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# *Case study*

## TeamUp International

One methodology, different implementations

# Case study: TeamUp International

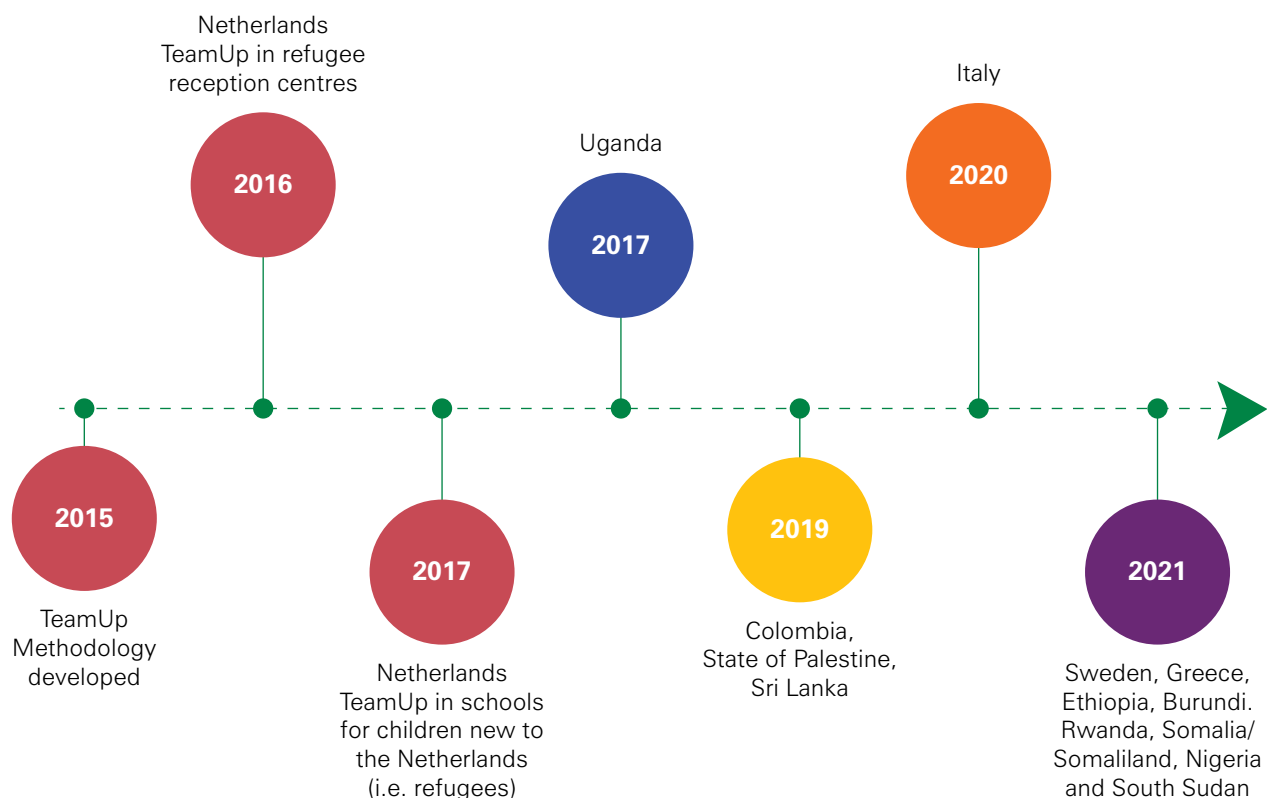
## One methodology, different implementations

A simple but well-thought-out methodology made it possible for TeamUp to roll out essentially the same intervention in many different countries with a strong refugee presence. Maintaining flexibility allowed it to shape the implementation to better work with the different partners, adapt to the conditions and requirements of the various locations and to integrate local coaches with a range of backgrounds and availability. Sessions follow a precise structure but there is always room for tweaks that make the experience more familiar for the children.

### TeamUp overview

The TeamUp methodology was developed in 2015 in the Netherlands as a response to the inflow of refugees and the lack of psychosocial support available for refugee children. Building on their expertise in working with refugees, Save the Children Netherlands, War Child Holland and UNICEF Netherlands partnered to develop a movement-based intervention. By 2017, other Save the Children and War Child Holland country offices showed interest in the methodology and thought it could be relevant and easily applicable in different contexts with similar needs (see *Figure 1* for an overview of the expansion). To launch activities in a new country, a training of trainers was organized, with subsequent

Figure 1: Timeline of TeamUp programme expansion



mentoring, to ensure minimum standards of implementation of the methodology, but the way activities are organized varies by country or even by target group. By 2019, TeamUp was rolled out to five countries and reached 57,000 children in that year alone.

Each session<sup>1</sup> of TeamUp has three parts: opening (consisting of walk-in, a check-in, a warm-up), middle (main play activities) and closure (cooling-down, a checkout and walk-out). Basic play materials (e.g., balls, cones, rope) and a suitable safe space where children can play are needed to facilitate TeamUp sessions. A team of at least two facilitators plan a TeamUp session according to an open structure, choosing activities including routines which are supported by eight themes (fear, assertiveness, anger, stress and tension, conflict, bullying, respect and friendship), and the facilitators choose the theme of the day based on the needs of the group. During the approximately one-hour sessions, children can have fun and play without thinking about the difficult contexts they come from, thus finding some temporary relief from the stress they normally experience. The open but recurring structure of the sessions, the routines used, the consistent presence of facilitators and the regularity of the sessions can give a sense of stability which refugee children often lack. All this constitutes psychosocial support that children would not otherwise receive and enables facilitators to identify children who need additional support. One of the most common characteristics of the children whom the methodology is intended to benefit is that they all speak different languages, and there is often no shared language among them and the facilitators. Even where language is not a barrier, different backgrounds and cultures can create the need for a universal way of communicating. To tackle this, the TeamUp methodology had to implement a lot of movement and very little talking, so that, by minimizing verbal interaction, all children could start at the same level and be included. A movement-based activity is easily accessible and allows to all children to participate.

### **Training facilitators**

When expanding to other countries, master trainers will go and train the trainers in those countries, who will then train the facilitators. They first offer a 4–5-day

training of trainers. After this the trainers go on to train facilitators following the Start-Up training (2 days) and a follow-up training (2 days) model used in the Netherlands (see Annex 1.5 *TeamUp Netherlands case study*), and additional training is available periodically (see Figure 2 for overview).

This training focuses on the methodology and on how to facilitate sessions, the responsibilities of the facilitators and their role within the global team, as well as child protection and safeguarding. An important component of this training is to teach facilitators how to identify children who show symptoms of neglect, exploitation or abuse, and place this in the context of stress, protective factors and psychosocial well-being.

## **Country implementation**

### **Uganda**

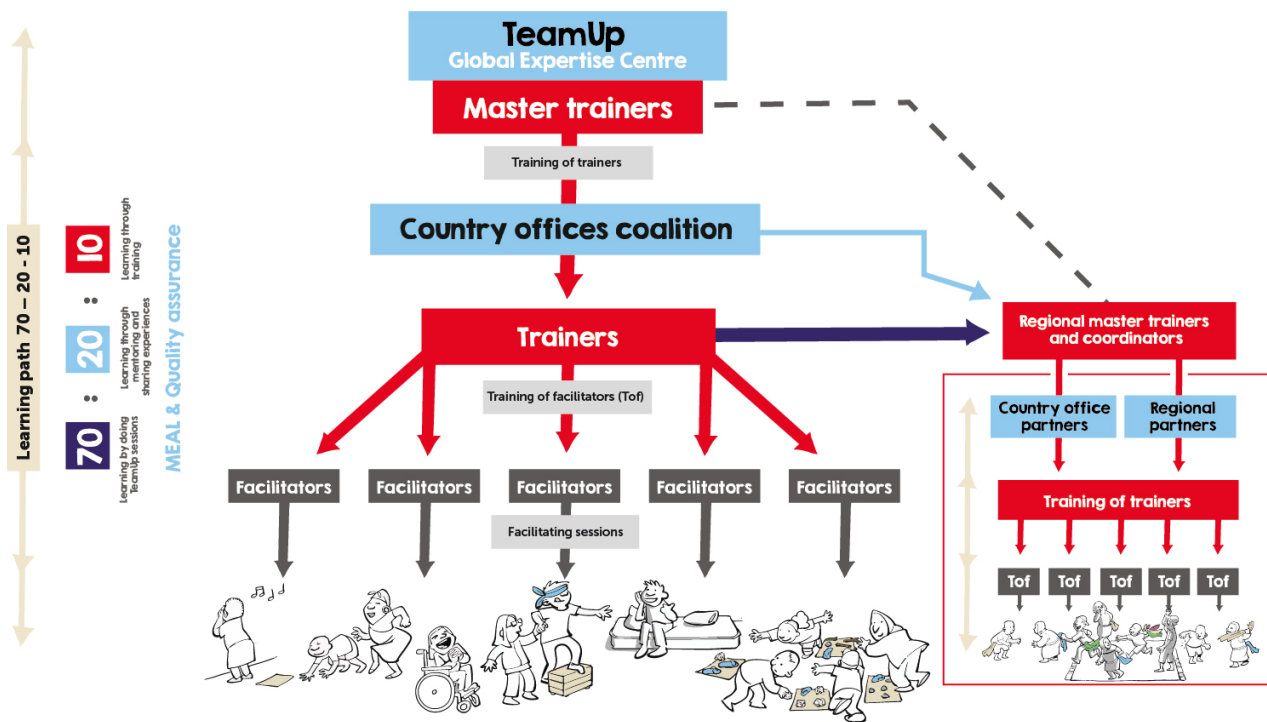
Uganda was the first country outside the Netherlands to implement TeamUp.

- In 2017, War Child, who were already working with refugee children who have faced both stressful and traumatic life events, saw the need for a programme that could be targeted to a broad population of children in refugee camps and decided to adopt/ implement or integrate TeamUp to their programming as a Psycho-Social Support (PSS) intervention. A training of trainers took place in April 2017 and implementation started in July. As of mid-2020, the programme has been implemented in nine locations, with 7–8 schools per location.
- In 2018, Save the Children, implemented TeamUp in child-friendly spaces within refugee camps. These spaces have a regular schedule of activities and TeamUp sessions were introduced as one of them. Any child is welcome to join, so while the intended age is 6–17 years, children as young as 3 can also attend.

### **Intervention structure**

In Uganda, War Child first implemented TeamUp in primary schools, where other programmes were already operating but lacked TeamUp's focus on movement-based activities. Teachers were trained in the methodology and became facilitators who

Figure 2: Training operating model



conducted the sessions during physical education classes. Since classes can have over 200 children, it soon became apparent that more facilitators were needed, so a ratio of three facilitators (1 leading and the other 2 to support and monitor) for 60 children was set. The additional facilitators, who are volunteers, were recruited from refugee and host communities and settlements and have a similar background to the children attending the sessions. As some of the intended effects of TeamUp are the reduction of conflict and promotion of teamwork, when expanding to new schools, the most problematic classes were selected to participate. Accelerated education programmes are conducted as add-on components with the objective of reaching children who dropped out and are being reintroduced to school.

**COVID-19 adaptations**

Between March and May 2020, when group activities were prohibited because of COVID-19, facilitators visited various children, household by household to facilitate TeamUp at Home. Teachers asked to be involved as well so they joined facilitators in the activities. In these sessions, children were encouraged to make local play

materials and parents were invited to join. One of the positive feedback about TeamUp at Home was that it created occasions for children to bond with their parents. In addition, thanks to it, staff can continue to identify children who need referral to further support services.

**Colombia**

In 2019, Save the Children introduced TeamUp in temporary learning spaces for refugees in Colombia. In 2020 War Child Holland adopted it as part of a broader project with migrant populations to contribute to creating harmony within communities and relieving stress in Guajira (close to the Venezuelan border) and Bogota.

**Intervention structure**

Facilitators work in pairs and the guidelines keep groups to a maximum of 25 participants; however, if more children wish to participate they are not turned away. Sessions are organized in sets of 10, but since the turnover of the population is high, a child attends an average of seven sessions, with some attending just one. Colombian and Venezuelan culture includes a lot of dancing and sounds, which are reflected in the type of activities children like to do, together with

indigenous games. Sessions in Colombia last longer than the one hour foreseen in the manual; this is mostly because movement-based activities are accompanied by more dialogue. While in general there is little talking in the methodology, in Colombia, children and facilitators spend more time talking. This is mostly made possible because all participants and facilitators speak the same language, with only a slight difference in terminology depending on the country of origin. Language provides an opportunity for bonding among children for those who like to compare different words and create their own ways of communicating.

Another feature of the programme in Colombia is that, at times, following experience developed for other projects, a group of teenagers (13–17) facilitates a group of younger children (7–12) under adult supervision. This has the double positive effect of empowering teenagers and providing the younger group with a highly relatable leadership figure.

### COVID-19 adaptations

During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the team made TeamUp at Home videos (see *TeamUp NL case study*) and sent them to families so that they could access the programme. Facilitators conducted home visits in accordance with COVID safety guidelines. Parents were invited to join and often found the session interesting. Families found these initiatives very useful. Before then, some children had trouble sleeping but later found they were better able to sleep thanks to the physical activity the initiatives had encouraged. Having children replicating TeamUp activities with their parents also had the effect of uniting generations and families (including all family members in the household). Facilitators developed a podcast for children in which they followed the structure of sessions (including collection of feedback and recommendations for next time at the end), and they guide and motivate children, trying to encourage participation even if visual contact is not possible.

### State of Palestine

#### Intervention structure

TeamUp was launched in the State of Palestine in 2019 with a training of trainers in March 2019 by master trainers from TeamUp Netherlands in Gaza. This was

followed by the training of 27 facilitators in community-based organizations (CBOs) as well as some psychologists or teachers in schools. As external facilitators are not allowed to work in schools in the State of Palestine, TeamUp trained one person per class. Pre-COVID sessions took place twice a week in CBOs and once a week in schools during school hours. Sessions were delivered in a cycle of 12, facilitated by volunteers who committed for at least one year, typically psychologists, teachers or other university graduates.

What was key for TeamUp success in the State of Palestine was the right division of age groups. At first, the mixed ages of children created very little interaction as younger children ended up being less participative in games, while teenagers felt less engaged because they saw the activities as something childish. Ensuring that participants were divided by age for the activities in CBOs made TeamUp more popular with everyone. In one of the groups, boys and girls asked to play separately because it was seen as not culturally appropriate, and while this practice is generally not recommended, in this situation it meant that participants felt more comfortable.

One piece of feedback received by the programme is that when TeamUp is held right after school, children are never lazy to go to class in the morning, as the TeamUp session works as a motivation to go to school, and after the session they are happy to go home and do their homework.

### Italy

In 2020 in Italy, SOS Villages heard about the methodology and approached TeamUp to explore implementing it in its children's villages.<sup>2</sup> It is now implemented in three locations and, elsewhere, it is used as a stand-alone one-time pilot with the same structure as regular sessions. TeamUp was found to be a good tool to repopulate school spaces which were completely unutilized during the school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the lockdown in Italy, young people had no opportunity to interact with their peers and, as in most other countries, did not go to school for a significant period of time. Conducting TeamUp in school premises has been a way of procuring opportunities for participants to be together and to get re-accustomed to being close to schools in view of the upcoming resumption of classes.

### Intervention structure

Participants, who are mostly aged 14–16, form groups of about twelve and are accompanied by three facilitators. Unlike most other countries, dialogue between participants and facilitators during check-in and check-out is given more importance. Each session is planned based on feedback from the children. While the programme team originally planned for nine sessions with fixed themes, the theme is now decided week by week based on outcomes of the previous session. This is the process followed in most other countries.

Facilitators focus mostly on adolescents, often seeking their feedback and taking note of their music preferences.

They make a playlist based on this to keep them motivated and engaged. This is a way of making them feel listened to, which is a slightly different approach from that used with younger children, who are more in need of a guiding figure. One element that proved relevant for teenagers in Italy has been the space where sessions take place. When at first sessions were conducted in spaces mostly surrounded by grey buildings, participants would lose interest and leave to go for walks towards green spaces. This prompted facilitators to dedicate greater attention to the preparation of the space, for example by having participants paint the ground, and soon they started to be more enthusiastic about joining TeamUp.

### Adaptation: Variations on a theme

**Table 1: Overview of adaptation of TeamUp in five countries**

	Netherlands <sup>3</sup>	Uganda	Colombia	Palestine	Italy
Year started	2015	2017	2019	2019	2020
Target age groups	6–11; 12–17	3–17	7–12; 13–17	Not known	14–16
Number of suggested sessions per group	Ongoing	Ongoing	10	12	9
Session frequency	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly	Twice weekly (CBOs) or weekly (schools)	Weekly
Max. group size to facilitator ratio	25/3–4	60/3	25/2	25/2	12/3
Facilitator type	Volunteers and teachers in schools	Teachers; volunteers from community	Community members	Psychologists, teachers or other university graduates; community members	SOS staff
Location	Centres for asylum seekers and schools	Child-friendly spaces; schools	Temporary learning spaces	CBOs; schools	Schools

## Commonalities

From the illustration of how the programme is rolled out in different countries it is possible to identify the aspects that remain constant despite the differences in contexts:

- **Training of facilitators:** All facilitators receive the same training based on the training manual. These facilitators are taught by trainers who have themselves been trained by master trainers from the Global Expertise Centre. These local trainers are charged with ensuring quality in training delivery so that the programme is delivered in a similar way globally and that the core TeamUp's core methodology is consistently addressed in training and mentoring sessions.
- **Three-part structure:** Each session follows the same structure, composed of warming-up, middle and closure. Participants from all countries have a similar experience and, within the same country, if they were to attend TeamUp in a different location from the one they are used to, they would still recognize the structure and benefit from the stability and predictability offered.
- **Gamebook:** The gamebook, once translated to the relevant language, is used as starting point by facilitators in every country. Sessions globally are supported by eight psychosocial themes supporting the well-being of children.
- **Safeguarding:** Sessions are used everywhere to identify children who need further follow-up and all TeamUp implementers have a referral protocol in place to ensure that children receive the support they need.

## Differences

Observing that the TeamUp intervention does not happen in the same way everywhere can be a useful reminder of the need to adapt to the context. It is possible to identify a series of important elements that vary by country or even by individual locations:

- **Location:** TeamUp is implemented with refugees and should therefore be shaped around the structures that are in place in the host country. So while in the Netherlands and Colombia it relies on centres that temporarily welcome refugees before they move on

to more permanent accommodation, in Uganda, it also takes place in refugee camps where some of the participants experience relative stability. Along similar lines, and based on the structures in place, TeamUp might be implemented in schools as in Uganda, community-based spaces as in Palestine, or in other types of spaces.

- **Facilitators:** The organizational setting in which the programme is implemented, to some extent, determines who the facilitators are:
  - » When the TeamUp relies on schools, at least one of the facilitators is typically a teacher.
  - » When the intervention takes place in community spaces it is more likely that facilitators are community members themselves, as in Uganda and Colombia.
  - » In the Netherlands, the programme relies mostly on volunteers who have no relations with the refugee centres, but reside in nearby communities.
- **Turnover and organization of sessions into sets:** How long children reside in the location determines how regularly and for what duration they can attend TeamUp. In Colombia there is a high turnover and children on average attend seven sessions, motivating the decision of the country team to organize the sessions in a limited cycle of sessions that can be repeated. In Uganda, children move frequently between settlements, but since TeamUp is implemented on an ongoing weekly basis they will find sessions to attend most of the time, and possibly attend more than once a week in other locations.
- **Group size:** Programme teams in each country set guidelines on the number of children and facilitators per group according to the minimum standards of implementation. One aspect that inevitably affects this decision is demand. In Uganda, with such large classes, it was decided to allow more participants per group than in any other country. On the other hand, in the Netherlands and Italy, for example, each location has a smaller number of participants and therefore groups are smaller.

- **Age groups:** Every country team highlighted the importance of dividing children into age groups so to conduct age-appropriate activities. However, this might again depend on the demand. In Colombia, for example, to remain faithful to the notion that everyone is welcome for TeamUp, facilitators welcome children as young as 3.
- **Activities:** Lastly, and possibly most importantly, each country, each location and even each group will modify activities to make them more familiar and relatable for participants. As well as the games and routines listed on the gamebook, children and facilitators can add local games, songs and dances. When children from different tribes or ethnicities play together, they sometimes share cultural songs and games. Depending on the various cultural contexts and settings, activities may be adapted or facilitated differently. For example, one facilitator working in Europe observed that children are quite familiar with the concept of stretching their bodies, so during the warm-up part, facilitators say the name of the exercise and participants will do it. On the other hand, in Uganda, there is more work using images so, to encourage children to stretch up their arms, facilitators may ask children to pretend they are trees, and their arms are branches which need to reach high up.

<sup>1</sup> Please see TeamUp Netherlands case study (Annex 1.5) for more details on the theory of change, assumptions and methodology.

<sup>2</sup> These villages offer homes, carers, education and healthcare in self-contained villages to children who have no one to care for them. There are 559 villages in 126 countries, supporting 70,000 children. See: <<https://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/how-we-help/>>, accessed 5 May 2021.

<sup>3</sup> See the TeamUp Netherlands case study for more details on the set up of the programme.



# for every child, answers

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