

# Annual Report 2022



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Cover illustration: One of Wadi's newly installed cages to collect bottles at a school in Erbil

# Contents

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<b><i>Overview 2022</i></b>	4
<b><i>Stop FGM</i></b>	
Combating and Living with FGM	6
<b><i>Environment</i></b>	
Environment Protection – Keep Kurdistan Green	12
Community-Based Plastic Recycling	16
<b><i>No to Violence</i></b>	
No to Violence! Campaign	20
Mobile Playgrounds	24
Women's Rights Awareness and Economic Independence	27
<b><i>Refugees</i></b>	
Support for Yazidi ISIS Survivors	29
Support for Refugees in Lesbos/Greece	32
Support for Ukraine Relief Infrastructure in Poland	37
<b><i>Independent Media</i></b>	
Community Radio Denge Nwe	49
KirkukNow - Independent News Outlet	52
<b><i>Articles and Media Coverage</i></b>	58

## Overview 2022

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After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Polish local organizations asked us for advice. So on short notice we traveled to the south of Poland, where hundreds of thousands of new arrivals, especially women and children, had to be managed quickly and safely. We were able to assist the dedicated helpers on the ground with advice and some financial support, working with them to increase the safety of the refugees and improve operations. As with all Wadi projects, the focus here was on strengthening self-organization. This worked very well after some time, hence by summer our presence was no longer required and we were able to refocus on our actual area of responsibility, the Middle East.

In northern Iraq, we were able to push ahead with the environmental campaign and, for the first time, create new products from old plastic bottles in the newly built recycling center. Colorful self-made collection containers were placed at schools, government offices and public places. People enjoy using them. The cages convey a clear message: There is a problem. Something has to change. We can change something.

In the schools, we talk to the children about violence, meaning not only the physical and psychological violence that is so widespread, starting from parents and family, teachers and peers, but also the brutal living conditions caused by climate change, pollution and armed conflicts. The need is tremendous. Many more schools want to be included because they have heard of the positive impact on the school atmosphere and even on the students' school marks.

On the Greek island of Lesbos, we have continued to support local refugee initiatives such as the "Moria White Helmets", who self-organize inside and outside the camp to take care of a wide range of tasks - from children's and adult education to garbage collection - defending their dignity and self-respect. They have expanded their activities, opened a barber shop and established a basic recycling infrastructure for plastic bottles as part of the newly-launched *Green Mytilene* campaign.

# ***WADI'S ACTIVITIES IN NUMBERS***

## **Support for Yazidi ISIS Survivors**

**(54,191** beneficiaries

**91** courses for Yazidi orphans, **1900** participants)

## **Combating FGM, Living with FGM, Women's Rights**

**259** FGM awareness seminars with **1741** participants

**95** *Living with FGM* trainings with **666** participants

**76** participants in ToT trainings

**11** media reports: **7** articles in Kurdish online publications, **4** TV reports

**119** women's rights seminars with **1,045** participants

Women's rights seminars for **401** female students in **29** schools

**21** sewing training courses for a total of **495** women

## **Playbus Activities**

**66** villages visited, **1,467** children participated

## **Environment Protection – Keep Kurdistan Green**

**149** seminars, **4649** students, parents and village dwellers participated

**8** media coverages: **4** articles in Kurdish online publications, **4** TV reports



## Combating and Living with FGM

**This project started in December 2020. It was set up to target 300 villages with continuing high rates of FGM (Erbil and Ranya areas) through women led mobile teams. The teams work with local communities through dialogue, education, and engagement. The goal is to lower/end the practice of FGM. The Living with FGM part is implemented in areas where FGM is not practiced anymore. It helps affected women to cope with the late effects of the mutilation and improve their lives and partnerships.**

In the areas where FGM is still practiced at high rates, Wadi goal was to engage in a holistic strategy to change the culture surrounding the practice of FGM. In Wadi's 30 years of experience a 'one size fits all' approach is not helpful when dealing with such a topic as different groups have different understanding and attachments to the practice. Over the first twelve months of the project Wadi saw high engagement and participation in both Erbil and Rania. Overall the topics of women's rights, domestic violence, forced marriage and other GBV issues were repeatedly and consistently addressed. Men were encourage to participate in specialized seminars, and although numbers were small they were consistent, showing that there is a space for growth.

In this new second phase of the project Wadi aimed to expand the living with FGM project best practices and lessons learned and also focus on knowledge transfer to local actors in the community . By continuing to establish and refine tools for women and men living with FGM in villages that have rejected the practice of FGM. The living with FGM sessions were held regularly, and participants generally reported feeling better for attending them. Although the sensitivity of the topic did ruffle some feathers, the overall reception was positive and continue to show the importance of this groundbreaking project.



*Our most recent FGM awareness brochures*

## FGM PREVENTION & AWARENESS PROGRAM

Area of focus Rania & Erbil

### Summary of awareness seminars:

The awareness seminars took place in Erbil and Rania where FGM continues to be practiced and covered a wide range of topics over the twelve month period, with the main topics being the misinformation that continues to exist around FGM, domestic violence, forced marriage, child marriage, and the provisions of Law no.8 Combating Domestic Violence, and their implications. A total of **259** trainings was offered, with **1559** women and **182** men participating.

Our teams approach was to be non-accusatory and evidence based while sharing the longterm negative consequences of FGM as part of the prevention program. The teams also discussed the psychological harm that many women suffer from and the trauma they re-live when they remember being mutilated. This was often an entry point for discussions with women, and many shared their experiences and stories.

After reflecting on their experiences or experiences of women they know, the teams talk about FGM into the larger context of violence against women and girls. The idea that FGM is a deep form of domestic and sexual violence against girls and not a requirement of religion is a big part of connecting with participants on why this practice needs to end.



There are so many stereotypes that are culturally associated with FGM that it really is important to engage with each one and discuss it. Some of the most common arguments that persist in favor of the practice are that women who are un-mutilated are 'unclean, unattractive and improper' there were many variations in the details of the arguments but those were the uniting themes.

Women also expressed fears that no one would marry their daughters if they were not mutilated, but on the other side of the same coin, many other women who were mutilated expressed fears that their husbands would get second wives who were not mutilated as they suffered from sexual issues due to their mutilation.

Issues that were also very important to participants included sexual harassment, suicide, and forced marriage. These topics really cemented the amount of violence that continues to dominate relationships in the area, and the importance of addressing all of them in a holistic manner. The ongoing training and capacity building of the teams over the past two years and

through this new phase of the program have been essential to boosting their confidence and ability to handle these highly complex situations.

These discussions continue to show the complexity of the issue, and the importance of addressing all GBV of which FGM is one form. The recurring themes of misinformation and fears were used as continuing discussion points by the teams over the course of the twelve months of the project. They also used films, documentaries and interviews to explain why these stereotypes were not true. In the second half of the project Dr Chra a psychologist and activist and expert on family affairs Omed Anwar joined the teams and were able to provide the participants with detailed medical information about women's bodies, how they work, and to answer these questions from a medical perspective.



#### **Awareness seminars for Men:**

Seminars for men were held once a month in both Erbil and Ranya, this was a new experience for the teams especially in the villages where these kinds of seminars are very new. The topics covered by the teams were the general explanation of Law No.8 which covers domestic violence, violence against children and bans the practice of FGM. In general the teams reported that most men were surprisingly receptive to the topics and the idea of seminars in general.

They often expressed that as men they also were concerned and affected by these topics, and were glad to have a forum to discuss them in. There were a lot of different attitudes towards family violence held by the men that participated in the seminars, with many not seeing many violent acts as 'violence' but rather as 'educating' or 'correcting'. The participation of men remained small, but as a first step the teams were encouraged that they were interested in participating at all. This experience brought up the fact that our teams are all women, which is an advantage when talking to women about such a sensitive topic as FGM but maybe not the best approach when talking to men. On that note there were suggestions of perhaps training male team members in the future.

The teams felt that they needed different training to lead discussions into more depth with men as they are trained in leading seminars with women.

### **Awareness materials and online tools:**

The twelve month period saw a focus on collecting questions from participants to begin compiling a FAQ of questions about FGM. The questions are currently being reviewed and some of them were presented by our teams as part of the TOT training with Dr Negin (OBGYN). Some of the responses have been turned into short video clips that can be shown to participants when a specific question is asked.

We also printed and distributed awareness materials, including a comprehensive booklet on the campaign to end FGM in Kurdistan, the booklet goes into depth and detail on the issues, struggles and successes of the ongoing work to end the practice. The creation of online video materials has faced some issues with potential experts being initially agreeing to appear, but later changing their minds and not being willing to have so much potential exposure. As we plan the next phase of the project we are reviewing how best to approach this unexpected difficulty.



### **Awareness seminar for women & girls with specialist (gynecologist):**

As part of the awareness seminars a nurse specialized in women's health and maternity occasionally volunteered to provide medical information to participants. The participants were happy about these visits from a medical practitioner because they wanted to confirm that the information the FGM teams were presenting to them was medically accurate. Participants were also glad to have the ability to discuss other medical issues with the doctors such as menstrual problems and other women's health and general health issues. This has been an added value to the seminars, creating trust between the participants and the teams.

## LIVING WITH FGM PROGRAM

Area of focus Garmyan & Halabja

### The sessions:

In the 12 months of the project, **666** women participated. 'Living with FGM' project has taken many lessons learned from the pilot project supported by the Consulate of the Netherlands. The teams felt more empowered after their extensive training in 2021 and the ongoing training in 2022. The areas that the this phase of the project took place were Halabja and Garmyan in villages where FGM is no longer being practiced and with participants (mostly women) who have been attending Wadi FGM awareness programs and reached out about more help. It is and continues to be very important that this project not appear to condone FGM in any way or send the message that 'its not that bad if you mutilate your daughters because there are coping strategies'.

This project deals with very sensitive issues, and in order to continue to 'do no harm' as this project progresses it is very important to protect participants' anonymity and to focus on creating real safe spaces for participants. Therefore no pictures and no recordings were made as well as no social media posts about these activities, however notes and written reports were taken by our team members.

As the small intimate sessions began there were two clear areas of focus (1) the physical effects of FGM and how to manage them long term and (2) the emotional and mental effects of FGM on the self and on married life. The longterm physical effects could not be understated, participants shared their constant state of pain, inflammation and pain during sexual intercourse, as well as disinterest in sexual relations due to pain. The teams also discussed the history of FGM, psychological and physical impacts of FGM, the effects it has on sex life and child birth, the law against FGM, people who support FGM and participate in it on any level, the physical complications such as bleeding, infections, infertility in addition to STD's and HIV.



On the emotional and mental health effects women expressed a sense of hopelessness and also loneliness. Although there was at times criticism about talking so 'openly' about 'shameful' topics by some participants, most were relieved to have a space where they could finally safely unburden themselves. The deep rooted 'shame' of FGM and sex in general meant that the idea of discussing their needs with a husband was really difficult. Many women shared that they were taught to put themselves last, and asking or even thinking about pleasure for themselves was just not accepted. This way of thinking is part of the many layers of misogyny that affect the society of which FGM is but one part.

As the sessions moved forward women began to feel more comfortable and ready to learn about the tools and techniques on how one can verbalize their emotions and speak about their pain when they want, how to overcome fear and self soothe when needed.

### TOT Trainings for Teams

As part of the capacity building of team members and mutiplicators, the training seminars (mostly online for team members and other actors) continued with the goal of developing tools on living with FGM in terms of (1) Psychological effects (2) physical effects (3) emotional effects. The trainings are an essential part of the Living with FGM project as Wadi works to turn the experiences, lessons learned into best practices and to eventually provide a more standardized approach that would be useful for medical professionals, social workers, team members, ad counselors. Below is a summary of the training sessions. The trainings had a total of **76** participants.

### Network Building

Wadi continued to work on building the network both locally and internationally. The focus for the next phase of the project is to strengthen the ties with the medical community as we are planning on adding three more doctors to the training roster — a specialist in dealing with men as the teams pointed out the need for more specialized tools in their seminars with men.

The two experts are a psychologist and a physical specialist in FGM to provide different information about the tools and techniques that could be useful for participants in the living with FGM project.

*The project is supported by the Netherlands' Consulate General in Erbil and Roselo Foundation.*



## Environment Protection – Keep Kurdistan Green

***Keep Kurdistan Green*** - a two-year Wadi project promotes environmental education in schools in Kurdish northern Iraq. Main focus of the project is to get children and young people involved so that they express themselves and become active.

*Keep Kurdistan Green* engages directly with school students and teachers in Halabja, Garman, Ranya and Erbil through a combination of seminars and small projects that are student led. The different student groups are encouraged to network with one another, share ideas and work together. The student groups organise trash clean up, create green spaces at their schools and encourage entire communities to participate in more eco-friendly practices. Leaflets and other educational material are developed together. This project continues Wadi's vision of supporting people to work together creatively to solve their own problems, come together as citizens and take ownership of communal spaces, by providing both short term boosts and long term technical support on how to reach those goals.

*Keep Kurdistan Green* is taking place at 34 selected schools in the Kurdish region. Specially trained environmental teams visit these schools again and again in order to build up a

relationship of trust with the students and the teachers and parents, to ensure a lasting commitment on the part of all those involved. Continuity and reliability have proven time and again to be key to the success and sustainability of Wadi projects.

The project has an impact beyond the immediate circle of participants through social media and press coverage. It is a message of individual responsibility and collective action that is being conveyed: Each individual bears responsibility.

Conscious behavior in everyday life helps to improve nature and our immediate environment. And if we organize ourselves, we can multiply our forces and achieve amazing things.



*Berkot elementary school, Erbil*

### **Project outcomes after two years**

The project which ended in November was met with huge enthusiasm. Children were eager to talk about environmental issues, express their worries and their wishes for a better future in a total of 346 seminars across the Kurdish region, particularly in disadvantaged areas. A total of 10,131 children participated.

Apart from talking, there was a great desire to contribute to environment protection and actually do something practical. So there have been activities at all participating schools, ranging from decorating the school with plants and flower pots to collective rubbish collection in nearby areas. Most schools also engaged in planting trees and bushes on the school grounds, since most schools have much concrete and very little green.

A student environment group of 10- 20 committed students has been formed at each school. These groups took responsibility for watering and caretaking, together with the janitor and responsible teachers.

Many actions have been covered by local media, including TV.

On March 7, 2022, an environmental festival was held at Bektas School in Erbil, where the participating schools presented their environmental projects, performed plays and musical performances, and overall promoted more environmental awareness and activities. German Consul General Dr. Sven Mossler was present. He was very pleased about the initiative and impressed by the children's commitment.

The achieved project goal will be maintained and pursued beyond the end of the project. Several aspects contribute to this:

- 1) Trained teachers will continue to teach environmental protection topics using newly experienced participatory learning methods.
- 2) Children and young people have been sensitized individually, creatively and sustainably to nature conservation and environmental issues, which means that they will continue to introduce and pursue the issue in their families and communities.
- 3) The large media coverage (21 reports in Kurdish media) has helped to raise awareness of environmental issues among the population and has made the issue more prominent in public discourse
- 4) The groups formed will remain for the near future. However they may disintegrate after a few years because many teachers have not yet internalized the concept of student self-organization and will not promote it.



*July 18: Summer holiday activity: Gardening with school children in Shakal village, Sarqala district*

The particular effectiveness of the project resulted from the direct, lively interaction with the beneficiaries, outside of the otherwise practically exclusively practiced frontal teaching. This will apply beyond the end of the project, when the trained multipliers at the schools continue to introduce new generations to environmental topics in subsequent years, using the cooperative teaching methods learned in the project. A more open, less authoritarian teaching style has a positive effect on the school climate, improves performance and reduces the potential for violence.

Addressing environmental issues that matter locally and open up scope for action counteracts the often expressed feelings of powerlessness and has a positive impact on the sense of community in schools and communities. It was observed that the children and the parents involved carry the newly gained knowledge home to their families and into everyday life, where it spreads further.

There was a consistently positive response among the teaching staff, and they assured us that they would definitely continue to address environmental issues. We often heard requests for further teaching materials. We will respond to this request as best we can as part of our further environmental campaign.

The project had a clear impact. Many other schools were interested in the project and would have liked to be involved.

## **Background**

The focus of the “Green City Halabja” campaign which started in 2018 was the improvement of the green spaces and public parks, planting of trees and flowers, the recycling of trash and the end of plastic bag use.

Activists in Halabja worked to make their city the first “plastic bag free” city in Iraq, single use plastic bags were replaced completely by reusable tote bags made of cotton. Cotton bags were sewed and labelled with the logo of the campaign, then activists visited the marketplace and local shops of Halabja to distribute the bags among the people there. The goal was to encourage the residents of the city to use reusable bags instead of single use plastic ones for their daily purchasing.

The action joined an initiative which started in February 2019 to end plastic use in Halabja. What made it special, however, was the connection between two different topics: protection of the environment and an improved possibility of income for low-income women from Halabja or women refugees; as the main protagonists of this project were not only local activist, but also women refugees and IDPs – seeking protection in Halabja. After their arrival refugees, especially women, normally have trouble finding regular income, this project works to change that, by sewing, designing and selling the tote bags. This project is having a positive effect on the community; people in Halabja are seeing the benefits that come from working to protect the environment by planting trees and having green spaces. Replacing plastic bags with cotton ones has also been very positive for the city and for the women refugees who are starting to generate a steady income for themselves. Halabja would like to be a role model for other cities in the field of environment protection.

*The project is supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development ( BMZ ) and Roselo Foundation.*



## Community-Based Plastic Recycling

**In cooperation with ShredUp and NWE, Wadi has begun to establish a locally-engineered community-based plastic recycling infrastructure. A small-scale recycling centre in Halabja is already up and running. A second one - in cooperation with Rang and supported by the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - is being built in the southern town of Kifri. Collection bins have been installed at schools, public buildings, central locations, refugee camps. The bins and even the recycling machinery are produced locally, with local people and local tools.**

The project includes activities and awareness campaigns to preserve the environment and to explain the harm of plastic waste to water and climate. The goal of this project is to educate the public, raise awareness and reduce plastic waste and plastic consumption.

In Halabja, plastic waste is now collected and recycled to produce chairs, benches, flowerpots, toys and accessories. The same will soon be possible in Kifri. Ziba Ali Baram (65 years old), a service employee at Nowruz School in Kifri District, welcomed the project and said, “Every day I am busy cleaning my school environment from six in the morning until 12 in the afternoon, because the children here throw water and juice cans. Setting up these boxes and educating the children matters. It is very important to urge them to put the plastic waste inside the boxes designated for this.”



*Ultra-durable pottery from recycled HDPE*

Sarah Mohammed, a fifth-grade student at Nowruz School, where the launch of the project was announced during a special event, said, „They taught us not to throw away plastic bottles from now on and to put them in that box.“



*School class getting a tour*

On the 34th anniversary of the bombardment of Halabja with poison gas, various groups have joined forces with the city government to launch the Green City Halabja program, which is unprecedented in the region. On March 16, this campaign was unveiled to the public - as a new way of commemorating gas attacks, aimed primarily at preserving livelihoods for future generations: Responsibility towards the past also means, according to the message, working together for a better and livable future.

After the end of the official ceremonies that day, the residents of Halabja were invited to a press conference in the new Khakakars Park. This park, currently with one hundred mulberry trees, will soon be a flourishing green space planted with native species and will then also serve as a meeting place for seminars and cultural activities.

Despite the unusually cold and even snowy weather for the time of year, many residents of the city came to show their support for the campaign. Staff members of WADI's local partner organization NWE addressed the press with powerful and moving words, expressing the determination of the citizens of Halabja to secure a better future for their city. The park will not only serve educational and recreational purposes, but the planted trees will also commemorate the thousands who died in agony during the March 16 attacks.



*Recycling team Halabja*

After the campaign statement was read, the sixty or so environmentalists headed to the opening of the ShredUp recycling workshop, another important sub-project of the #GreenCity campaign. The goal of this plastic recycling project is to highlight the destruction of the ecosystem by plastic waste and how to combat it - namely, by publicly communicating the value of plastic as a raw material while establishing an efficient recycling system in the city that will significantly reduce the amounts of plastic and other potentially recyclable waste that end up in landfills. The team has set up small recycling facilities that can wash, shred, extrude and press plastic waste to make new, durable products.

Good relations have been established with many schools in the city, where environmental seminars are held regularly. In addition, locally produced collection bins for plastic waste are set up there. In return for the partnership, recycled plastic furniture will be donated to the schools to show the students directly what their "plastic waste" can be turned into. The recycling team cooperates not only with the schools, but also with the University of Halabja, various local businesses and civil society groups. There have already been several garbage collection events in nearby locations, and people in the area are very happy to be able to drop off their recyclable waste locally so that it can be used by the team or taken to a suitable company for recycling.

*This project is supported by Roselo Foundation and the Canadian Embassy in Iraq.*



## No to Violence! Campaign

**In 2022, the campaign's main focus shifted back from COVID-19 awareness to violence prevention and conflict resolution trainings. Violence is a vicious cycle, it only brings more violence. When a parent or teacher hits a child, that child may act out by hitting other children, and the cycle goes on. Breaking that cycle by ending all forms of physical violence is the first step in a process that then builds to develop other forms of conflict resolution, de-escalation, as well as training teachers and parents on new non-violent ways of providing authority and guidance for children.**

Violence is also omnipresent in war and crisis regions. It lives in people's memories and experiences and until it is addressed it continues to grow in families and schools.

In 2016 before we began the campaign we asked hundreds of children as part of our *Playbus* playground activities what were the main issues in their lives, and consistently the answers were about fear of being hit, bullied, yelled at by teachers or their parents, girls also report being mistreated because of their gender. We also spoke extensively with teachers, social workers, parents, school administrators to understand their perspectives, how we could help them break the cycle of violence and to understand many of the issues at play in their world.

### The Beginning

Wadi launched the 'No to Violence' campaign in 2017. The goal of the campaign is to stop violence against children in schools and at home, and to encourage non-violent conflict resolution and authority for teachers and parents.

This is a big task, as violence is such an engrained method of discipline, and is mostly seen as the only way. How do we change a culture of violence? The approach of the campaign is not accusatory, our teams do not take an adversarial stance with school staff or parents, but rather take a 'clean slate' approach where they explain that the past is done, and we focus on changing behaviour and approaches going forward. There is little to gain by guilting, shaming past behaviours, most of the adults who perpetrate violence towards children, be they teachers or parents, have themselves not known anything else. They did not have access to information or

tools on how to be a non-violent but effective teacher or parent. Therefore the first step is to accept that this is 'how it was', but going forward take an active commitment to no longer using violence and fear as the tool of discipline and learning.

The first year of the project (2017-2018) only one school participated, but in that year they saw a dramatic improvement in children's behaviour and grades. The success of this pilot school was extensively covered by local Kurdish media and is highlighted in this interview with the director of the school. The results in combination with Wadi pushing for awareness and bringing the subject into the larger societal debates was that in the years since the project has become a real success, and now in 2022, 17 schools have committed themselves to stop beating and abuse of children by teachers. They became 'Violence-free schools'



Other schools have registered to join the program. The teachers of participating schools all receive anti-violence training and extensive support. Parents are also included in non-violence and conflict resolution training sessions. In conversations and events with the children, they are encouraged to stand up for their rights, learn how to behave in the event of abuse, and where to report abuse.

Creating a space for non-violent resolution to become mainstream is a long term goal of this campaign. Our aim is that by continuing to make violence against children a 'hot button' topic on local media and on social media this pushes forward a conversation on a societal level, that helps really bring about larger societal change where this practice no longer becomes the accepted norm for raising or teaching children.

Looking back on our own experiences we know that huge societal shifts can happen quite quickly, and it is our goal that this generation can break the cycle of violence and come to a place where it is no longer seen as routine, acceptable and 'the only way'.

It is important to remember that these approaches are relatively new in western countries as well, and till now not always accepted. Many of us who are 'not so old' can still remember corporal punishment in school. Although attitudes towards violence against children vary around the globe, countries that have banned the practice have often also experienced rapid societal change regarding children's rights. For example, in Germany, the law banning corporal punishment in schools was not applied at a federal level until 1983, yet today it would be

unimaginable that a teacher would enforce their authority with violence. With some pressure and strong campaigning change can come quickly.

### The No to Violence campaign in Duhok

The situation in the camps for Yazidi displaced people and Syrian refugees in Northern Iraq remains dire. Many Yazidis will soon spend their 8th or 9th winter in a camp because their homelands are still combat zones. They have lost any hope for a soon return, and the gates to Europe are closed. Especially young people are desperate because they do not see any future perspective at all.



*Our six self - awareness teams each consisting of four volunteers from the camp are doing an amazing job in encouraging people to vaccinate. Since the start of the project the vaccination rate has increased a lot. The teams are visiting schools, tents and crowded areas to deliver the right information to the camp community with distribution of face masks and posters.*

However, some families have returned to Sinjar, although there is little infrastructure left, and despite the tense situation and ongoing clashes between different armed groups. Surrounded by violence and fear, they try to rebuild a life, against all odds.

Our Yazidi social worker team and local cooperation partners are currently operating in four camps close to Duhok. Already back in 2018, they identified considerable violence-related problems in the camps and started to tackle this issue. Today, they are raising awareness on domestic violence, promoting non-violent education and offering non-violent conflict resolution trainings for students at the camp schools.

The no-to-violence campaign in the camp schools benefitted more than 2,000 students, in addition to the teachers and families. The campaign was welcomed by teachers, students and parents alike because immediately everybody understood its relevance. Several schools reported significantly less violence and better grades among the students due to the trainings and seminars. The school atmosphere became more friendly and relaxed. Some schools declared themselves solemnly “violence-free”. The campaign became popular, even beyond the camps. School principals from other schools began asking for these trainings, some of them from Sinjar.



*Dec. 10: Duhok team working in Yazidi IDP camp schools which have declared themselves violence-free*

Schools in Sinjar face incredible challenges. Teachers do not get paid, teachers are threatened, children feel not safe, buildings are still damaged, essential basics like water, electricity and furniture are lacking. Teachers from Sinjar schools told us that due to the tensions and omnipresent violence in the area they are facing serious violence issues in their classes. Many students express willingness to quit school and join armed factions like the PKK, while teachers desperately try to convince them to continue their studies. Family violence, bullying and all kinds of violence among students are increasing as well.

*This project is supported by Roselo Foundation and Wadi private donations.*



## Mobile Playgrounds

**In 2022, the mobile playgrounds were able to increase their activities to the same level than before Corona. They offered their services at remote schools and kindergartens in the districts of Garmyan and Ranya.**

The busses are equipped with toys, climbing frames, writing and coloring pencils and a children's library, music instruments, drawing tools, games, sports equipment and other materials.

The Mobile Playgrounds are sent to the poor and remote villages in the hot plains of Garmyan and the isolated places in the mountains of Ranya. Villages with high percentage of refugee/IDP populations are also visited often.

The project aims to support the children through playing and learning, and is assisted by a team of educational supervisors. None of these villages have any existing facilities for children – be it playgrounds or parks or anything similar. For almost all the children in these regions the Play Bus is the only pure entertainment and fun they have in their hard daily life. Moreover, most of these villages don't have any professionals who have any pedagogical or medical skills.

## Activities of the Mobile Playground

Play Bus teams are offering a combination of activities. Some are focusing on play and fun entertainment for the children, while others emphasize education, health or the prevention of domestic violence.



*Dec. 09: Khanaqin, Balajo Elementary School*



*Dec. 17: Sarkapkan District*

The activities include a variety of lectures and awareness programmes for the children and their parents. Often parents are not aware of how to prepare healthy food for their children, therefore the teams are confronted with various forms of malnutrition. The teams developed a sustainable method to teach mothers how to prepare a proper diet including vitamins and minerals. In some cases parents lack the skill to see if their children suffer from diseases or sickness.

The teams are raising awareness about

- Healthy Diet
- Dental Hygiene
- Hygiene for body and clothes
- Food Hygiene
- Simple first aid assistance for minor injuries
- Non-violent child-raising

Many times the teams find themselves confronted with severe problems in the families and various forms of violence. Many parents have not yet heard of the idea that you can educate children in a positive and non-violent way. The teams offer advice to parents and make efforts to moderate in family conflicts. In 2022, the Mobile Playgrounds have visited **66** villages, some of them multiple times. Approximately **1,467** children benefited.

The 2022 play bus project aimed to create a connection between children and the environment. Games that use natural elements repair the broken relationship between children and nature.

And for this goal, we prepared a booklet full of environmental games to play with the children. We also developed environmental brochures and insect cards.

Apart from the environment, the play bus was also aimed at non-violent conflict resolution and creating a safe space for children to talk about their problems and violence they face at home and school.

Very often children approached team members and asked them for help and comfort with problems they were facing. This helps us to understand what the children need most in terms of awareness and education.



*Insect and animal cards*

## Challenges

Most parents don't let their children play or spent much time outside during school. The teachers also don't give much time for these types of activities. Even their own sports and art lectures are substituted with math or other lectures. So, during school months the play bus is not easy to operate, but we still managed to make some arrangements and cooperate with some of the schools.

At the start of the project, we were struggling to find a good way to transport the toys, as its large slides and swings which will not fit in a small car. However, we managed to obtain a caravan that we can attach to the car.

Climate change! From June to August the weather is extremely hot in Garmany, hot enough that no one can stand outside, let alone play. So for those months, the teams had to provide indoor spaces which required some additional advance planning, but could always be managed.

*This project is implemented by Wadi's partner ADWI and supported by Roselo Foundation and Wadi private donations.*

# Women's Rights Awareness and Economic Independence

**Wadi offered a number of awareness seminars for rural women and schoolgirls, as well as sewing training courses for women in the Iraqi Kurdish areas of Ranya, Halabja, Erbil and Garman.**

In rural areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, women and girls are still facing a variety of hardships, including domestic violence, discrimination, arbitrary restrictions and a lack of opportunities. The concept of women's rights is largely unknown. In some areas, female genital mutilation (FGM) is still prevalent.



*Sewing course in a community house in Garman*

Over the course of 2022, **1,045** women in **119** villages participated in the meetings on domestic violence, FGM and women's rights. **29** schools have been visited, **401** students participated in talks about issues they were concerned about, like hate speech, cybermobbing and social media in general.

Additionally, **21** two-week sewing training courses for a total of **495** women have been conducted. This year, considering the economic as well as the environment crisis, a special focus was put on upcycling of used clothes.

Many girls expressed disappointment with their situation. T. B., a girl age 13 from a village in Ranya area said: "it makes me really sad knowing parents treat their children differently based on their gender. Many girls in our village drop out of school when they reach grade eight because people keep saying something bad will happen to them on their way to school, but that is not the case with the boys. They can go to school whenever and wherever."

In contrast, some school principals are still holding very conservative views. M., principal of a high school in Erbil area, said, "It's an honor to have organizations like you, but some of the organizations have a negative impact on society. I hope you talk about appropriate and useful things, honestly I don't think it's a good idea to talk about the harms of early marriages because it's permitted by sharia law. In my opinion girls should get married as early as 12 years old. It's not about age. Some women are 30 and still can't run a family".



*Sewing course in Erbil*



*Selection of produced dresses in Garmyan*

During the meetings in the villages, women keep sharing horrific experiences about FGM. A.A. (67) said: "When I reached 6, I faced the most horrifying assault in my life, they forcefully dragged me and opened my legs and mutilated me, I will never forget that day". In many cases, the mother or grandmother are the driving forces behind the mutilation, however sometimes social pressure is paramount. Participant Shilan described it like this: "I was in six grade and I was living in a vulgar street. I urged my mom to mutilate me because all my friends were mutilated and I thought I was late and I felt disgusted about myself, and my poor little sister got caught up because of me, too".

Topics that came up again and again during the meetings were forced marriages and early marriages to much older men. Almost in every village a woman reported about herself or a relative who was affected by this and the problems this meant for her. These were not only older women, but also women between 20 and 30; this tradition of marrying young girls to an older man is still alive. Also, the idea of having to save the "honor" of the family is still present in some villages even among young men. L.R. (40) said: "A relative of my husband who is also our neighbor, told my younger son that his younger sister (my daughter) is in a relationship with a friend of his, which was of course a slander. My son came in the yard that day with a gun in his hand screaming his sister's name, swearing to kill her. My elder son forcefully dragged the gun out of his hand. He almost killed his sister over a slander". Situations like this show how important it is to talk to young men as well, and that it is not enough to empower young women alone, but that both genders must be equally involved in such a process, which is far from over.

*This project is supported by Women's World Day of Prayer.*

## Support for Yazidi ISIS Survivors



**Jinda Center is supporting Yazidi ISIS survivors - women, girls and kids from different ages and areas - with various services and social and medical support. In recent years, Jinda has also put lots of efforts into coronavirus prevention and awareness raising in the camps and beyond.**

**JINDA**  
**ژیندا**

Jinda is a former Wadi project in the Duhok region which has become an independent local NGO in 2015. It has become less and less dependent on Wadi support. However, Jinda and Wadi are still cooperating in a number of projects. In 2022, as an extension to the Green Halabja recycling activities, Jinda and Wadi started a plastic recycling campaign in the Kabarto 1 & 2 camps. Plastic waste is a major concern in the camps, and this project may provide some relief.

### The recycling campaign in the camps

So, Jinda (supported by Wadi and Shred Up) started with explaining the importance of recycling and the benefits of this project to the self-organized Yazidi teams based in the camp, consisting of six young women from Shingal. These teams started the awareness tent by tent with daily visits explaining to the families the goal of the project, distributing environment awareness brochures and trash bags to collect plastic waste. The teams then visited the same families the following week to collect the plastic from the families to bring it to the store.

In addition to the awareness, five collecting plastic bins have been placed in the camps in five different locations including schools, camp managements, and social centers.

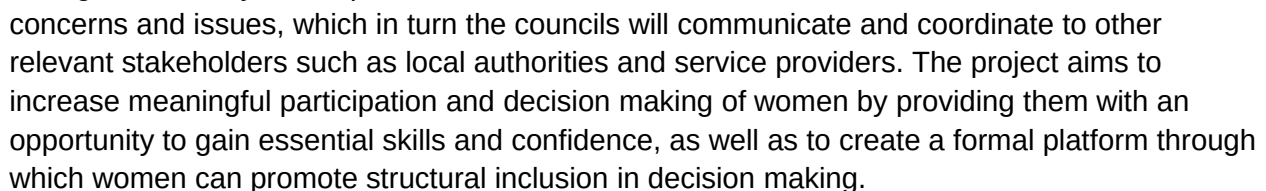


The first two months, the teams were separating plastic from other waste. Najla, one of the recycling teams, reported *“We received lots of comments about our work, people didn’t trust that this will work in our community and gave us the look of “garbage collectors”, with the pass of time we saw that the camp community started to accept the idea and even the bins started getting full which made us proud of our work”*.

Jinda received funds from various donors such as John Paul II Foundation, UN WOMEN, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund and Mercy Corps. Thus, they have been able to support the IDPs from Shingal and Mosul and the host community of Dohuk in many ways.

Jinda organized workshops in which participants learnt essential skills such as communication, negotiation, public speaking and problem solving which will enhance and promote their capacity, confidence and willingness to participate in decision-making and public roles. Local women councils will be created which will coordinate and communicate closely with the local authorities and stakeholders in addressing gender-sensitive issues and promote the role of women in conflict prevention processes and response.

Subsequently, these councils will provide women with a platform through which they can express their



## Vocational trainings for IDP women

In an effort to to teach women new skills and support their financial independence, Jinda offered training courses for 32 women from six different refugees' camps locations, including Sharya, Esysan, Kabartu 1, Kabartu 2, Khanke and Qadya. The women received training from experts in manicure, pedicure, and hairdressing. All participants have received transport to and from the training location. They have learnt very well and with practicing at home, they are ready to start their own business. After graduating from the training, two salons have been opened for six ladies in two camps( Issyan and Kabarto 1) camps. After graduating from the course, the ladies also received participation certificates that will help them with their new career, along with tool boxes including all the essential materials for practising their skill.



With learning the new skill and receiving the tool boxes and certificates, this project had a good impact on the psychological statue of many girls for going out from the camp and making friends with other girls from other places and also having the opportunity to share their feelings with Jinda's social workers through the group sessions they had during the training. Jinda is proud to mention that two girls have already started working with another nail shop, and two others have opened their shop with the help of other donors.

## Protection, psychosocial treatment and immediate life support

Jinda offered psycho-social support to 140 women and girls as well as 100 orphan children. The project was set up to help the internally displaced Yazidi girls and young women and their children in Iraq, who experienced kidnapping, enslavement and sexual abuse and had to cope with severe traumas. General objective is to improve the quality of the life of Yezidi girls, women, and children, including orphan children by providing adequate services with medical, psychological and education support.

The goal was to offer protection, psychosocial treatment as well as immediate life support to the target group. In order to support the girls, women and children in this regard, psychological and medical support was provided, as well as various training and therapeutic activities. English and computer courses, art and STEM education, as well as various lectures and psychological, medical and social activities were arranged, among others. The courses helped the beneficiaries acquire new skills, confidence, reduce anxiety, improve health and wellbeing. Emergency relief was also provided by distributing food and basic necessities, but also hygiene material such as masks and disinfectants to Yazidi families living in the camps and surrounding areas of Dohuk.

*Jinda is also supported by Roselo Foundation, Crosspoint Europe and Joss Stone Foundation.*



## Support for Refugees in Lesbos/Greece

Since 2019, Wadi has been supporting self-organized refugee teams in camps in Lesbos/Greece. Refugees are active in many fields, such as recycling, cleaning, maintenance and education.

### Waste Management

In 2022, the refugee volunteer group *Moria White Helmets (MWH)* continued its foundational environmental waste management and recycling efforts in the Mavrovouni camp on Lesbos island. 65 team members spread across all the activities of *MWH* worked to address the most pressing needs to asylum seekers residing in camp, as well as Lesbos residents in general.

Rubbish collection occurred in Marovouni camp 3 days per week, resulting in the collection of approximately 120-160 150 lt bags of rubbish per month. Additionally, one time per week the *MWH* team did a special rubbish collection focused on the local community needs, cleaning the local streets and villages upon request, or the beaches.

Additionally, *MWH* began a new partnership with *Ariadni AMKE* to begin the *Green Mytilene* project focusing on environmental education and plastic recycling. To support this partnership and build the recycling infrastructure, *MWH* constructed recycling bins for collecting plastic recyclables in their workshop space at Mavrovouni camp. These bins were then distributed throughout camp as well as to participating schools around Lesbos.

## Electric

The electrical team of MWH continued their work throughout 2022, on call 24/7 and working in close collaboration with the Mavrovouni Camp Management Electrical Department. The team of 13 electricians worked to repair electrical outages for camp residents throughout the year, maintaining the generators and restoring the electrical grid to individual housing units when damages occurred.

## Education

There is a lack of access to formal education opportunities for asylum seekers on the island. Students who have access to formal education often fall behind for lack of support. Additionally, there is a lack of non-formal education opportunities to reach the capacity of camp residents.

In 2022, *MWH* worked to address this discrepancy by providing access to educational opportunities, space and support to camp residents, and to increase capacity building of individuals within the camp. Additionally, *MWH* worked alongside the formal education channels available to children, minimizing the number of students who drop out of formal education because they fell behind by providing homework assistance in their mother tongue.

Fifty students daily across two classes were reached in English and German classes, in addition to open study sessions for children to bring their homework from formal education in Greek schools and receive assistance.



*MWH electrician*



## Barber and Salon

In order to assist in addressing the lack of the proper infrastructure for safe and dignified hygienic care in the camp environment, the *Moria White Helmets* team launched barber and salon spaces this year. These spaces provide a safe and clean alternative to hygiene care. By providing gender segregated salon and barber space, camp residents are able to seek services in a safe, community-based environment. Six days a week the barber shop and salon space was open and accessible to all camp residents to receive safe, basic and dignified hygienic services, such as haircuts and nail care. Approximately 60 individuals received services each week.

## Workshop

For 2022, the MWH team continued to run the workshop in Mavrovouni camp with which they provided a skilled team of 8 handymen, equipped and trained to assist camp residents to conduct repair and construction services when needed and by request and assisted camp residents and organizations with electrical, mechanical and carpentry needs. Approximately 75 bicycles were repaired monthly, in addition to the daily use of workshop materials to repair and alter accommodations for camp residents.

## Green Mytilene

The pilot project of *Green Mytilene* began in 2022 in a 2 part collaborative effort: Education and Awareness, as well as Recycling. This project is conducted in collaboration between *Ariadni AMKE*, Wadi, *Moria White Helmets*, Mytilene Municipality/Vice Mayor, Mavrovouni Camp Management, Northern Aegean Primary and Secondary Educational Body.

### Education and Awareness

*Green Mytilene* launched in 2022 as an environmental project aimed to bring education and awareness around environmental issues facing the island of Lesvos and the globe with a specific focus towards plastic waste. On the educational side of this project, partner *Ariadni AMKE*, with the support of Wadi, developed and facilitated weekly environmental educational classes taught in 5 participating schools across the island of Lesvos. Each week classes covered a different aspect of environmental issues and protection, adapting to the specific challenges faced by the students.

Overall, approximately 500 students participated weekly across the entirety of the 5 schools, ranging in age from 6-11 to 15+. Each school provided education and awareness classes also discussed the importance of reducing plastic waste and how that could be done practically on the island.

### Recycling

To create the infrastructure to collect recyclables in Lesvos, the *Moria White Helmets* in collaboration with the Mavrovouni Camp Management constructed recycling receptacles to be placed throughout the camp as



Nov. 2022: production of recycling bins for plastic bottles

well as at participating schools across the island. Receptacles in the camp were monitored and managed by the *MWH* to collect plastic bottles and bottle caps in separate bins. Similarly, receptacles at the participating schools monitored and managed the use (filling and emptying) of the bins in collaboration with *Ariadni AMKE* team in correlation with their educational activities.



*Feb 25: MWH staging anti-war protest*

## ***Moria Academia:***

### **Education**

Early in 2022, *Moria Academia* secured a space in Mavrovouni camp to construct a new classroom, allowing them to continue the self-organized refugee led educational initiative run since 2020. The *Moria Academia* educational programs of 2022 focused on English and Farsi lessons, and mathematics classes, as well as sports and art sessions. With a team of 6 refugee teachers, classes for men, women and children residing in Mavrovouni camp were conducted at the *Moria Academia* classroom. Approximately 200 students accessed classes each week.

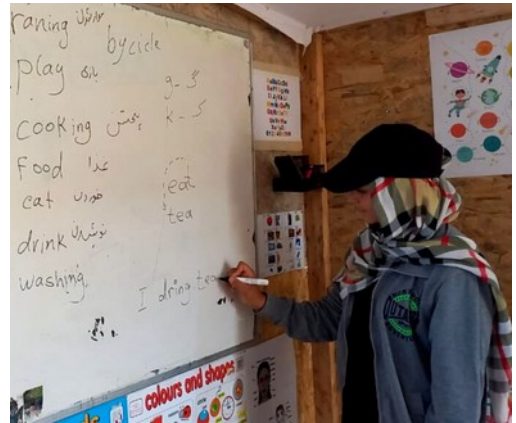
English classes aimed to assist students in reaching A1 proficiency and beyond to aid in the integration of each student, allowing them the necessary language skills to navigate the asylum process and excel wherever they settle. Farsi classes aim to allow students to build or keep a vital connection to where they come from and understand their history, culture and language. Mathematics, sports and art classes are fundamental in the development of children and often missed for children in transit through the refugee system. *Moria Academia* worked hard to provide these vital and joy-filled educational opportunities to the children in Mavrovouni camp.

In addition to their own activities, *Moria Academia* welcomed long time partner *Moria White Helmets* to make use of the classroom space when their own educational activities had grown

beyond the space they had available, further demonstrating the power in empowering self-organized groups as they support each other and find solutions together, efficiently and effectively.

## Sewing

Since its inception, *Moria Academia* has provided a sewing space accessible for the students of Moria Academia (and later all camp residents) to alter, mend and create their own clothes. In 2022 this dignity giving project continued in the new classroom in Mavrovouni camp, in the afternoons, after classes had commenced. Equipped with 3 sewing machines and 2 professional tailors, the tailor space of *Moria Academia* assisted camp residents in adapting and fixing clothing and other fabrics to meet their needs, minimizing the amount of clothing reaching the rubbish bins. By providing individuals with the means to address their own needs, this project also allowed people to visit other organizations fewer times for clothing needs, lightening the clothing donation needs on the island. Additionally, by allowing camp residents the possibility to create clothing options that fit, as well as look and feel nice to wear, they are able to save their money to spend it on real necessities.



*Moria Academia*



## Support for Ukraine Relief Infrastructure in Poland

Wadi arrived in Krakow in the beginning of March 2022, upon the request of local NGOs to assist with the mass-evacuation of Ukrainian persons. This included setting up systems/structures for managing this crisis by sharing past experience and expertise.

During the first weeks of evacuation, particularly single women and unaccompanied children, were at high-risk of trafficking and sexual violence, due to the evacuees' significant number; a lack of overview that created easy-access to the evacuees; and a whole lot of good-will that resulted in cutting corners of safety protocol and security processes, in an attempt to accommodate as many persons as possible, opposed to accommodating a few through a more strict and safe protocol of regulation. In cooperation with local partners in Krakow the campaigns and strategies #SafeAid and #HelpResponsibly were created.

### Background

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, Russia conducted a large-scale invasion of Ukraine, that resulted in Poland receiving over 1 million Ukrainian refugees in less than a week. The evacuees consisted predominantly of women, children and elderly people, since all combat-capable males were requested to stay in Ukraine through the enactment of Martial Law.

Even before the invasion statistics reveal that Ukrainian women are at a particularly high risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation, not only in Europe, but also per global figures. In the weeks leading up to the war, tips and tricks would be shared on the deep web that both encouraged and explained how to traffick Ukrainian women successfully. On a more general basis statistics disclose that up to 2/3 of women in conflict will experience sexual or physical violence. Whereas nearly 90% of all domestic violence occurs behind closed doors by a person acquainted with the victim during peacetime, with an

### Увага: остерігайтесь торговців людьми

**Торгівля людьми** - це форма сучасного рабства та порушення прав людини, яка все ще актуальна в XXI столітті. Вербування, транспортування, переміщення, укріплення чи одержання осіб шляхом погроз, застосування сили чи інших форм психологічного тиску з метою подальшої експлуатації.

**Експлуатація може мати такі форми:**

- Експлуатація праці або примусове надання послуг
- Сексуальна експлуатація
- Учасність у злочинній діяльності
- Примусове жорядство
- Боргова кабала (боргове рабство)
- Незаконне усиновлення
- Домашня кабала (домашнє рабство)
- Рабство або дії, подібні до рабства
- Примусовий шлюб
- Видалення органів

**Ознаки, які можуть вказувати на те, що ви є або може бути використані людиною, яка стверджує, що вам допомагає:**

- Вам пропонують роботу з нерівномірно високою зарплатою.
- Вас змушують виконувати роботу, зайнятися сексом чи надавати послуги без згоди та/або використовувати когнітивні такти (маніпуляції) щодо отримання вашої згоди.
- У вас вилучили або утримують паспорт або інші документи, що посвідчують особу.
- У вас вилучили або утримують ваш особисті засоби комунікації (наприклад, телефон, ноутбук тощо).
- Вас змушують підкорятися суворому правилам, контролю, обмежувати ваші свободи (наприклад, не виходити з місця, контролювати над вашим грошима).
- Вам загрожує втратити роботу або зарплату, якщо ви не будете працювати у певних умовах.
- Вас просять працювати, надавати послуги або виконувати статеві дії, щоб виплатити борги (якщо можуть, укладати угоди про виплату чи обслуговування боргів над змушують вас думати, ви не можете їсти, дати ні заплатити).
- Вас «правдивають», оскільки не повністю їм довіряються угодами з вами про роботу, щоб виплатити тільки частину боргу, або зберігають контроль над вашими грошима.



expected rise of susceptibility of violence in times of conflict.

While Ukraine is neither part of the EU, nor NATO, then Ukraine did become a member of an expanded Schengen program known as the ETIAS visa waiver program in 2017. This allows Ukrainian nationals to travel to Schengen member-countries visa-free with an electronic passport (basically like a tourist). But as was experienced, refugees crossing borders can be both a blessing and a curse: a blessing because persons in need of protection could pursue it at any minute; a curse because it made it more difficult to prevent, monitor and regulate malicious actors who sought to exploit the vulnerable position that the Ukrainian refugees found themselves in. With numerous unregistered so-called volunteers, private initiatives and organizations ready to host and transport Ukrainian refugees to all ends of Europe (and in some cases outside); it was impossible for Ukrainian refugees to know who to trust and who not to trust. Even genuine offers would present difficulties as they were performed by private initiatives and amateurs who ended up adding to the problem on the basis of not knowing what to do, or how to approach the situation. All in all, the border crossings and transport-stations opened up a “free-for-all” type of situation for malicious actors to prey more or less unnoticed.

The situation thus accumulates down to a very high number of women and children arriving within a short time, with a pre-documented susceptibility towards trafficking, sexual violence among other forms of violence, on top of all the other forms of endangerment and exploitation who are experienced by refugees, women and children in various EU-countries - without any, or if so very few male combat-capable counterparts. With malicious actors having easy-access to the evacuees through 1) chaotic border points by disguising themselves as aid workers, as well as 2) host- and transport-programs that were quickly enacted out of necessity and founded upon blind trust and good-will. While many persons did approach these programs with the best of their intent, then it's lack of regulation could also be easily exploited, resulting in evacuees being transported and accommodated against their will in almost any EU-country through a more or less easily disguised approach.

Some interviews which further outline the concerns:

[SVT/Swedish](#)

[NRK/Norwegian](#)

[Die Zeit/German](#)

### [#HelpResponsible](#) / [#SafeAid](#)

It was the concerns outlined above that created the basis for the [#SafeAid](#) and [#HelpResponsible](#) campaign and (info-)strategy. The campaigns were developed in cooperation with local partners, for local partners to implement into action with Wadis support and guidance. The [#SafeAid](#) campaign itself can be split up and synchronized into various steps of the evacuation;



### Transportation: Borderpoints

To regain an overview at border points, such as Krakow train-station. This was achieved through numerous steps. Firstly, to avoid overcrowding and to gain an insight into who was there, no more “random” pick up of Ukrainian refugees were allowed; as such, those who were trying to relocate or host persons through the authority gained from wearing yellow vests bought at the nearest dollar shop, or through the recruitment of cardboard paper signs.

Instead these people were asked to leave the train station and go to an alternate location where their request to relocate or host Ukrainian refugees could be processed by a separate unit. Whereas the organisations and persons who were needed at the trainstation had been scheduled and registered; staff and volunteers were identifiable; there was increased communication between all actors present at the train station. Que-systems were made more identifiable, and awareness posters written in Ukrainian language were hung up at the train station. Several concrete steps, such as outlined above, were taken in order to create a more overseeable situation at the train station; reduce access for ill-intent actors while in a parallel manner keeping it open for good-willed actors; which all in all contributed to the prevention of trafficking and violence on behalf of refugees.



### Transportation: Relocation

In this context, the term relocation implied the process of transporting a person from one country to another. A specific team within the emergency shelter at 3 Radziwiłłowska Street/Salam Lab was dedicated solely to the process of validating

- 1) legitimate bus drivers;
- 2) end-destination accommodation and;
- 3) keeping track of requirements and laws.

The terms and conditions concerning Ukrainian refugees to be relocated into various other EU/EEA countries were subject to change from one day to the other. For example, in the event of a Ukrainian national to be transported to Denmark, they would be bound to 6 months of labor attributing the Danish State. However, this would not be the case in neither Norway, nor Sweden. Or, if a Ukrainian national was bringing a pet (cat/dog), then they could process the pet easily in both Norway and Denmark. However, pets would not be allowed entrance to Sweden until a few weeks later.

The last element of the process was to map down and ensure how many Ukrainian refugees wanted to go where, and if they had the necessary documents to go where they wanted. Several of the Ukrainian refugees had many questions about the end-destination that the relocators had not considered; how soon can my child resume their education?; is volley-ball and gymnastics training available?; how will we sustain ourselves financially?

In short, does there exist a plan for the family should they relocate to the proposed destination. As such, the relocation team would often act as a platform of communication between the Ukrainian refugees, the municipality and relocators. All in all making this specific task quite a complex one.

Person(s) and organisation(s) offering to relocate Ukrainian nationals were requested to bring documents that would confirm their intent; for example that the municipality was in agreement with relocating a certain number of persons; and that the trip was coordinated to avoid situation where Ukrainian nationals would arrive to a destination without further support awaiting. For example, it was experienced that a bus driver had been refused access to bring in a group of Ukrainian refugees who did not have the necessary documentation to enter the designated country. The bus driver had simply dropped the Ukrainian refugees off at the nearest gas station at the border and left.

Moreover, it provided the unit the service of flagging requests such as “do the refugees have nice teeth?”; “do they have strong muscles and can do heavy lifting?”. In other cases, it was experienced that the bus drivers had criminal records that included charges of sexual assault, as well as convicted paedophiles.

### **Examples**

23.03.2022 Aftenposten/Norwegian

[\*Krpos: Norwegians convicted of sexual assault "directly involved" in the transport of Ukrainian minors.\*](#)

08.04.2022 VG/Norwegian

[\*\[The Police\] Stops convicts of sexual abuse with Ukrainian children in the car - not punishable\*](#)

22.07.2022 Mirror/English

[\*Ten British paedophiles deported from Poland after pretending to help refugees\*](#)

Throughout the work there was a continuous push requesting greater presence from State organs of other EU/EEA countries; either by registering persons and producing a sort of

documentation that would approve that the persons coming to relocate refugees did not have a criminal record; or by leading the evacuation themselves. Unfortunately, these calls never received a reply.

### Accommodation: Shelters

Over the first few weeks numerous makeshift shelters were set up to accommodate persons. Making use of several larger venues such as sports halls, or in the case of 3 Radziwiłłowska Street which was initially a theater. Although organizations had acquired larger spaces and volunteers that could contribute to the shelter's functionality, it was the first time several of these organizations tried to operate a shelter. In the heat of the moment, it resulted in several important aspects regarding security and well-being getting lost such as fire safety hazards, hygienic concerns (e.g. food, bathrooms and pets), access to medical and psychological assistance and general security concerns concerning particularly concerning sexual violence due to a lack of safeguarding practices. Plus general challenges that arose in the context of coordination. Lastly, several of the shelters had been opened through private initiative, and they had no immediate duty of registration; which contributed to the difficulty of locating them. After having first inspected the site of 3 Radziwiłłowska Street, Wadi opted to fly in a longtime friend who has over 30 years of experience in running shelters. In which, it must be emphasized that 3 Radziwiłłowska Street, although operated by persons who had never worked with a shelter before, was of very high standard in comparison to other shelters visited.



At one of the locations, a shelter opened specifically for pregnant women and mothers with babies, we found it hard to move within their space due to the excessive number of dirty diapers

that were piled up both in the stairs leading up to the shelters as well in their actual living space - including the kitchen. Several trash bags had already started to attract insects and a strong smell. In general, there were very few elements, if any at all, to this specific shelter that would suggest it safe for children. Whereas inspections from the landowner had created a situation where he wanted the organization out of his spaces as soon as possible. Despite our best efforts to turn the situation around, then all forms of assistance and guidance were rejected from the persons in charge of the shelter and it was eventually closed down. Several shelter-inspections were made, where both assistance and guidance was offered to all shelters ready to welcome it.

### Accommodation: Private Housing

Due to the dire need of accommodation, several organizations made use of the offers coming from private homes to take in refugees. Similar to the entry of *Relocation*, then there was little to no safeguarding protocols taken into account in the general chain of operations. To such an extent that Ukrainian refugees were housed in locations that one could neither verify that the information provided was real (even the entry of surnames were often bygone), nor did there exist a register of knowing who and how many refugees had been sent to where. The initial process was limited to one part of the call center accepting calls of invitations by Polish hosts, and another, separate part of the call center calling the refugees to offer them accommodation to these sites.

There was no physical inspection of neither the place nor site. Often the invitations would be communicated through calls, but in other events simply through texts. As a result of the call centers being mostly operated by volunteers without any training in safeguarding security, dubious requests such as “please, I only want a young and single female refugee, preferably under 23 years old” were not flagged down in the system for further inspection. Nor was there a security mechanism in place in terms of informing the refugees of what to do should they find themselves in an endangered situation. As a result Ukrainian refugees were at potential endangerment from both the system and possible hosts, and it did not take long before specific cases began surfacing in the media.

#### **Examples**

10.03.2022 Oko/Polish

[\*“The \[49 year old\] man raped a 19-year-old girl from Ukraine, whom he took under his roof. She was running away from the war”\*](#)

15.03.2022 Daily Mail/English

[\*“Ukrainian 18-year-old refugee 'is gang-raped by two men' on board German hotel ship used to house people fleeing war”\*](#)

02.04.2022 NRK/Norwegian

[\*“Charged with rape of Ukrainian 17-year-old”\*](#)

12.03.2022 ReportersOnline/Dutch

[\*“Ukrainian Refugees Disappear; Reception by Private Persons Appears To Be Unwise”\*](#)

To emphasize, this is how *most* organizations operated over the first week. Upon Wadis arrival, an emergency meeting was held and information concerning the security risks were passed on. As a result several local organizations quickly changed their ways.

Accommodation: arranging accommodation online on social media and hostpages

Numerous online host pages were shared around and encouraged for their proposed use, even by large and influential actors. Yet, it became evident that most actors had put little thought into what type of systems they were actually sharing. To accept host-invitations from online systems presented the same, if not even a higher risk and endangerment towards refugees as accepting host-invitations through calls and texts.

In an attempt to map down online platforms offering accommodation to refugees, several host pages were inspected by competent computer technicians and the results were striking: not a single one of the tenfold pages assessed came with a satisfactory method of ensuring safety on behalf of the refugees!

Firstly, in fear of violating the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)[<https://gdpr.eu/>], most host pages would request hardly any information upon their host-entry.

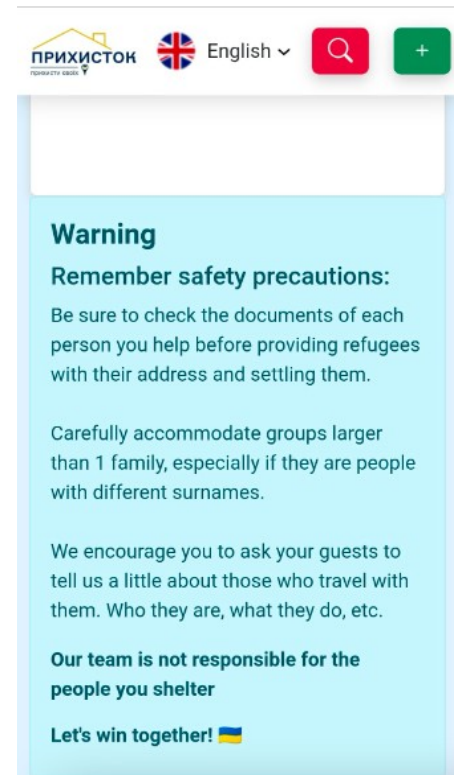
Secondly, most host pages would stress that they were not the responsible actor; this naturally raises the question of *who is the responsible actor?*

It must also be noted that several persons opted to arrange accommodation through social media platforms and groups such as Facebook, Instagram, Google Document and WhatsApp/Telegram groups, posing an equally large risk. It was further observed that in countries where state systems to host refugees were made available through easy registration were often overlooked simply out of incomprehension. Persons who wished to volunteer their homes had not been informed of these systems and while requesting information of the processes, they would often be redirected to unsafe sites thinking they were the best approach for registry.

Accommodation: #Safeshelter Platform for Safe housing

It was all of the concerns outlined above that led to the creation of #Safeshelter: a GDPR-compliant software that could catalog both private-host arrangements and shelters alike to better cooperate on meeting the needs of refugees in need of safe accommodation.

Here you may find a short [introductory video about #Safeshelter](#).



*Screenshot from a hostpage that the Ukrainian Embassy in Norway encouraged to use*

### Media: #HelpResponsibly

Media stations and social media were used intensively as a tool to get relevant information out to both Ukrainian refugees, as well as persons who wished to assist them. Simple guides for refugees to safeguard themselves were created and published in Ukrainian languages on Ukrainian media; as well as in social media groups.

#HelpResponsibly included a series of do's and don'ts particularly affecting and encouraging new and private initiatives towards a more rational approach and response that would build on safeguarding mechanisms opposed to shortcuts that could further endanger the refugees.

### Martynka: a “clean-up project” from Ukrainian women for Ukrainian women

It was observed that while a wide range of services were available to Ukrainian refugees in Poland, then the Ukrainian refugees had little to no awareness of them. As such a grass-root hot-line was created to assist Ukrainian refugees with whatever service they might need while in Poland. Through the hotline it was also possible to reach and assist women who found themselves in a difficult situation. Hence why it is referred to as a “clean up project” in its introductory phase.

A short [introductory video about Martynka](#)

### Local Partners



#### Salam Lab/SafeShelter (March - May)

Salam Lab holds an esteemed position within “Grupa Granica”, a Polish network of NGOs operative at the border, and the “Krakow Coalition”, that represents a network of NGOs, plus local governmental bodies operating in Krakow. Using these channels,

information, requests and needs could quickly be communicated to a multitude of actors within both close and far vicinity.

The need arose to deploy refugees to accommodation. Whereas the accommodation provided by the local authorities were first in short supply, Polish/Kraków residents offered to host Ukrainian refugees within their own residences. Within the start of this process, there were no systems to check that these hosts offering rooms were safe and suitable for Ukrainian refugees. It was this that led to the decision of developing an online host-system called Safeshelter.

([Introductory video about Safeshelter](#))

The Project Manager of Safeshelter was coordinating a group of approximately 20 volunteers: developers and UX designers who designed a platform that can be used for refugees accommodation management. This online platform provides tools to avoid human error and store guests, hosts and accommodation data securely. It also lets us generate reports to present statistics of the refugees hosted by Polish hosts who signed up to our database. Salam Lab's team at our Help Center has been connecting Polish hosts with Ukrainian guests since the first day of war. Since the end of March, we were able to do it more efficiently thanks to the use of the platform. The funds were spent on salary, software and licensing expenses and accrued

vacation (paid out upon termination of the contract). Thanks to that collaboration we were also able to understand how to manage the safety of such programs and grow into one of the main points of contact in the country in terms of refugee accommodation. It also helped us start the process of hosts' verification through online banking and other governmentally recognized means. Furthermore, Safeshelter communicated to the process of Relocation.

## The SafeShelter

Dashboard > Breadcrumbs here...

Accommodation Units (Found: 8)

[Refresh data](#) [Add new Accommodation](#)

☐ - Pets not present: ☒ - Pets present: ☒ - Pets allowed: ☐ - Disabled people friendly: ☐ - Parking place available: ☐ - Easy ambulance access:

City	Address	Status	Capacity	Description	Information
Katowice	ul. Kwiatów Polskich 84/24 24-691 Katowice	New	0 / 29		
Lublin	ul. Kosmonautów 87NM9 06-631 Lublin, lubelskie	New	13 / 35	Volunteer	
Kraków	Lorem 12-345 Kraków	Verified	3 / 1	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet	
Kraków	św. Filipa 23/4 31-150 Kraków	New	0 / 2	Takie tam Voi	
Kraków	św. Filipa 23/4 31-150 Kraków	New	0 / 1	Volunteer notes	
Włochy	ul. Janiszowska 43 14-658 Włochy, mazowieckie	New	0 / 1		
Sokołów Podlaski	ul. Czekanowskiego 70 14-291 Sokołów Podlaski, mazowieckie	New	None		

## Development in Stages

*First, the system for cataloging housing and people in need of shelter was promptly developed, based on Google Sheets. At the time, this was the only solution that brought the desired effect, whereas no in-depth IT knowledge was required from the users (or developers). With the military action intensifying and the influx of refugees into Poland increasing, the need arose for a system that was both secure and user-friendly. It was to be a system that would be used by volunteers (that is back-office) to enter housing, refugee data and assign refugees to housing. The system had also to be secure, that is adequately protecting all data (GDPR compliant).*

*We commenced our work by identifying the needs of the volunteers working at the crisis centre. From the first week of March, we established meetings that took place every 2 days. These meetings were open to anyone seeking to work on the new system - feedback from people (mainly volunteers) who had worked using the first solution was particularly important.*

*Over a very short time, we gathered approximately 15-20 people with a lot of experience in the IT sector. Smoothly and efficiently, we developed the PRD, divided up the tasks and commenced work. We decided that officially the project would be created in the SalamLab Association*

*In late March 2022, that is remarkably fast, we delivered a platform that was used at the helpdesk at 3 Radziwiłłowska Street in Krakow. During the systems changeover (transition from the initial solution to our system), a dedicated person, Implementation Officer was present on site. It is worth noting that in a fairly short period of time all volunteers learned how to use the system correctly, while the full implementation took place around April 2022.*

*Short list of functionalities introduced in the system:*

- 1. Creation and updating of: housing, guest hosts, including:
  - assigning guests to apartments,
  - assigning volunteers to visitors.*
- 2. Browsing, sorting and filtering their lists - the temporary "fast" version will be replaced.*
- 3. Login of volunteers via Google Workspace, with automatic creation of accounts in the system.*
- 4. Import of existing data from sheets.*
- 5. Saving the history of changes, enabling the audit.*

*In early May 2022, the development team completed work on an identity verification module for people sharing housing. SalamLab Association had contracted an external company to provide such a service. The verification was to look as follows: 1. entry of personal data 2. confirmation of identity via a photo of the proof including the face (so-called 'live check') or by logging into one's bank (so-called 'Open Banking'). (3) The person performing this verification was to be informed of the result by email. The entire data collection and processing process was GDPR-compliant.*

For Relocation, a specific team at the emergency shelter was dedicated solely to the process of validating 1) legitimate bus drivers, 2) end-destination accommodation and 3) keeping track of laws - as the terms and conditions concerning Ukrainian refugees would be subject to change by other EU/EEA countries. In addition to mapping down how many Ukrainian refugees wanted to go where, and if they had the necessary documents to go where they wanted. With over 30 organisations in Krakow making contributions to the catalog of Safeshelter, it made the whole task of coordinating relocation easier.



### **Storwarzyszenie Mudita/SafeShelter (May-September)**

In May, the needs of Krakow changed and Salam Lab decided to pull back on several of their emergency response projects. As such, Wadi completed the cooperation with Salam Lab and started consulting Mudita; a local organization that focuses upon persons with disabilities. In May Mudita was preparing to open shelters for disabled persons in Krakow and Warsaw which had continuously up to this point been a needed element in the evacuation of Ukrainians as most organizations accommodated and supplied services for the people at large. As such, it was agreed upon moving Safeshelter and the resource of IT-expertise to achieve the integration of similar systems for Mudita.

## **Martynka (April-September)**

[Link to bot](#)

Martynka is a female-lead Ukrainian grassroots organization based in Poland that through a helpline/chatbot supports Ukrainian evacuees with whatever they need while in Poland, with an added focus on:



- Preventing human trafficking
- Helping victims of sexualised violence obtain legal and psychological support
- Providing access to and information on safe abortions
- Providing information on sexual health, contraception and STTs.

In addition, Martynka takes on new and other types of challenges related to women's safety and security as they emerge. This includes ensuring safety in shelters, help translating in medical practices and police stations, and long-term psychological support.

The hotline is functional 24/7, with an operator responding within minutes. The hotline provides instant access to help and unified access to resources. "Martynka" is the only evacuee resource in Poland providing psychological, medical and legal support in a single place.

Wadis support for Martynka has been substantial in terms of consultancy and coordination.

The idea of Martynka emerged over an interview, where the founder, the Ukrainian journalist Nastya Podorozhnya was interviewing employees of Wadi for an article and security guide for Ukrainian women.



← → ↻ [zaborona.com/en/ukrainian-women-are-not-allowed-to-terminate-unwanted-pregnancies-in-poland/](https://zaborona.com/en/ukrainian-women-are-not-allowed-to-terminate-unwanted-pregnancies-in-poland/)

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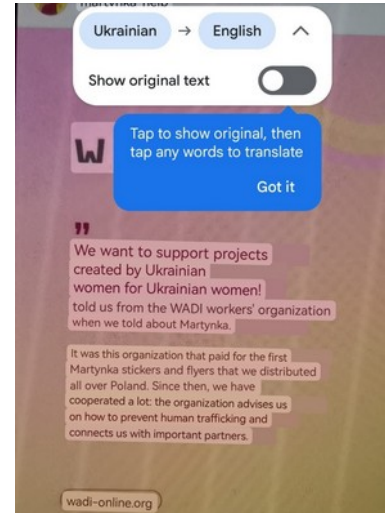
**ZABORONA** NOW READING Ukrainian Women Are Not Allowed to Terminate Unwante...

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Criminals who want to exploit refugees are even coming for this purpose to Poland and other Central European countries. I learned about this from Thomas Osten-Sacken, director of WADI – The German Crisis Relief Association. Speaking of the mass evacuation of Ukrainian women, he used a metaphor that shocked me: “it’s Christmas, Easter and the birthday at the same time for all sorts of bastards.” According to another WADI employee Shirin Tinneland who is in charge of refugee and migration affairs, on the dark web, even before the start of the Russian invasion, criminals were spreading instructions on how to lure Ukrainian women and manipulate them in the event of war.

Source: [Zaborona/English](#)

One month after the interview, Podorozhnyia informed us they had created the hotline and requested assistance to move forward. Since then, Wadi has been consulting Martynka projects through both physical and digital coordination, networking, weekly meetings, brainstorming and so forth. Martynka is in the process of becoming a registered organization in Poland. In just a few months, Martynka has already helped over 300 women with various services. Martynka has also gained a tremendous amount of media publicity for their work.



### **More about Martynka's Current Work:**

#### **1) Hotline for supporting refugees based within a messenger most popular among Ukrainians - Telegram**

*Consultations for refugees that faced sexualized and other forms of violence;*  
*Consultations for refugees that faced other instances of fraud or issues in Poland;*  
*'Help broker': an intermediary between a person seeking help and a person providing help (this could prevent situations where a refugee is exploited under the disguise of help by a local);*  
*Access to legal, psychological assistance offered by the partners of the project.*

#### **2) Organising need-based assistance for refugees with the participation of partner organisations**

*Psychological assistance for victims of violence;*  
*Legal assistance for victims of violence, fraud, or other crimes;*  
*Providing access to free abortion and "day after" pills, as well as medical assistance (free gynecologist, psychologist and / or psychiatrist);*  
*Assistance with addressing police or other local authorities with various problems — e.g. helping with Ukrainian-Polish translation at the police station;*  
*Humanitarian aid in accessing hygiene items (pads) and contraception devices (condoms).*

#### **3) Spreading information**

*Publication of educational materials on how to avoid violence on such platforms as Telegram, Instagram, Facebook;*  
*Preparation of printed materials and posters for distribution in refugee shelters, railway stations, and other locations frequently visited by refugees;*  
*Partnership with Ukrainian and international media to promote information about safety and the project.*

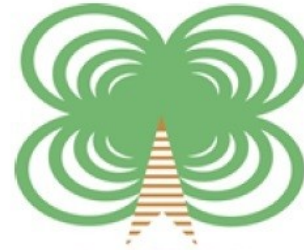
# Community Radio Denge Nwe

**Radio Denge NWE, the independent community radio in Northern Iraq, is dedicated to women's and youth issues in a community and local context.**

Denge NWE is a community radio station managed by the local NWE organization and supported by WADI. Very exceptional in this region, the station is completely independent and not affiliated to any party. It is broadcasting 11 hours daily, from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm, on FM 88.6 MHz in Halabja governorate, Sharazoor, Hawraman and Arbat.

The morning programs are broadcasted in Kurmanji dialect and Arabic language. They are dealing with hot topics of local society, focusing especially on refugees and IDPs, but also including other health, social or cultural issues.

The afternoon programs present news, music time and various special programs on current issues. The programme includes daily coverage of youth and women's issues, as well as daily awareness on health, human rights, women's rights, FGM, children's rights, refugees in Iraq and Syria, environment protection, electricity and water infrastructure. It is aired in Sorani and Hawrami dialect.



**Dangi NWE Radio**

**Community Radio for Women and Youth**



*Dec. 21: Discussion about women's rights with the director of the religious department at Halabja University Dr. Abduldham Maruf Hawramani*



*Nov. 10: Talk about better health journalism in the light of the pandemic*



*Oct. 30: Special program about breast cancer with specialist Dr. Azhin Hmatofiq*

## Daily Program

- Daily broadcasting for eleven hours.
- Ten daily national and international breaking news

- *Hanase Nwe* daily live program with talk about hot topics in society and burning issues for the people, like electricity, water or fuel.
- Rebroadcasting VOA Kurdish department program.
- Topics around women and youth.
- Awareness about health, human rights, women's rights, FGM, children's rights, refugees in Iraq and Syria, environment transformation, electricity and water
- Private announcements, "lost & found"



*July 08: Program on "Promoting Journalist's Ability to Recognize Fake News and Investigative Report Project", funded by the U.S. Department of State (with Meridian as implementing partner)*

## Weekly Program

- Special program: live program about hot topics. Local responsables join as guests. Sometimes three or four episodes are presented on one topic, 57 programs in total were broadcasted.
- Hezry Yasahy: Live program about problems women face. The program provides legal advice and awareness, powered by a local legal assistance organization. 42 programs were presented.
- Hagbai shar: Live program which focuses on coexistence with minorities of different religious backgrounds. 18 programs were presented.
- Hoshyare tandrusti: Live monthly program about health, focusing on health awareness and health advice, provided by doctors and nurses who join the program as guests. 32 programs were presented.
- Sport Nwe: This program focuses on the national and international sport news, 44 programs were presented.

- Trainers: An educational program by students prepared from Azad Hawrami School. The program aims to encourage students to keep on studying and get a good education. Problems and obstacles are discussed. 25 programs have been presented.
- Zhingakaman: A weekly live program which is hosting various experts to discuss environmental topics and provide awareness. 23 programs were presented.
- Zhyan Drusty: A psycho-social awareness program about common social and psychological issues. 12 programs were presented.
- Seven special programs on the 34th anniversary of the Halabja chemical attack.
- A series of special programs about the "16 days of activism against violence on women" was broadcasted under the slogan of "Orange the world". The aim was to prevent violence and honour killings. 16 programs have been broadcasted.
- Short topics: environment information, science, economy and health

### Other Activities

In 2022, Denge Nwe offered theoretical and practical media trainings for journalists from Halabja province, focusing mainly on accurate reporting and awareness of fake news.

On April 22, Memorial Day of 124 years of Kurdish Media, Denge Nwe conducted a survey among women journalists in Halabja. The aim was to examine how well women journalists were able to obtain information and how they were able to publish it.

Denge Nwe offered trainings for 5 volunteers in Halabja. They learnt basics about radio journalism and also became familiar with some technical aspects.

Much more about Radio Denge Nwe's daily journalist work [may be found here](#).

*Radio Denge Nwe is supported by Roselo Foundation and private donations.*

## KirkukNow - Independent News Outlet

**KirkukNow is an independent electronic news website. It publishes stories and events taking place within or relevant to Iraq's disputed territories, as defined in the Iraqi constitution, with the aim of promoting coexistence in those areas and providing easy access to information.**

### Situation in 2022

For KirkukNow, 2022 has been full of successes on one side and saw many challenges on the other side. The team was involved in working extensively on implementing the media outlet's major foreseen goals; first the expansion of KirkukNow's content production and audience reach through the daily publication of content in Arabic, English, Kurdish, and Turkish. Secondly, the diversification of revenue streams, to put KirkukNow on more stable financial basis, and thirdly redesigning the strategy of the outlet for 2023-2026. This is besides the changes the team made in the administrative structure of the institution with the help of national and international advisors.



Overall, KirkukNow has had a very high level of performance both in terms of quantity and quality. We have been active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and telegram throughout 2022.

Over the course of this period, KirkukNow produced dozens of stories that were picked up by other media outlets and reached tens of thousands of audiences. As a result, this has left an impact on many members of different communities in the areas we cover. In the stories, we have covered topics such as the global warming effect on Iraqi dispute areas, meddling in the Iraqi affairs by the neighboring countries, vaccination, Covid-19, minorities, women, and success stories of survivors of ISIS war, service problems, and human rights.

In the course of our job, we have been focusing on fighting rumors around misinformation, disinformation, vaccination, free press violations, and many others, such as the problems of children born of former ISIS sex slave victims.

Also, KirkukNow, in several follow-ups during the past few months, shed light on the living condition of IDPs in Kurdistan Region camps, particularly after international organizations cut off aid to the IDPs, which eventually urged the Iraqi government, the Kurdistan regional government (KRG) and the parliament to address the issue.

Meanwhile, KirkukNow editor-in-chief, Salam Omer, participated in [Fome22 Symposium in Hamburg on September 14, 2022](#), as a speaker in one of the sessions. The session was on resilience, viability, and continuity - how today's media can prepare for the crisis of tomorrow.

In the last quarter of 2022, we made a new partnership with Aide Humanitaire & Journalisme (AHJ) which is a French-based organization working on gender equality and global warming issues.

Our team, through its new project with Internews, and Aide Humanitaire & Journalisme (AHJ), has learned more about debunking disinformation, Covid, pandemics, podcast production, and graphic designing.

Meanwhile, KirkukNow has tried to find more sources of income during this period. We have been in contact with different organizations and we have submitted four proposals for organizations such as NED, Google, Internews, MRG and IRI, CFI. And we received an answer from IRI, and now we are working on a new project with IRI team.

In the final quarter of 2022, we have been through a very tough situation in terms of safety. The militias have become a very strong social and economic power in the areas we cover. Despite all of that, we have been doing our best to expand KirkukNow's content production and audience reach and the diversification of revenue streams, to put KirkukNow on more stable financial basis.

KirkukNow remains one of the most credible sources of information in the areas we cover and across the country. Dozens of our stories have been picked by other media outlets, organizations, and platforms.



## Challenges

Safety remains a big challenge; KirkukNow team operates in high risks areas in Iraq, where ISIL is active and dozens of militia groups active. Protecting our team and preserving our objective reporting, is one of our top priorities. Reporters Without Borders truly explains the situation of journalists especially those who independently function like KirkukNow. "In recent years, many journalists have been killed by armed groups, both Jihadist organizations, and militias. Such killings rarely lead to investigations and those responsible go unpunished. Death threats and abduction are also often used to terrorize and silence journalists. Influential, high-profile

journalists used to be the main targets of this form of intimidation but nowadays it is also used against lesser-known journalists.“

Financial issues are another challenge which KirkukNow faces. In the last quarter of 2022, part of our focus was on financial problems and fundraising because we are working hard to keep the team together, and in order to keep the team we have to fulfill their financial needs, and this remains a challenge. However, we are trying our best to get more funds and bring more partnership projects with international partners because we spent a lot of effort with having a professional team and keeping it remains one of the first priorities of the institution.

Access to information is another challenge, as government officials, in many cases, are not supportive to the few independent media outlets still functioning in the country. The lack of information provided by government departments is a constant challenge for reporters. Hiding information from reporters by security and service departments is one of the challenges created for the network of reporters, making it difficult to deliver correct and verified information to the audience.

Fake news and mis/disinformation were other challenges KirkukNow faced. Working in an environment full of fake news and mis/disinformation is always challenging that is why we encouraged the team to participate in the training on fake news mis/disinformation and gave part of the focus to the fact-checking process in KirkukNow newsroom.

## Lessons Learned

Due to the participation in the AHJ fellowship in partnership with KirkukNow, four members of KirkukNow team are now working on sound engineering, podcast production, and graphic design skills in order to build a podcast production team for KirkukNow. Furthermore, in the beginning of 2023 a first series of their podcasts will be published in partnership with AHJ.

Due to the training courses held in cooperation with Internews within the "Rooted In Trust" project, the knowledge of the staff has improved concerning how to deal with fake news, particularly those related to the pandemic.

Aide Humanitaire & Journalisme (AHJ) which is a not-for-profit organization launched in 2017 in France. Since 2018, AHJ and CFI have been working together to prepare the program "Women and Media in Conflict Zones".

Ahang Habib from KirkukNow in the scope of "Our Voices" project by Internews has produced an investigative report on the legal gap in IKR for children who are raised in orphanages, after they turn 18, they will be forced to leave the orphanages because there is no code to oblige the government to take care of them after 18. Most of them remain with no choice only to live on the streets. They are likely to turn from victims to criminals. 3 months after [Ahang Habib's investigative report](#), KRG made a decision to build shelters for those above 18 and provide them with jobs. Furthermore, the Kurdistan region parliament now works on a law draft on the issue. From this, we learned that it is possible for the media to play a positive role and change the life of people.

## Gender issues

Gender and cross-cutting issues remain crucial to KirkukNow team. In the last quarter of 2022, with help of national and international advisers we redesigned KirkukNow's strategy for 2023-2026 and made changes in the administrative structure of the institution. Now KirkukNow has a three member board management (director, head of business development, and head of finance). Two members of the board out of three are female which includes the development officer, and the chief finance officer.

Furthermore, the advisory board of KirkukNow [includes two female members out of five members](#).

We have trained female journalists for our new outlet, the KirkukNow podcast, which will focus on the situation of women in the country. Four female members of our team will be trained by them on podcast production, sound engineering, graphic design, and the development of the communication section of KirkukNow. This project will be very useful for our team in terms of empowering the female members of KirkukNow. At the same time, as part of the project, KirkukNow will be assisted to set up a studio to produce podcasts.

Meanwhile, as part of the "Rooted in Trust" project with Internews, KirkukNow over the past eight months has trained 181 journalists across Iraq, among them 87 female journalists and female media workers. This is good news for female journalists and those women who work in the media sector in Iraq.

KirkukNow team worked with national and international bodies to provide high-quality journalism. Amar Aziz, a KirkukNow reporter in Duhok won "The best report on human rights in IKR prize" on December 10, 2022. The case study of the report is about an IDP girl who was born outside of marriage. Since KRG refuses to give identity to the girl no school accepts her as a student. The report is under the title; "[Lack of identity closed school doors in face of IDP kid](#)".



*First Prize for KirkukNow in a journalist competition*

Ahang Habib from KirkukNow team had been chosen by Internews to participate in the "Our voices" project by Internews to write about gender issues in IKR. On September 25, 2022, the report has been published on the project's website:

"Our Voices (Aswatouna). Elevating and Amplifying Women's Voices in Iraq."

Aswatouna (Our Voices) project is to empower women to participate equally as citizens and decision-makers by strengthening and expanding women's voices in Iraq. This program is designed to improve gender equality and empower women in Iraq and will also contribute to Internews' ongoing efforts globally to improve access to information as a root solution to enable

women and men to make informed decisions, participate in dialogue and stand up for their rights. The project was implemented by Internews and funded by Sweden's department of state.

Meanwhile, KirkukNow was invited for several meetings and roundtable discussions with local bodies and international diplomats, namely [US Consulate in IKR in Erbil on October 14, 2022](#). Salam Omar and Ahang Habib from KirkukNow team participated in a one-hour discussion about a range of political and economic issues, including the U.S. policy in Iraq & Iraqi Kurdistan Region and continued dialogue between GoI and KRG on outstanding issues, and freedom of speech in IKR.

## Cooperation

During 2022 KirkukNow worked with local and international bodies to help the team produce high-quality journalism in disputed areas of Iraq. Furthermore, we made partnerships with international bodies. With all the efforts the team made we achieved some positive changes.

In the scope of the Rooted in Trust project, we trained 181 journalists across Iraq, among them 87 female journalists and female media workers. Now we have a network of journalists who can work on health issues and have knowledge of fact-checking and rumors. They are working on health issues all around Iraq. Furthermore, beneficiaries of the project made changes and created success stories. Hangaw is one of the beneficiaries of the Rooted In Trust project. He worked with the team from the beginning, and at the end of the project he decided to change his career to a medical journalist. Kochar Aziz is another one of the beneficiaries. Her idea was to create an investigative report on the vaccine expiration process in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. She got the grant and published her report through KirkukNow platform on Nov 22, 2022. KRG was not helpful and created many obstacles for her while producing the report. They even did not give her the data formally. She had to go herself to the health directories of the provinces one by one to collect the data and assemble the big image. Kochar's report led to changes in KRG's procedures. It left KRG no choice, but to publish the data formally. On Dec 1, 2022 KRG officially published the data on expired vaccines.

In 2022, we spent four months working with national and international partners, workshops with the team, and focus groups. In December we successfully redesigned the strategy (2023-2026). We have a new administrative structure which will lead to better performance and bring new energy to the team. This will help us to have a better overview on the disputed areas and a better working plan for minorities, women, vulnerable community members, IDPs, and environment-related issues.

Reporting on the Covid-19 pandemic was one of the challenges facing our team because some of those people who have not decided to take and disregard the Corona vaccine have been distancing themselves from telling their stories about the Corona vaccine. Also some IDPs in the camps were afraid of their approach to the media because of their fear of consequences by the camp administrators. In certain refugee camps access to information from refugees was not easy. We had to go through a series of obstacles and security and administrative measures. It also had an impact on the planning process to complete the work as planned. It was agreed that the KRG's security clearance letter, as well as the approval of the administration, should have been issued regardless of the worker's identity. It took time.

Throughout our work in 2022, it has become clear that while covering the issue of vaccination for minorities, IDPs, and refugees, that fake news reaches and convinces the audience very fast on social media platforms, therefore, it is necessary that the media consider that fake and misleading news and correct them to the audience.

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# Articles and Media Coverage

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