



Year  
in review  
2021

Global Compact Communication on progress



Reporting period: January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021. © Maram Foundation

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Sheikh Bahr Camp, Syria. © Maram Foundation



Esperanza Community, US  
© PhilmC6 Media



Library in Brazil © UNHCR



Emergency shelter, Esperanza Island © Made in Paradise



School children in Syria © Bonyan Organisation

# Figures at a glance

2021 in review



68,137

Since the start in 2015, we have delivered 68,137 shelters.

6,250

students go to school in RHU classrooms established in 2021 in a camp in Northwest Syria.

4,636

Shelter units were delivered in 2021, serving as schools, temporary homes and child friendly spaces.

150

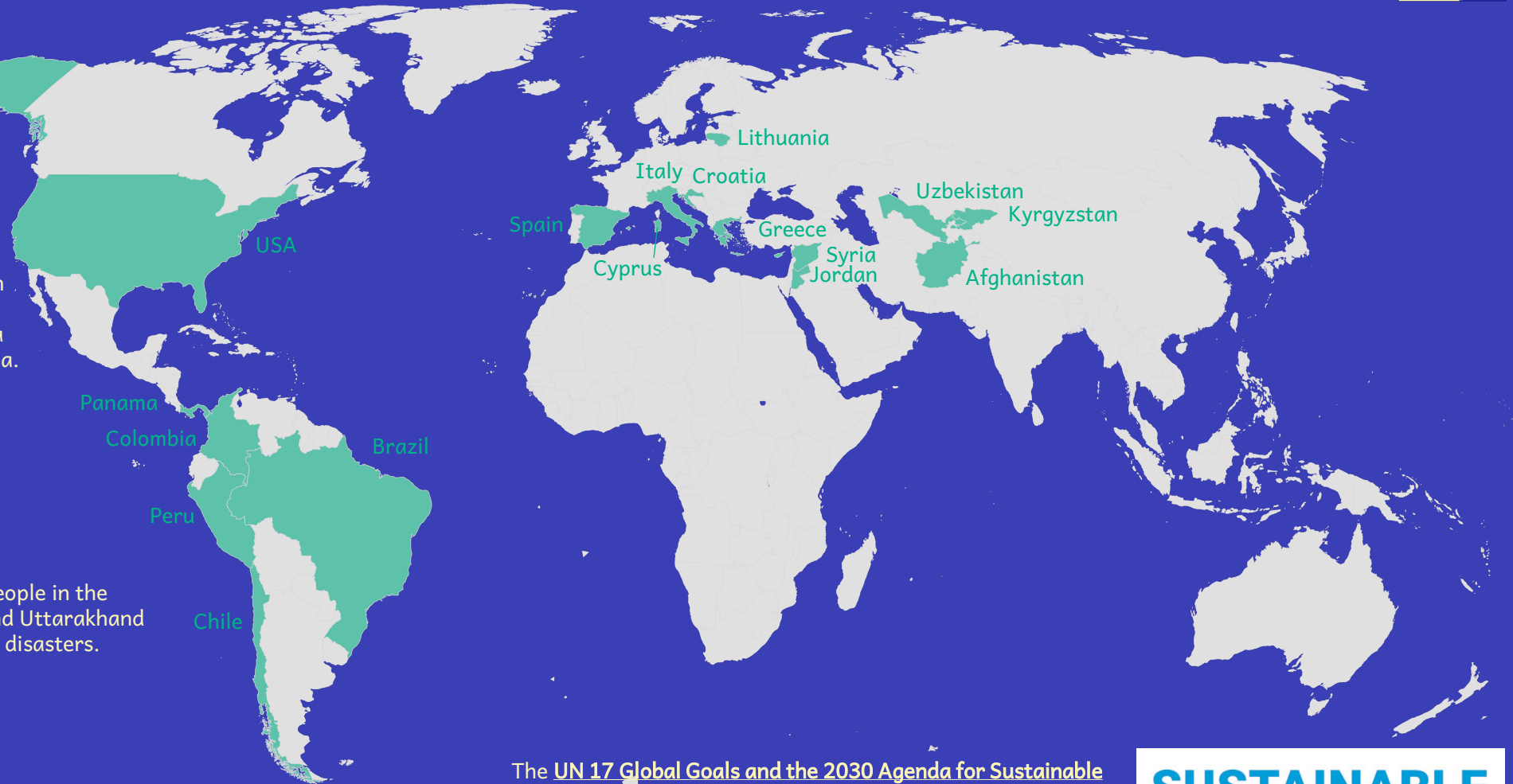
SEEDS sheltered 150 people in the Indian states Kerala and Uttarakhand who lost their homes in disasters.

78

Since we started, we have delivered shelters to 78 countries.

17

In 2021 we delivered schools, shelters, clinics, child friendly spaces to 17 countries.



The UN 17 Global Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were established to end poverty and hunger; achieve the human rights of all, and gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as well as to ensure our planet's long term environmental sustainability.

We will use this framework going forward and have identified the goals 3, 4, 5, 9, 13 and 17 towards which we will report.



# Statement of continued support to the UN Global Compact



You are reading our combined Year in review and Global Compact communication on progress for 2021. At the time of writing, just over two weeks have passed since Russia invaded Ukraine. We are deeply concerned over the acceleration of armed aggression and are heartbroken by the scenes of anxious children waving goodbye to their fathers through the windows of trains and buses, not knowing if or when they will be reunited. In just two weeks, so many lives have already been lost. The international community *must* continue to do everything in its power to stop this war.

The solidarity shown with the people of Ukraine is incredible. What if the same attention was given to the other severe humanitarian crises in the world? Among them, the famine induced by climate change in Madagascar, the political and economic instability in Venezuela, or the war in Syria, entering its twelfth year. In the northwestern parts of Syria, the Bonyan Organisation, with support from UNICEF, has built a school with RHUs. This project will enable a better future for thousands of children who were born in displacement and are growing up not knowing a life outside a refugee camp.

2021 was the year our shelter system travelled throughout the world, supporting missions which crossed all sectors of our extended humanitarian family. In addition to serving as schools, the RHU is currently offering protection for people experiencing homelessness in Austin, Texas. The shelter becomes a place of their own and functions as a foundation to help them get back on their feet. Our partners have continued to put our flexible shelter frame *Structure* to the test: in India, it functions as emergency shelters for people who lost their homes to major disasters, and as COVID-19 vaccination kiosks in rural areas to reach distant communities. On an island off the mainland of Colombia, 90% of the infrastructure was destroyed in a hurricane. Here, families are living in RHUs while they rebuild their homes from the ground up.

IPCC recently published its most recent, and most alarming report on climate change. We must act *now* to avoid future catastrophes. At Better Shelter, we are ready to play our part and will launch an ambitious sustainability plan this year. We are also pleased to submit our third Communication on Progress, presenting our work from 2021.



I want to extend a thank you to all our partners and the hardworking people we have the privilege to collaborate with every day. Lastly, you may notice that we have changed the way we look. We hope you like it.

Johan Karlsson  
managing director  
Better Shelter  
March 2022



Ariba Camp in Northwest Syria © Ali Haj Suleiman

Who we are



Ariba Camp in Northwest Syria © Ali Haj Suleiman

# Who we are



Better Shelter is a humanitarian nonprofit organization based in Stockholm, Sweden. We started as a small social enterprise in 2010 with a big mission dedicated to sheltering displaced persons with safety, dignity and hope on their path towards a more stable life in a permanent home of their own.

While our work has grown in scale, our small team continues to offer support to our partners and deliver our shelters internationally from our warehouses in Poland, Turkey and Panama.

Since 2015, we have delivered more than 68,000 shelters to emergency, crisis and development programs in over 78 countries.

We have been able to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons through our collaborations with humanitarian NGOs and INGOs, UN bodies, philanthropic foundations, academic institutions, including the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, the IKEA Foundation, Aga Khan Agency for Habitat and the University of Baghdad.



Imagine a family that have lost their home, and even loved ones, in a conflict or a disaster. They are now forced into a place where they are confronted with past traumas and an uncertain future.

How does one recover from this situation?

It starts with the little things that many of us take for granted: having private space with a door to lock at night. Walls around us that don't confine but keep us safe. A place to process horrific experiences, and to reach a point of healing. A place to speak, to think and to laugh freely, where old habits re-emerge and new ones are cultivated, even if temporary.

Our shelters are the building blocks to a transitional life of dignity and hope for vulnerable persons in a shared situation, and who can empower each other by engaging in their own sheltering process. The shelters can be customised and repurposed using local materials and other old and forgotten objects such as fabrics, planks and clay. Windows can be moved, and porches can be decorated with keepsakes that represent fond memories of a life left behind.

The shelters are symbols of encouragement and persistence, to keep going for days, or sometimes years. Then finally some day, the families who once lived in the shelter are long gone and well into their journey of pursuing their dreams with the ability to focus on the hope of what awaits them.

Hope starts with a home.



# Vision

For all displaced persons to experience safety and dignity through self-reliance and improved livelihoods, in their journey towards a stable life in a permanent home.

# Mission

To develop temporary shelters that offer displaced people safety and dignity on their path toward a life in peace in a permanent home. Together with partners, we provide shelters that offer protection throughout the duration of displacement where they are needed the most.



# Human rights



Ariba Camp in Northwest Syria. © Ali Haj Suleiman

**Shelter** is a human right.

Shelter is more than just four walls and a roof.

For people affected by conflict or disasters, shelter plays a critical role in supporting their journey towards a hopeful future.

We believe that shelter is a powerful tool that fosters safety and dignity, healing, livelihood, community and resilience.

# Hurricane affected families live in RHUs while rebuilding their homes



**Country** Colombia

**Application** Temporary shelter

**Partner** UNHCR and UNOCHA

**Shelters** 90

The Colombian islands Santa Catalina and Providencia were hit by a category five-hurricane IOTA in late 2020. 98 percent of Providencia's infrastructure was damaged and 13 people died. UNHCR donated 90 RHUs to residents of the two islands which were installed with the support of UNOCHA. These are used by families as temporary shelters while they are rebuilding their homes.



A family in front of their RHU on Providencia © Made in Paradise

# Shelter for families who lost their homes in a landslide



**Country** India

**Application** Temporary shelter

**Partner** SEEDS

**Shelters** 30

On 19 October, heavy rainfall in several districts in Uttarakhand destroyed the homes of hundreds of families. Several human lives, homes and livelihoods were lost.

41-year-old daily-wage labourer, Nandan Singh was one of the affected. At 4:00 am, a sudden landslide forced him, his mother, his wife and their two sons, Shivam and Ishu to immediately escape their house before it collapsed.

Due to the shock, the family only returned to see the state of their home three days later, discovering all their belongings lost.

Within a month, SEEDS constructed new Structure shelters to accommodate 20 families, while reconstructing permanent homes. The Structures were clad with locally sourced sheeting to offer basic protection.



Ishu in front of the family's Structure shelter. © SEEDS

**Protection** is a human right.

Whether in response to displacement caused by natural disasters or violent conflict, we have supported missions in some of the world's most severe crises.

One of the key functions of our shelters is to ensure that its residents are safe and protected so that they can live in peace and work towards their vision for the future.

Our shelters are equipped with several features which mitigate security risks and strengthens protections for its residents, with particular attention to the most vulnerable populations.

# People experiencing homelessness receive support in Austin



**Country** USA

**Application** Homeless shelter

**Partner** The Other Ones Foundation and Glimmer Austin

**Shelters** 52

Camp Esperanza is an encampment community in Austin, Texas, which gathers persons experiencing homelessness, and where the Other Ones Foundation is making strides toward radical progress for current and future residents.

Despite complex circumstances and changing times, there remains one constant truth around camp: shelter is better.

Residents arrive from all walks of life, faced with the same challenge: the need to get back on their feet. The ambitious TOOF team provides all kinds of support: temporary shelter, work opportunities, psychosocial support and most notably, the path toward a permanent home. Meet the TOOF team and residents in this mini [documentary](#).



I know, in my heart, that when I leave here, I'm going to miss this little house in a certain way, because at a time when I needed it, it was there. People provided it.

Robert Batiste,  
Resident,  
Camp Esperanza

Robert Batiste in Camp Esperanza, Austin, Texas © PhilmCo Media

**Education** is a human right.

By providing a space for learning, our shelters promote education as a tool to empower children.

Our partners' education initiatives restore regular schooling as a priority in childhood development, following the disruption of education during displacement.

More than just a place for learning, our shelters serve as classrooms to provide a safe space as children are particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse, sexual violence, human trafficking and forced recruitment.



# Empowering education for children through shelter



**Country** Syria

**Application** Classroom

**Partner** Bonyan Organization and UNICEF

**Shelters** 92

Syria has suffered over a decade of war. More than 12 million are displaced and much of the civil infrastructure has been destroyed. The 2019 Northwest Syria offensive left 2.7 million in need of humanitarian assistance. 1.6 million people live in emergency shelters in this region.

[Bonyan Organization](#) partnered with UNICEF to run a project which aims to train teachers and provide quality education to children living in displacement camps in Northwest Syria.

The project counts the support of 92 RHUs serving as temporary classrooms. It aims to offer education to 6,250 students in the camps, while providing employment opportunities to 300 teachers in the area to run the schools.

An expansion of the project is planned in order to offer even more children the possibility to go to school, and ultimately laying the foundation for a hopeful future.



School children in Syria © Bonyan Organisation

**Health** is a human right.

There is a critical need for medical support structures around the world, and especially in regions with precarious health services.

Through partnerships with medical NGOs, thousands of our shelters have been deployed as medical facilities to increase the access of health services for the populations who are in most need of vital care.

Our shelters nurture both short-term and long-term mental and physical wellbeing by enabling access to basic sanitary health services.

# Children affected by earthquake play and learn in RHUs



**Country** Croatia

**Application** Child friendly space

**Partner** Croatian Red Cross

**Shelters** 25

On 29 December 2020, several cities in Croatia were destroyed or damaged from a devastating 6.2 magnitude earthquake.

Children are particularly vulnerable after an emergency with concerns about the future and feelings of helplessness, loneliness and fear.

As part of their relief response, the Red Cross set up child friendly spaces inside RHUs across several cities. Their psychosocial program was developed to entertain children with play and learning activities to process painful memories, and to take their mind off feelings of anxiety, depression and stress.

In Sisak, the RHUs are being used for psychosocial counselling, voluntary blood donations and field offices. They also serve as distribution hubs of aid and warm meals for local populations.

Thanks to the activities offered in the shelters, the children who took part in the programme are reported to have improved mental and physical health, as well as general wellbeing.

Children draw in a child friendly space. © Croatian Red Cross



# Environment



Our approach remains to develop structures that, while temporary, can be implemented in an emergency and gradually be upgraded into a safe space that lasts throughout the duration of displacement.

The shelters are designed to adjust to the residents and their situation. They offer the possibility to upgrade with what is locally available, to prolong the lifespan or to give them a renewed purpose when the situation changes.

# Actions



By 2050, the socioeconomic impact of climate change has the possibility to make 200 million people dependent on international humanitarian aid every year. Extreme weather events are expected to drive millions of people out of their homes, while accelerating the need of shelter in the coming decades. The world can still avoid a future environmental catastrophe by making immediate changes and by working together.



After completing a Life Cycle Analysis and decommissioning guideline, we shared results with our partners, in the aim to inform future decisions on the appropriate time to either dispose of the shelters or to transform them for a new purpose in order to prolong their lifespan.

Structure assembly in Kerala, India © SEEDS



On certain routes, we began shipping inbound via rail instead of sea to decrease Co2 emissions, which we aim to continue with additional routes by an incremental approach. On one specific route, we reduced emissions by 40%.

Venezuelan refugees enter RHUs in Boa Vista, Brazil © UNHCR



We set up a warehouse in Panama to minimise the need for sudden air shipments to this region of Latin America.

RHU installation after Hurricane Iota in Providencia Island, Colombia © UNDP

# Actions



We are setting ambitious short- and long-term goals that will guide our work in the critical years ahead of us and will implement our new strategy for sustainable development in 2022.



We continue improving the fill rate of our transports by placing orders strategically to minimise our carbon footprint without compromising pace of production.



Last year, we placed larger, but fewer orders, thereby reduced our carbon footprint on inbound shipments with 10% compared to the year prior.



We changed from two suppliers to one for the production of the most complex component of the RHU. This saves transport and Co2 emissions and reduces scrap and storage space.

# Labour





Better Shelter operates under Swedish labour law and within a collective agreement for all employees that regulates fair wages, pensions, annual leave and insurances.

With our ethical framework, we aim to maintain high labour standards through our own operation and throughout the value chain.

# Labour



Better Shelter operates under Swedish labour law and a collective agreement for all employees and regulates fair wages, pensions, annual leave and insurances. Better Shelter maintains high labour standards through our own operation and throughout the value chain. We follow our ethical framework strictly:



We respect and promote fundamental human rights.

School inauguration in IDP camp in Syria © Watan Foundation



We have zero tolerance for any kind of discrimination.

A Venezuelan refugee child has made a dream catchers in a child-friendly space run by the at an Integrated Assistance Centre in Maicao, Colombia. © UNHCR/ Santiago Escobar-Jaramillo



We promote equal opportunities.

Ruba and her friends in an IDP camp in Syria © Ali Hai Suleiman



We uphold employees' right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Afghan refugee women learn how to stitch and do embroidery to earn an income for themselves and their families in a refugee village in Peshawar, Pakistan. ©UNHCR/ Saiyna Bashir

# Overall team engagement score was 7.7/ 10



In 2021, we continued to work from home and our engagement score remained high.

The team's motivation and needs were measured on a weekly basis through anonymous surveys that monitored the mental and physical health of all employees.



# Anti-corruption



A woman from Venezuela feeds her child in an RHU in Brazil. © AVSI

Better Shelter is a nonprofit working directly with reputable and trusted humanitarian organisations, academic institutions and companies with comprehensive anticorruption policies in place.

# Activities



Corruption aggravates poverty, undermines democracy, contradicts good governance, prevents investments and weakens the trust in the market economy. Better Shelter is a nonprofit working directly with reputable and trusted humanitarian organisations, academic institutions and companies with comprehensive anticorruption policies in place. We have zero tolerance for corrupt practices.



We do not accept gifts, benefits, reimbursements, or entertainment.



We do not accept bribes, kickbacks and similar undisclosed monetary items.

# Activities



We collaborate only with trusted partners with comprehensive anticorruption policies in place. Consequently, Better Shelter takes a clear stance and actively works against any form of corrupt behaviour, as stipulated in our Ethical Framework.



We request all suppliers to sign our ethical framework to ensure that these standards are respected throughout our value chain.



Better Shelter has mechanisms in place, such as authorisation grids and control methods for payments, to ensure that the company standards on anti-corruption are met.



Our internal open communication policy enables assured and confidential reporting of misconduct, at once allowing us to address deficiencies with training on remediation good practice.

# Innovation





# Product development within thermal comfort

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



13 CLIMATE ACTION



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



In 2021 Better Shelter launched various projects with university students on thermal comfort to build heat resilience. The project included a PhD research project with the University of Baghdad in Iraq, and a Master project with a student at Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands. These initiatives lay the foundation for crucial short and long term product development of our shelters. We also supported Eurorelief with technical guidance on the winterisation of RHUs in a Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) Mavrovouni on Lesbos, Greece. Over a short period of time, different designs, material proposals and prototypes were evaluated against effective thermal performance, cost, applicability and assembly resulting in some 120 insulated RHUs.



Eurorelief in Greece

“A few women came up to us to say thank you because it’s been making a huge difference. One woman has arthritis and it’s been getting less painful because it’s warmer inside her place. Some women don’t even use their heater anymore and can live in t-shirts in the wintertime in their RHUs.”

- EuroRelief representative



University of Baghdad

PhD research project within thermal comfort in hot climate.



Eindhoven University

Master project within thermal comfort in hot climate.

# Create Structure empowers displaced families



In 2021, we launched *Create Structure* in the United States: a fundraising initiative aiming to match donors with families who require emergency shelter for only \$1 a day. With this initiative we aimed to build resilience among displaced communities. This is achieved through provision of emergency shelter structures which can be locally upgraded to enable self-recovery and long-term development.



A fundraising platform invites supporters to donate as little as \$1 a day for a year, accumulating to the funding of an entire Structure.

The *Create Structure* team held events in New York, Austin, Los Angeles and San Francisco, to raise awareness of climate migration and the many solutions available to mitigate the negative effects of climate change.

Hundreds of shelters were funded by supporters and are now accommodating families and schoolchildren across India.

Women sort grains in a Structure shelter in Kerala, India.  
© Sameer Raichur

# Mobilizing resources to achieve greater impact

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



13 CLIMATE ACTION



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



We continued to support partners with resource mobilization from the private sector to help them realize their projects. Thanks to these efforts, we helped make it possible for humanitarian organizations to achieve impact and for private sector companies and foundations to make good use of their assets.



An IDP camp in Northwest Syria. Photo: Ali Haj Suleiman

# Media

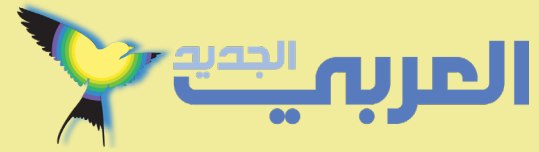


Children inside their RHU unit in an IDP camp in Northwest Syria. Photo: Ali Haj Suleiman

# Media coverage



Our work across the globe was covered by a range of media outlets in Europe, the Americas and the Middle East. Here are a few of those stories:



# Exhibitions, talks and lectures



# Exhibitions, talks and lectures



In October, the Norman Foster Foundation invited Better Shelter's Johan Karlsson to participate in the Re-Materializing Housing Public Debates, supported by the Holcim Foundation. © Norman Foster Foundation



*Design 1900 - Now* exhibits 250 objects, among them two RHU flatpaks, from the Victoria & Albert Museum's collections of 20th- & 21st-century art & design. © Victoria and Albert Museum



Insulation prototyping in Greece © Eurorelief



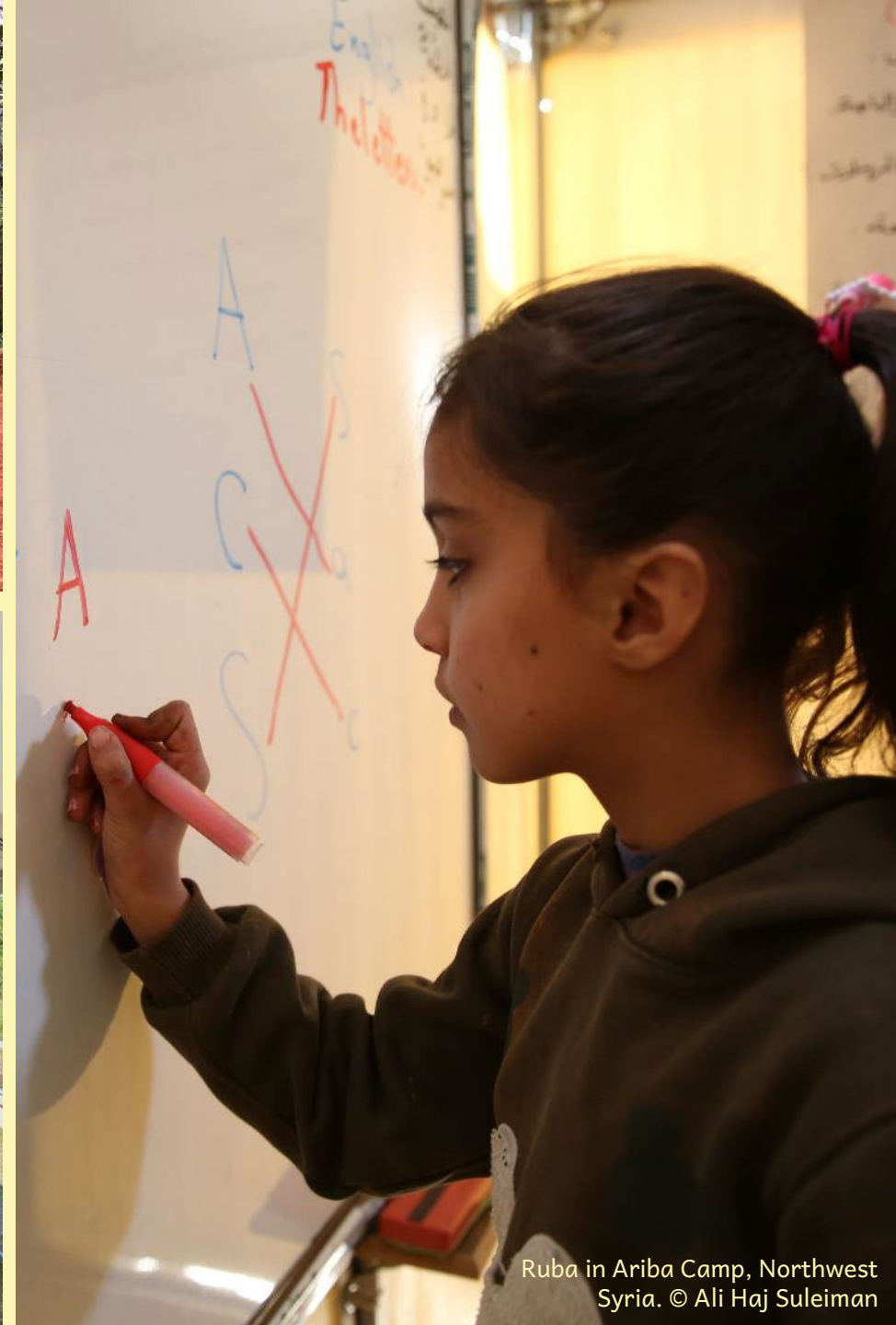
Structure assembly in India © SEEDS



RHU assembly in Albania © Albanian Red Cross



RHUs in Northwest Syria © ATAARelief



Ruba in Ariba Camp, Northwest Syria. © Ali Haj Suleiman



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