from these assessments will not only highlight the significant work done but also provide valuable evidence for future resource mobilization.

Additionally, systems and tools should be established for data collection and assessments. From the interview responses, it was clear that volunteers and educators often rely on observations and discussions, which are valid data collection methods. However, these observations have not been consistently recorded and analyzed throughout the

programme implementation. Currently, IFRC is developing the Needs Assessment Hub, which could serve as a valuable reference center for accessing assessment questionnaires and improving data collection processes.

Additionally, given the availability of the budget, education experts and child psychologists could be involved in the program to develop specialized assessment and feedback questionnaires tailored specifically for the CFS.

In addition to the needs assessment, it is recommended to conduct a service mapping to understand the scope of intranational and local organizations implementing similar projects in schools. This will help avoid overlapping and promote complementarity.

## **REFERRAL MECHANISM**

It is recommended to establish and strengthen referral systems to ensure they function effectively, particularly for vulnerable children. This will help guarantee that their needs are properly addressed and that those requiring specialized services have access to the necessary support. Referring to the IFRC CFS Guidebook "CFS is one part of a comprehensive approach to the care and protection of children that also includes other sectors and services, such as protection, education, health, camp management, mental health, legal and social services." This will be beneficial if ARCS can map the available child centered services in the regions and in Yerevan, inform volunteers and educator, continue constantly training volunteers on PGI and referral mechanisms and raising awareness on the need of the effective referral systems. Additionally, ARCS should be more engaged in the coordination with local governmental entities and other local actors to who are providing services and supporting children in communities. Additionally, ARCS has a PGI focal point, who can be involved in the implementation of the activities, may be conduct monitoring visits with the team to ensure that such cases that are describes in the upper paraphrase are discovered and reported.

Since during the LLW ARCS mentioned that they are currently working on the Smiley Club/Education policy, may be the document can very briefly mention about the referral mechanisms. Various guidelines and policies on the implementation of child-friendly spaces outline detailed procedures for organizing referrals. For instance, the CFS Monitoring and Evaluation Guidebook includes sample referral forms that can be adapted and incorporated into the overall ARCS CFS policy:

Referral No. \_\_\_\_\_

CFS REFERRAL FORM FOR SERVICES

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm

Child Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

CFS Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

CFS Location ID:

CFS001	CFS005	CFS009				
CFS002	CFS006	CFS010				
CFS003	CFS007	CFS011				
CFS004	CFS008	CFS012				

**Reason for Referral (summary)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Action taken by CFS Facilitator**

Contacted caregiver/parent on \_\_\_\_\_

Held meeting with caregiver, child and supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

Referred to (service provider name) \_\_\_\_\_

Submitted to National/Regional Child Protection Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

**Planned follow-up**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

CFS Facilitator signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## CONSENT FORMS AND DOCUMENTATION

The consent form currently used by ARCS for the SCs is limited to obtaining permission from parents or caregivers for photographing children. However, a consent form should go beyond photo consent and address the collection of personal and sensitive information about the child. It is therefore advisable to revise the existing consent forms and introduce a more comprehensive version that clearly outlines the purpose of data collection, the type of data collected, how and where the data will be stored, who will have access to it, and under what circumstances the data may be shared with third parties.

There was also inconsistency in documentation practices across the SCs. While most centers-maintained schedules and registration sheets for both teachers and children, there was no standardized approach. Some SCs received pre-printed templates from ARCS, while others developed their own formats independently. This lack of uniformity can lead to gaps in

record-keeping and makes it difficult to ensure consistent monitoring and reporting across all centers.

## **PARENT AND CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT**

Given the comprehensive approach of CFSs, it is crucial to involve parents and caregivers in the design and implementation of SC activities, while also addressing the challenges of engaging them. The interview results indicate that no specific activities are being implemented for parents and caregivers, aside from inviting them to parent meetings and certain events. However, it is essential that parents' voices are heard, and their opinions and feedback should be considered. To ensure the best outcomes for the child, it would be beneficial to organize training or awareness-raising sessions for parents and caregivers.

## **FEEDBACK MECHANISM**

One of the key approaches to fostering meaningful engagement with parents, caregivers, children, and other stakeholders is the continuous collection and use of their feedback. However, the review revealed that feedback mechanisms are not well established across the SCs. Feedback boxes were available only in those centers that had previously received funding under the UNICEF programme. Since the funding freeze, these boxes have not been updated or maintained. In the remaining SCs, feedback boxes were entirely absent. Moreover, even in centers where feedback boxes were present, they were not actively used, and no systematic process was in place to collect, review, or analyze the feedback received.

## **DISSEMINATION AND VISIBILITY**

To effectively engage community members and promote community-based approaches, it is essential to consistently raise awareness and clearly communicate the objectives of the program. This helps ensure that all parents and relevant stakeholders have a solid understanding of the initiative implemented by ARCS. Furthermore, it serves as an opportunity to strengthen the visibility of ARCS and emphasize its important role within the community. However, responses from the review indicate that many parents have limited awareness of the objectives of the SCs. The same applies to teachers in the participating schools: many are not fully informed about the purpose and goals of the ARCS program.

## **COORDINATION WITH AUTHORITIES AND OTHER ACTORS**

As part of the Review, the team met with four representatives from the *Marzpetarans*. The findings indicate that coordination with local authorities is currently limited. The interviews were conducted with the Heads of the Education Units at the Regional Administrations. One of the Heads mentioned that they had received an initial information letter from ARCS regarding the implementation of the educational intervention but had not been updated since. It is important to ensure the involvement of key stakeholders in the implementation of the programme. Strengthening coordination with local authorities would not only enhance the visibility of ARCS and its work but also open opportunities for future collaboration.

As one of the heads of unites mentioned “we submit reports to the governor every six months. If you don't provide us with information, we, in turn, cannot provide information to the governor, and your work remains unseen.” Additionally, working closely with state authorities and relevant stakeholders can create new opportunities for joint projects, the development of shared methodologies, and the promotion of ARCS and IFRC educational approaches within schools and communities.

**Annex A:** The table below presents the list of Smiley Clubs, along with relevant details provided by ARCS. This list served as the basis for the review. The review was conducted in the schools marked in green, indicating that they were operational at the time of the review. Schools marked in red were non-operational and therefore not included in the review.

#	Region	Smiley Club	Project Donor
1	Armavir	Armavir basic school N5 after Ozanyan	ECHO/ Austrian RC
2		Vagharshapat Basic School No 11	ECHO/ Austrian RC
3		Metsamor Secondary School	ECHO/ Austrian RC
4	Ararat	Artashat BC No 2	ECHO/ Austrian RC
5		Masis BS No 4	IFRC Appeal
6		Sayat Nova Sec. School	IFRC Appeal
7	Gegharkunik	Mets Masrik Secondary School	Norwegian RC/ IFRC
8		Vardenis Basic School No 4	Norwegian RC/ IFRC
9		Gavar Basic School No 5	IFRC Appeal
10		Sevan BS N4	IFRC Appeal
11		Chambarak BS N1	IFRC Appeal
12	Kotayk	Abovyan Dormitory	Austrian RC
13		Hrazdan BS N11	Norwegian RC/ IFRC
14		Hrazdan BS N9	ECHO/ Austrian RC
15		Abovyan N7 school	IFRC Appeal
16		Tsakhkadzor Secondary School	IFRC Appeal
17		Charentsavan Basic School N6	IFRC Appeal
18	Lori	Stepanavan BS N1	IFRC Appeal
19		Tashir BS N2	IFRC Appeal
20	Shirak	Gyumri BS N21 after Oyunjyan	IFRC Appeal
21		Gyumri BS N29	IFRC Appeal
22	Syunik	Tegh BS N1	Norwegian RC/ IFRC
23		Syunik Secondary School	Norwegian RC/ IFRC
24		Geghanush Secondary School	Norwegian RC/ IFRC
25		Goris BS N6 after S. Khanzadyan	Italian RC
26	Tavush	Dilijan BS N2	Norwegian RC/ IFRC
27		Dilijan BS N4	Norwegian RC/ IFRC
28		Ijevan ARCS room	Italian RC
29		Dilijan BS N5	IFRC Appeal
30	Vayots Dzor	Vayots Dzor ARCS room	IFRC Appeal
31		Jermuk BS N1	Italian RC
32		Hermon Sec. School	IFRC Appeal
33	Yerevan	Basic School No 11 after M.Melkonyan	IFRC Appeal
34		Yerevan Dormitory	Austrian RC