

# The Letter

No. 133 • JANUARY 2026



# Asmae Association Sœur Emmanuelle



# PROTECTING CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CONFLICT AND EXCLUSION



# EDITORIAL



**By 2025, more than one in six children will be living in conflict zones.** Behind these figures are the faces and the voices of children growing up in fear, deprived of an education, care or protection. In a world beset by crises and declining public funding, international solidarity policies are running out of steam. Yet needs have never been greater. Humanitarian crises are continuing, inequalities are worsening, and children's rights are regressing in many parts of the world.

It's in this demanding context that **Asmae is pursuing its mission: to protect children, support families and strengthen the organisations that work with them.** More than ever before, action is needed where children are most at risk, but also where they still have a chance. **The PEACE programme fully embodies this spirit and approach: an ambitious, multi-country programme, rooted in local realities, which combines prevention, support and community empowerment.**

In Burkina Faso, an abandoned baby was rescued and cared for within hours thanks to the coordination between our partners and the local authorities. In Egypt, teachers trained in more caring teaching methods speak of the positive changes they've seen in their pupils. In Ivory Coast, refugee children have been able to go to school for the first time. In the Philippines, in the aftermath of Typhoon Kristine, children's committees have met weekly to talk, play and rebuild their confidence.

These often fairly modest gestures tell the story of what we stand for: protection that isn't improvised, but built over time, with and for communities. Through PEACE, Asmae is helping to create fairer, safer and more sustainable environments for every child. This is also the purpose of our work in all the countries where we operate, strengthening our collective capacities to protect and support children, even in the most fragile of contexts.

**In a world where the temptation to withdraw is gaining ground, we're choosing to act, to connect and to hope.**

Thank you to all of you who make this work possible every day.

**Adrien Sallez,**  
Director General



**For 44 years now, Asmae has been continuing the work of its founder and staying true to her principles**

## OUR VISION

*"A fair world where children are guaranteed the opportunity to live and grow up in dignity within their families and their environments to become free men and women who can contribute to society".*

## OUR MISSIONS

- **To promote child development** through a global approach. To achieve this, Asmae also works to support families with their environments firmly in mind.
- **To strengthen the capacity of local stakeholders** working in the field of child development, improving synergies between them and maximising their social impact.
- **To champion children's causes** by raising awareness and speaking out.
- **To experiment, expand and share information.**

## ASMAE IN FIGURES

- **62,550 beneficiaries**
- **10 countries** of intervention
- **47 partner** associations
- **180 professionals** worldwide
- **31 volunteers**
- **15,565 donors**
- **44 years of experience** in the field

Quarterly newsletter published by Asmae – Association Sœur Emmanuelle; Siret (company registration number): 347 403 156 000 40; APE: 8899B; Address: Immeuble le Méliès, 259-261 rue de Paris, 93100 Montreuil; Tel: +33 (0)1 70 32 02 50; Fax: +33 (0)1 55 86 32 81; Website: [www.asmae.fr](http://www.asmae.fr); Email: [infos@asmae.fr](mailto:infos@asmae.fr); Chair of the Association and Editor: Catherine Larrieu; Editorial board: Adrien Sallez, Lizzanne Danan, Janna Chouchane, Pierre Villelongue Hugo Sanchez, Anne-Charlotte Cheron; Photos: © Asmae, © Léa Thomas; Layout: Stéphanie Poche; Printing: Imprimerie Vincent, January 2026; Copyright: January 2026, ISSN 1254-2865



10-31-1087 / Certifié PEFC

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## AT THE HEART OF THE ACTION

# GIVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING ON THE STREETS THEIR VOICES BACK: AN INTERVIEW WITH ASMAE PHILIPPINES PROJECT MANAGER ISAAC LINCO

*Since 2018, Asmae and its local partners have been working to sustainably transform the lives of children and young people living on the streets in Manila. To mark the launch of the third phase of the Children in Street Situations project, we heard from Project Manager Isaac Linco, who reported on some of the most significant progress to date and the methods that are making a real difference.*

**Isaac, what practical changes have you seen in the lives of the children and young people you work with?**

Even though I only joined the project in 2024, the testimonies and evaluations speak for themselves. Many young people have been able to return to school, while others have taken part in collective action to defend their rights. What strikes me most is the way in which young people are asserting themselves, expressing themselves and getting organised.

**How are the young people's personal aspirations taken into account on their path to employment?**

We realised that to really change things, we had to start with their dreams, not just their needs. So we researched the local jobs market, then met with each young person to understand their story, their desires and their talents. Some want to set up their own businesses, others are looking for paid work. We support them whichever path they take with training, workshops and, soon, partnerships with companies to ease their transition into the world of work.

**What kind of skills do they develop over the course of the project?**

They gain self-confidence and learn to make themselves heard, alongside cooperation and how to lead workshops for other young people. Some even become leaders in their communities. It's impressive when you see the extent to which they can transform their lives when given the means to act. And for those preparing for work or to start their own businesses, we help them acquire the right attitudes, structure their ideas and look ahead to their professional futures.

**How do you explain the strong, trusting relationship between the project's participants and teams?**

Our teams and those of our partners (Bahay Tuluyan, Childhope Philippines and Kanlungan sa Erma Ministry) have been working on the ground for a long time now. They're made up of social workers trained in respectful and caring approaches. They go out and meet young people, listen to them and support them in the long term. Some even call them "Nanay" or "Tatay" (mum or dad), which just goes to show the strength of the bonds they've forged. For my part, even though I'm not in daily contact with them, I've been



Isaac Linco, Children in Street Situations (CISS) Project Manager

lucky enough to take part in lots of activities. Some of the young people even called me "Tatay". It's a sign that there's trust there. Another explanation lies in the continuity that the programme brings with such long-term support. Some of the children we were working with back in 2018 have now grown up and their needs have changed, for example, as they look for work. So we're constantly adapting to meet their current needs.

**What do you think makes our partners' approaches so effective?**

Our partners have in-depth knowledge of the realities faced by children living on the streets of Manila. Their experience – even before the project began – has been invaluable. Asmae has been able to draw on this expertise to enrich our approach with a vision centred on children's rights that integrates educational, protective, economic and participatory dimensions.

**What do you see as the project's greatest achievement?**

So far, 265 children and young people have taken part in the project. That's a real success. We've also helped change practices. We've moved from a logic of support to an approach that recognises young people as subjects of rights, capable of deciding, acting and transforming their lives for themselves. I hope to be able to share this model more widely in the years to come.

**Financial partner: French Development Agency.**



## SPECIAL REPORT PEACE

One of the families involved in the PEACE project in Ivory Coast

### FROM MARGINALISATION TO HOPE: FOUR INSPIRING JOURNEYS

**All over the world, children are paying the price of conflict and exclusion. Deprived of security, schooling and healthcare, their rights are trampled underfoot. Issa, Ali, Adama and Mayumi are four such children. Different backgrounds, but the same reality: violence, insecurity and injustice. Thanks to the PEACE (Protecting Children Affected by Conflicts or Exclusion) programme, they've regained their rights, their place and their voice.**

#### Burkina Faso: identifying vulnerable children and meeting their basic needs



In northern Burkina Faso, Zenabou and her son, Issa, are living with the silent repercussions of forced displacement. Originally from a village now deserted for security reasons, they fled, leaving behind everything they knew and everything they had. Having arrived in the city, Issa found respite in the early-learning workshops organised by the AJBF Association, supported by Asmae. He attended regularly, until one day his absence raised concerns among group leaders.

Worried, they went to his house. There, they discovered that Issa has been rushed to hospital and needed an operation. His mother was alone and destitute. His father – who had gone to work on a gold-mining site to provide for his family – was unable to afford the medical bills. Faced with an impossible situation, AJBF turned to Asmae. Thanks to an emergency fund, the teams were able to quickly release financial aid. His operation could go ahead. **"My child's life was saved"**, says Zenabou.

This wasn't just about providing medical support, it was recognition of the right to health, even in extreme poverty. Against this backdrop of forced displacement, the PEACE programme is working to ensure that children aren't forgotten. The programme identifies, supports and protects them. Sometimes, it even saves their lives.

#### Egypt: improved understanding for better protection, a positive parenting course



For Fatma, a mother of three from Cairo, every day was a struggle. Ali, her eldest son aged ten, couldn't sit still or concentrate and resisted all forms of authority. "I thought he was just being disobedient", she confides. At the end of her tether, she sometimes resorted to hitting him. Until the day she attended an awareness session on positive parenting, organised by one of Asmae's partner associations. There, she heard about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a condition that affects attention and behaviour. She realised her son wasn't doing it on purpose.

With the help of a psychotherapist, she learnt to set boundaries without resorting to violence, give time-outs and reward effort. **"I've taken an important step forward. I no longer hit any of my three children"**, she adds proudly. Ali's father was sceptical at first, but eventually came round to the idea. He met with the therapist, opened up and adapted. Ali has also begun to make progress and gain confidence. He changed schools and flourished. **"My son is very happy in his new school"**, says Fatma. At home, the hitting has stopped and the shouting has been replaced by talking.

**"Now, when a situation arises, my son tells me, 'you understand how I feel, mum'. And I reply, 'yes, I understand'. Honestly, those words mean so much to him. I never realised quite how much"**. Thanks to the PEACE programme, Fatma has not only learnt how to protect her son, but also how to listen to him, understand him and support him. And the whole family has been rebuilt around this new awareness.

#### Ivory Coast: returning to school after exile



When Adama and his family arrived in Ivory Coast, school wasn't an option. **"My parents couldn't afford the fees"**, he explains. Like many displaced children, he had to give up his education to work. **"We didn't go to school. I was very sad because my brothers and I couldn't go"**.

The PEACE programme helped turn things around. Thanks to the support of Asmae and its partners, Adama and his brothers have been able to get back into school. The

formalities have been simplified, teachers have been made more aware and families have been supported. **"Thanks to Asmae's help, we no longer need to look after people's cattle all day. We're lucky to go to school"**.

This return to education is more than just a change of pace, it's a reclaiming. Reclaiming a fundamental right and a future. PEACE is working to ensure that education is no longer a privilege, but a matter of course.

#### Philippines: a voice from the margins



Mayumi is 18. She lives in a Sama-Bajau community, one of the most marginalised indigenous groups in the Philippines. To help her mother who sells cassava at the markets, Mayumi wanders the streets selling her produce. **"What my mother earns is just for the day. It's not enough for the next day"**, she explains. Income is precarious and dependent on the vagaries of the weather. "When it rains, we can't sell and we can't go to school. We've nothing to eat".

The PEACE programme represents a window of hope in this difficult daily routine. Mayumi discovered the Peace Camps, which offer leadership training and spaces for awareness-raising and self-expression. She's since become a representative on the Philippine National Children's Council and has spoken out on the issues facing her community, including early marriage, teenage pregnancy and access to education. **"I'm happy because I've realised that, as a young person, I can make my own decisions"**. She refused an arranged marriage in the hope of continuing her studies.

She now runs awareness-raising workshops for the children in her neighbourhood. **"They said to me, 'you're a leader now!'"**. She cleans the streets, organises activities and inspires others. **"I now feel like I can achieve my dream of becoming a teacher"**. Thanks to the PEACE programme, Mayumi is no longer just a young girl from a stigmatised community. She has become an agent of change. A voice from the margins that is finally being heard.

**These stories are nothing extraordinary. They embody what PEACE makes possible, every day, in complex and shifting contexts. Because while exclusion knows no borders, neither do protection nor education. And wherever children are at risk, PEACE works to help them regain their place, their rights and their voice so that, tomorrow, no child is left behind.**

Financial partners: Soeur Emmanuelle Belgium, Paprec, 1001 Repas, the Technip Energies Endowment Fund and John Cockerill.

## EGYPT: FROM TRAINING TO EMPLOYMENT, YOUNG EGYPTIANS ON THE MOVE

Three years on from the launch of the Youth Inclusive Empowerment Project (YIEP) and the smiles speak for themselves. In Cairo's training centres, many young people who once doubted their futures now have a job, an income or a business plan. Led by Asmae with its Egyptian partners and supported by the European Union, YIEP has helped 537 young people, including 125 with disabilities, on the road to independence and employment.

### Learning, daring, moving forward

When they first joined the programme, most had never had the opportunity to be trained or even meet an employer. Some had dropped out of school, while others believed their disabilities would make any career plans impossible. Yet in just three years, their paths have changed dramatically.

Asmae's partner centres SETI-Caritas and EACD offer tailor-made support, including training in trades like sewing, mechanics, cookery and office skills, as well as workshops on how to put together a CV, talk about yourself and prepare for an interview. For many, it's the first time they've experienced a caring professional environment, where every step forward is encouraged and valued.

Step by step, their confidence returns. The young people dare to speak up, present their ideas and contemplate their professional futures. And it's not just limited to skill building. It transforms the way they see themselves and gives new meaning to their journey through life. They're not just beneficiaries; they're genuine stakeholders in their success.

### From the training centre to the real world

To increase the chances of finding work, YIEP has focused on learning in real-life conditions. Participants in the programme have joined partner companies, where they've been given on-the-job training, supported by mentors who are attuned to their needs. This experience has given them a real insight into the world of work, helping them understand its demands and find their place.

Job fairs have also been part of the project, bringing together young people and companies around practical workshops and career presentations. These often highly valuable opportunities to network have allowed several participants to land an internship, a first job or even to present their business plans.

Other young people have chosen to set up their own businesses, with the support of the Asmae teams and local partners.

### Changing views

The companies currently involved in the programme have praised the motivation, seriousness and desire to learn demonstrated by those they've recruited. Some have even decided to extend the experience beyond the project itself, believing that diversity is an asset and a driver of collective efficiency. By welcoming people trained as part of the YIEP project, many employers have discovered a pool of talent previously unknown to them and changed the way they look at disability.

For our partner associations, these three years also mark an important milestone. Local teams have strengthened their support practices, forged lasting links with economic stakeholders and helped to build a more solid and open employment ecosystem. The relationships built between civil society, businesses and public institutions now form a common basis for future initiatives.

### Ongoing momentum

Today, the effects of the project are still being felt. Some of the young people are in work, while others are continuing their apprenticeships or growing their businesses. Our partners are building on this experience to take workplace inclusion even further and expanding local collaboration.

In Egypt, YIEP has shown that with confidence, skills and the right support, every young person can break down barriers and forge their own path ahead. Beyond the figures alone, the most important thing is that a generation is moving forward, aware of its worth and determined to build its future.

**Financial partners: European Union and Paprec.**



A young man with a disability taking part in vocational training.

## CHILDHOOD IN A STATE OF EMERGENCY: WHEN THE WAR IN LEBANON DISRUPTS EARLY YEARS LEARNING

Since 2019, Lebanon has faced a succession of crises that have hit children hard. With the SPECIAL (Support for an Inclusive Early Childhood) project, Asmae is committed to guaranteeing access to quality early childhood services for 1,200 children in the Tyre region. The armed conflict has upset this dynamic, worsening an already critical situation. The Asmae team in Lebanon has redesigned its approach to ensure it remains as close as possible to the needs and priorities of local families.



The mobile unit goes directly to those living in vulnerable situations.

disappeared, quite the contrary. The economic insecurity has been compounded by the physical and psychological suffering caused by the war.

### A mobile unit to help reach children in distress

Faced with this ever changing context, several avenues were explored, adjusted and then validated. The resumption of activities eventually took the form of a mobile unit, responsible for providing psychosocial support, running parenting workshops and distributing essential kits. With infrastructure damaged and movement restricted for the most vulnerable, the mobile unit was key to reaching them directly. Families were able to prepare for the end of the crisis and returning to life as they knew it before the war. Thanks to the commitment of our local teams, it was a space for listening, expressing needs and providing a rapid response.

In a Lebanon marked by chronic instability, children remain the silent victims of crises that are beyond their control. The SPECIAL project shows that it's possible to take practical steps to safeguard their right to a dignified and balanced childhood. Born out of necessity, the mobile unit embodies our desire to adapt and stay close to the people we work with. But over and above any immediate measures, we need to build a sustainable response so that every child – whether Lebanese or refugee – can grow up, learn and dream even in the most fragile of circumstances.

**Financial partners: French Development Agency, the Jean-François Peterbroeck Foundation and the Mustela Foundation.**

### Tyre: early childhood on less than \$4 a day

The SPECIAL project was launched in 2022 against a backdrop of economic and financial crisis in which children are – as is often the case – the most vulnerable. UNESCO estimates that 31% of Lebanese children don't attend pre-school, a figure that rises to 85% among refugee children. These are alarming figures, given the significance of this period in their cognitive, language, social and emotional development.

In response to this need, Asmae began working with the Lebanese Ministry of Education to come up with a project designed to improve children's overall development. In the Tyre region, where over 40% of the population lives on less than \$4 a day, a thousand children and just as many parents have been able to take part in the project. Our efforts relied on the expertise of our local partner, the Imam Sadr Foundation, which has over 60 years of experience in the field of education.

### Training, raising awareness, protecting: a collective effort for the youngest in society

The project's approach was to mobilise all those involved in early childhood. Training has been offered to strengthen their skills, particularly when it comes to identifying and protecting children at risk, but also in terms of inclusion. Communities have also been made aware of the importance of pre-school education.

The initial results were promising, until the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah brought the project to an abrupt halt for several weeks. Partner schools were temporarily shut and the uncertain security situation brought activities to a standstill. Yet the needs of the children and their families haven't

## BRIDGE: WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE BUILD THEIR OWN FUTURES

On the streets of Beirut and in the villages of the Beqaa Valley, a generation of young people faced with instability, unemployment and job insecurity – but who refuse to give in to discouragement – is rising up. Supported by

### **BRIDGE is much more than a project, it's an invitation to build the future**

Through an innovative approach combining vocational training, entrepreneurship, digital skills and community leadership, 150 vulnerable young people – Lebanese and Syrian refugees – will chart their own paths towards independence. They'll learn how to code, grow crops sustainably, produce solar energy and start their own businesses. But, above all, they'll learn to believe in themselves, to become agents of change, capable of transforming their everyday lives and those of their community.

### **BRIDGE builds on their potential, creativity and resilience**

It offers them tools, knowledge and mentors, and gives them a voice: 30 young men and women will be trained in mediation, advocacy and citizen mobilisation. Together, they'll run campaigns, set up committees and engage in dialogue when tensions divide. Supported by the Citi Foundation, the programme isn't just a response to an emergency, it sows the seeds of a sustainable future, while also building the capacities of local organisations so that the impacts are felt well beyond the two years of implementation alone. BRIDGE brings together dreams and reality, uniting communities and building a Lebanon where young people are no longer on the sidelines, but the makers of their own futures.

## BRIGITTE: A YEAR OF HAND-WOVEN COMMITMENT

**In western France, Brigitte Bardot is known for more than just being the namesake of a celebrity. In her own special way, she embodies a discreet but profoundly effective form of activism. A dedicated volunteer with Asmae, she's punctuated the past year with three outstanding initiatives, all driven by her creative energy and sense of giving.**

### **May: kimonos from the heart**

To mark Mother's Day (and subsequently Father's Day), Brigitte decided to run up some handmade kimonos. These original creations were designed for the stand on 15 May, all in aid of Asmae. A great way of combining business with pleasure and picking up some meaningful gifts.

### **August: sunshine and solidarity**

Brigitte ran a very successful stand at the Charity Forum on 25 August 2025. The result? She raised €350, all of which went to Asmae. Her remarkable generosity has already led to some new projects: her sewing machine has made another appearance to prepare for the Christmas markets, staying true to her commitment.

### **November: a heartfelt voice on the airwaves**

On 30 November, Brigitte spoke to *France Bleu Armorique* radio station about her Christmas crafts. It was a great opportunity to spread the word just before she was due to take part in the World and Charity Christmas Market in Betton, near Rennes. Over the airwaves, she was able to convey all her enthusiasm and commitment.

**Three key events, all driven by the same conviction: that every gesture, every creation and every word can contribute to a more caring world. Thank you, Brigitte, for a year woven with kindness.**



Brigitte Bardot at a Christmas fair in aid of Asmae.



### **Asmae Association Sœur Emmanuelle**

Asmae is an association formed under the French law of 1901. Recognised to be of public interest and authorised to receive bequests, donations and gifts.



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