

# Annual Report 2023



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Cover illustration: July 6<sup>th</sup>: Seminar about ways to prevent domestic violence and FGM in a village close to Kalar

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## Overview 2023

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Wadi continued its mission almost unhampered and even expanded in several areas, despite some increasingly challenging factors, like the continuing economic crisis, growing tensions in the region and a deteriorating security situation.

Our decentralized structure with many close partners cooperating in a non-hierarchical way has made us not only resilient to many challenges, but also more effective. Small local organizations with team members from the community benefit massively from high credibility and trust of the people.

In cooperation with Jinda and ShredUp, Wadi established a new plastic recycling center in Kabarto camp, Duhok. It is run independently by camp residents for camp residents. This achieves various goals: It combats widespread plastic waste pollution in and around the camps, raises environmental awareness among residents, creates sustainable job opportunities and promotes personal responsibility and self-ownership.

The "Living with FGM" program has reached a new stage with Dr. Mahmoody's publishing of a professional handbook for social workers on how to help women affected by FGM. Dr. Mahmoody wrote this comprehensive work based on his professional knowledge as a psychologist specialized in couple therapy and experience gained during the implementation of the program. The handbook will help new teams (whether from Wadi or other organizations) to build on the project's lessons learnt and make their sessions more effective.

The mobile playgrounds extended their activities to Erbil and the surrounding area where a third bus is now operating. Although Erbil is a booming capital city, certain quarters in the outskirts are very poor and neglected, as well as many villages nearby. Garmyan and Ranya playbuses continued to offer their services at remote schools and kindergartens. Every time we arrive in a village with our colorful vehicle, we see that joy in the eyes of the children and even the elderly. This gives us more than enough energy to keep our mission going.

# **WADI'S ACTIVITIES IN NUMBERS**

## **Support for Yazidi ISIS Survivors**

**724** direct beneficiaries, **3,250** indirect beneficiaries

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

**240** FGM awareness seminars with a total of **1,396** participants

**129** *Living with FGM* trainings with **711** participants

**10** media reports: **2** articles in international newspapers, **3** articles in Kurdish online publications, **5** TV reports

**93** women's rights seminars with **618** women and **72** men participants

**12** sewing training courses (15 days each) for a total of **249** women

## **Playbus Activities**

**170** villages visited, **4,488** children participated

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

**22** media publications: 2 international newspaper, **12** articles in Kurdish online publications, **10** TV reports



## Combating and Living with FGM

**The Combat and Living with FGM 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's 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 recent 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 encouraged to participate in specialized seminars, and although numbers were small they were consistent, showing that there is a space for growth.

In the 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. Tools for women and men living with FGM in villages that have rejected the practice of FGM have been established and refined. From the experience gathered so far, a comprehensive Living with FGM handbook for psychosocial assistance to survivors of FGM has been published. 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.

## FGM PREVENTION & AWARENESS PROGRAM

### Summary of awareness seminars:

The awareness seminars took place in Erbil and Rania where FGM is still being practiced.

The seminars 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 **240** trainings was offered, with **1,198** women and **198** 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.

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

As in the previous year, seminars for men were held once a month in both Erbil and Ranya. 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'. Participation of men remained small, but at least some were ready to talk about it. The teams noted stark differences between villages, as some were very open while in others the men refused completely.



## **LIVING WITH FGM PROGRAM**

Area of focus Garmyan & Halabja, where no new cases have been recorded since 2022

### **The sessions:**

In 2023, **705** women and **6** men 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 trainings in 2021 and 2022. The areas where seminars took place were villages where FGM is no longer practiced. Participants were 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 does not appear to condone FGM in any way or



send the message that 'it's 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.

### Living with FGM Handbook

This comprehensive manual was written by Dr. Mahmoody as a result of his three-year-long training within this project. Wadi's teams translated, layouted and printed the book which includes everything they learned about ways of living with FGM.

This book is specially made for team members that are a part of the Living with FGM program, but is also designed to provide future teams of other organizations with the knowledge and lessons learned required.

## TOT Trainings for Teams

### Training with Dr. Osman Mahmoody

Dr. Mahmoody is a specialized psychologist. who has been working closely with women affected by FGM. This extensive training lasted for two years via video sessions, tackling the most important issues, and equipping the teams with everything they need to start the project.

### Training with Dr. Nabaz

Dr. Nabaz specializes in psychotherapy for men. As the Living with FGM program was expanding. the need for men's involvement in the process became apparent. The training was very much appreciated and the teams required a follow-up training to face the next challenges.

### Training with Dr. Zangana

Dr. Goran Zangana is a member of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and is currently an acting consultant in acute medicine at NHS Scotland. This training dealt with the involvement of men in FGM, and the possible factors and history behind it.

### Training with Shatoo Kamaran, Wadi staff member

The training dealt with social work documentation, and how to document activities and create content from notes and recordings. Recommendations on how to manage and share content on social media were provided. Special consideration was given to the sensitivity of the project, i.e. the fact, that we are dealing with sensitive cases like FGM and domestic violence, where the victims have a right to privacy and confidentiality. When creating content for vulnerable women, we have to bear in mind that they might have limited ways of receiving awareness and seeking help.



*On Nov. 17 Wadi team member Isis Elgibali presented at the 'Best Practices and Challenges in Fighting Female Genital Mutilation' in Madrid, hosted by Medicos del Mundo and End FGM European Network.*

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



## Community-Based Plastic Recycling

**It has been two years since the opening of our first recycling centre in the Kurdish region of Iraq, and a lot has happened since then. Last November, another recycling centre was officially opened in collaboration with our local partner Jinda the Kabarto IDP camp in Duhok area, which means that a third centre is now operational alongside the centres in Halabja, which we run in collaboration with NWE, and Kifri.**

The focus of this project continues to be on raising awareness of the importance of environmental protection and sustainability, which is achieved through regular seminars in local schools, local community meetings and reports from local television stations. At the beginning of last year, school classes visited the two recycling centres in Kifri and Halabja, which were already in operation at the time, on a weekly basis and lectures were held at local schools with the same regularity. It had indeed become challenging to combine all the requests for partnerships with schools and all the requests for visits to the recycling centres with day-to-day business. Unfortunately, however, schools in the PUK-ruled region did not open for the new school year in autumn 2023 due to political disagreements, which made educational work more difficult at the end of the year.



*Recycling Center in Kifri, operated together with Rang Organisation*

As every setback is also a new opportunity and the project consists of other important facets in addition to educational work, the capacities freed up at the recycling centres in Halabja and Kifri were used to expand the recycling collection infrastructure and design new products.

Partnerships with local companies as well as local independent waste collectors have now supplemented the collection infrastructure at all three locations, which was previously very focussed on schools. It is great to see how the project continues to grow in this area and how people are recognising the opportunity to earn money by collecting recyclables and selling them to one of our centres.



### Kabarto, a Recycling Center in a Camp

The recycling project, which is being implemented in collaboration with our local partner Jinda at IDP Camp Kabarto, is also taking shape.

After a few collection bins were set up as part of a small pilot project in 2022 to find out how well this project idea was received by the camp community, the construction of a recycling centre began in May 2023. Even though the camp, which is home to around 20,000 Yazidis, has been in existence for eight years, there is still no waste management system worthy of the name. In the camp itself, the gravel roads and common areas are littered with plastic waste and piles of rubbish are literally piling up on the sides of the access road in front of the camp. The residents of the camp are longing for opportunities to improve their living conditions on their own as much as possible and are therefore very excited to finally be able to work on the problem of littering thanks to the recycling centre that opened in November.

### Future Outlook

One of the goals set is the profitability of pure recycling work. This includes everything apart from the costs incurred for educational work. We are still a few steps away from this goal, but little by little we are getting closer. Of course, selling the products created in the recycling centres is essential to achieving this goal. These are now regularly sold at a wide variety of local festivals. Here, the products were met with great enthusiasm, especially at the pomegranate festival held in Halabja. There are also initial partnerships with cafés in Sulaymaniyah which display and sell the products.

The individual actors involved in the three recycling centres are also increasingly networking across regions. Quality and diversity of the products benefit greatly from the fact that creative

work is being carried out in parallel at three locations. The experience gained here is then naturally passed on, allowing everyone to learn from mistakes and benefit from good ideas. This also means that the independence and sustainability of the project is constantly being strengthened. For the installation of the first recycling centre machine in Kabarto Camp, the team engineer from Kifri travelled to Dohuk to show the local team everything they need to know about operating and maintaining the machine. In August 2022, the Yazidi recycling team also visited the environmental projects of our partners NWE and Shred Up in Halabja to gain further inspiration for their work in the camp. Both visits were extremely positive and everyone involved learnt a lot from them.

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



## No to Violence! Campaign

**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.



*July 6th: Seminar in the Garmyan village of Chama Bismila about ways to fight domestic violence and FGM*

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, 13 schools have committed themselves to stop beating and abuse of children by teachers. They became 'Violence-free schools'. Additionally, 15 village communities have declared themselves 'violence-free' which includes violence in the families and violence against women and children.

### The Method

Wadi's teams select their target for change very precisely. They watch over the school and interact with the students, trying to pinpoint the issues and start working on them. The teams would select a school and constantly visit them until they formed a close enough relationship with the committee to make a change. Eventually, the school is declared free of violence.

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.

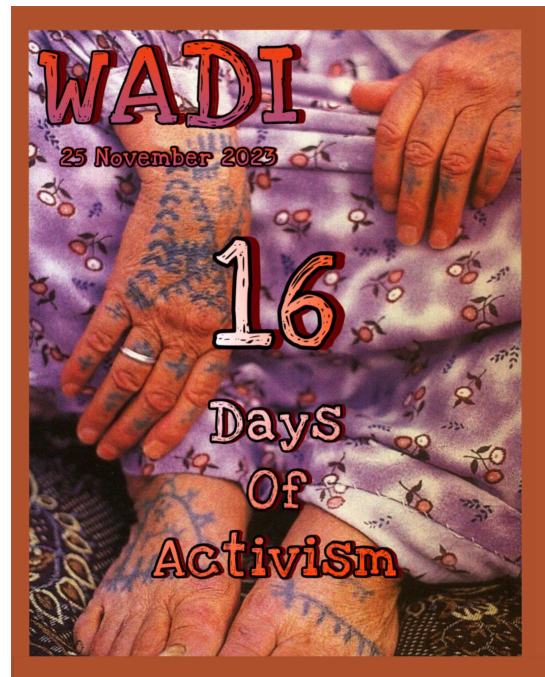
Strategies are adapted and vary from one school to another. Generally, the teams tackle the issue slowly and indirectly, with group activities, plays, videos, seminars, and so on. As for the teacher and parents, a more direct approach is used. The campaign also includes providing stationaries and necessities for some schools that are in dire need. We are reconciling in tribal issues related to students and teachers, and helping students emotionally and/or legally who face violence. For Wadi's team in Duhok which is working in the camp schools, these issues are rather common.

### 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 10th 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.

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



*The 16 Days of Activism is an annual campaign that begins on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs through International Human Rights Day on December 10th.*



domestic violence, promoting non-violent education and offering non-violent conflict resolution trainings for students at the camp schools.

### Work in the camps

In 2023 Duhok team were requested by a number of camp managements, in particular Khanke, Domez, Sharya and Essian camps, to do awareness raising activities as they have trouble reaching out to students themselves and asked our team to help them strengthening their relationship with the students and in a way to become a bridge between the school management and the students.

Therefore, the team conducted a series of activities and meetings with students in the camps mentioned above and addressed the issue of the decrease of students' performance at school in the first course of their school year despite the teachers' commitment to the lessons.

Meetings with the teaching staff were also conducted to look for a solution. The teachers were advised to reach out to the students' parents to work more on the issue.

The teachers' view on the issue was that due to lack of consequences and respect the student's performance dropped since last year. The team worked a lot on decreasing the use of corporal punishment in educational systems and in particular in the camp schools.



The team also reached out to the parents. They said that one major problem they are facing is phone screen time, *"Children nowadays are always on their phones, talking with their friends through social media or playing video games which creates lack of concentration and desire to do well at school"*. They also mentioned that they themselves lack knowledge when it comes to dealing with teenagers and how to help them adapt to the change they experience.

Other issues that were raised through Wadi activities were that 42 students dropped out of school during this year because of their families' financial struggles and leaving school to work in the camp to provide for their families.

Another matter that was addressed was environment protection and the current situation of the global crisis when it comes to climate changes and its prominent effects on endangered countries like Iraq.

Sexual harassment and domestic violence were also the topics the team mentioned in their activities, as the last statistics shows about 327 reported cases of harassment have been recorded only in Khanke camp in one month, for both sexes, and most of the victims are teenagers and children. Wadi team met with the teaching staff at the school camps, in particular Khanke camp, to discuss the issue of child molestation and the families' fear of reporting the molesters, as the children will be exposed to defamation. The school director asked to visit some families and educate them about the issue of sexual violence and its danger on children.

The team also visited the Essian camp school and gave an awareness seminar to male and female students there on how to protect themselves and report cases of harassment. He gave them the number of a police station in the camp so that they could communicate with them directly.

School stationaries were also provided for those camp schools that needed the help and did not receive assistance from civil society organization or government.

Aside from their usual activities, Wadi also participated in regular organizations meetings with the camp administration to address the pressing matters at the camps. They also helped in referring cases they encountered to other organizations and participated in capacity building trainings set to improve their capability in aiding the camp community.

The team also helped with various donation projects, particularly crowd donation for the Turkey and Syria earthquake with the help of Essian school administration. Additionally, they helped in collecting donations for a cancer patient.

During the anniversary of the Yazidi genocide, Wadi participated in many activities which were organized by the families of the victims, survivors, civil society organizations, as well as the Yazidi community. Prominently along with 45 other related organizations a demonstration was carried out asking the government to expedite the removal of remains from the mass graves.

### **Work in Sinjar**

Wadi team was asked again to become a mediator between teachers and students to aid in solving pressing issues.

On top of the list were a case of a teacher from Dastan school and one of the fifth-grade students by the name M. who was acting disrespectfully towards one of the teachers as some witnesses stated. When M. spoke in an inappropriate manner, the teacher expelled him from class as a punishment. Subsequently he went missing for two days. They later found out he joined a militia. He had told the militias about what happened and they started to threaten the teacher. The family of the student was also threatening the teacher, accusing him of driving the child to such path. Our team then informed the local authorities and arranged for the teacher to take a leave from the school till the issue is solved.

In the light of the situation, the team started holding awareness raising seminars for students in Sinjar regarding the danger of joining militia armed groups.

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



## Mobile Playgrounds

**In 2023, the mobile playgrounds extended their activities to Erbil and the surrounding area where a third bus is now operating. The playbuses in Garmyan and Ranya continued to offer their service at remote schools and kindergartens.**

All 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, isolated places in the mountains of Ranya and, since June 1st, also to neglected villages and quarters in and around the capital Erbil. Villages with high percentage of refugee/IDP populations are preferred visits.

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 playbus 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

Playbus 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.

After some exuberant playing, Wadi's team members call them in for a short break time. On this occasion they sometimes ask them about their feelings and the problems they face, such as bullying in school or abuse from teachers or parents. The children know they can trust the teams and talk openly.

From time to time, the teams also organize group discussions about the environment, insects, trees or even the universe.



The games offered are tailored to the psychology of children of various ages:

- For toddlers (ages 1-3) the playbus has many colorful memory games, like simple puzzles and picture books.
- For preschoolers (ages 3-5) there is a variety of energetic and mobility games that challenge their physical development.
- For school-aged children (ages 5-10) the playbus provides an array of competitive and engaging group games, since in this age group children start to form their personality and traits.
- As for teenagers (ages 11-17), this group is encouraged to participate in creative activities where they are invited to explore various arts and crafts like painting, jewelry making, crafting, and singing.

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 new playbus in Erbil, inaugurated on June 1st, World Children's Day*



*This was made possible thanks to the support of the German Consulate General Erbil*

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 2023, the Mobile Playgrounds have visited **170** villages, some of them multiple times. Approximately **4,488** children benefited.

The 2023 playbus project aimed to reconnect children with the environment. Games that use natural materials help to repair the broken relationship between children and nature.

Last year, we prepared a booklet full of environmental games for this purpose. The booklet was now extensively used. We also continued to use our self-developed environmental brochures and insect cards.

Apart from the environment, the playbus 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.

Frequently, children approached team members and asked them for help and comfort with problems they were facing. This gives the teams an opportunity to assist and mediate directly, and it helps us to understand what the children need most in terms of awareness and education.

While the children are having a good time, the parents also gather around the playbus, watching their children play while they sip tea. For many women who barely get some time for themselves, or are not even allowed to go out unless they can give a good reason (like watching their children), this is an excellent opportunity to catch a break and mix with others.

While they do, Wadi's teams also talk to them. They highlight the importance of playing for children, how parents can support their kids, about the dangers of smartphones for kids, and many other issues.

## Challenges

In April, Meningitis spread in the Garmyan region, a virus that mostly affects children. It causes inflammation and swelling of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. Parents were very cautious with their children, as this virus is highly contagious. As Wadi, we had to take extra precautions. We rose awareness regarding the virus, provided masks and sanitizers, and made it mandatory for the children while they played. Thankfully, by the end of the year it was completely under control.

Certainly, smartphones and the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly influenced children's social interactions and participation in programs. The combination of increased screen time due to remote learning, limited in-person social interactions, and the omnipresence of smartphones has affected children's social development, potentially contributing to heightened social anxiety. For the playbus, these factors posed significant obstacles. This project thrives on in-person interaction and group activities. While virtual programs can offer some engagement, they might not sufficiently address the social and emotional development needs of children, leading to feelings of isolation and anxiety.

## Participants comments

*"There is a game field in the village, however, the boys completely occupied the space. Every day after school the boys go there and play football. But today, unlike other days, all the girls and boys played together in that field because of the playbus".*

Hasty Hussain, 13, said, *"I play with my friends outside all the time, but my parents and neighbors shame me for it all the time. they say I'm a grown woman and my breasts are*

*popping I shouldn't be playing. But I want to play, I still feel like a child. today I played with the other kids without peer pressure from my parents"*

*"I'll buy these puzzles for my children, though, i have to say I'm mostly buying them for myself. As a child, I was deprived of these games. I want to go with the children and play now",* said one of the teachers supervising the students as they play.

*"When I heard the play bus was coming I slept soon so I could be wide awake tomorrow. Wadi's games are a childhood memory for me, I'm 12 now, but I have been participating in the play buss since I was a little child",* said Rawand Muhamad.

Khurasan Majid, 51, said, *"I'm very happy to see my grandkids finely playing outside and getting away from that damn iPhone. They will remember this when they grow up."*

Anas Kaiwan, 9, said, *"I like making bracelets with beads. I wish I could wear them myself. but my father doesn't let me. He says it's for girls, so I make them for my sisters"*

Harme Atta, 8, said, *"This is the second time in my life trying a slide. The first time I went to the city with my aunt and went on the slide, it was the best day of my life. And today is the second best day of my life"*

*"When I grew up I have dart board games only seen on TV. Only the lucky children had a ball to play with. I don't care if they make fun of me, I will play with the dart board",* said a 42-years-old man who was accompanying his son.



*This project is implemented by Wadi's partner ADWI and supported by Roselo Foundation, the Consulate General of Germany and Wadi private donations.*





## Women's Rights Awareness and Economic Independence

**Wadi offered a number of sewing training courses for women in the Iraqi Kurdish areas of Halabja and Garmyan, combined with awareness raising sessions focused on women's rights.**

In the often-overlooked and remote regions of Garmyan and Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan, many women are deprived of basic rights of education and healthcare. Despite the rich cultural tapestry and resilience of its people, these regions have faced significant challenges, particularly in terms of gender equality and economic empowerment. The concept of women's rights is largely unknown. In some areas, female genital mutilation (FGM) is still prevalent. However, through strategic interventions such as seminar sessions and capacity-building training, particularly in skills such as sewing, a glimpse of hope emerges, promising to reshape the socio-economic landscape.

This project focused on the importance of education, skill development, and community engagement. It was designed to provide vocational trainings which would help the women economically, and to use the established access to the women by raising awareness on women's rights as well. The trainings and seminars were of course free of charge for the participants.

Each month a training was held in a different place with different participants, in total **12** trainings.

The locations of the trainings were carefully selected: Areas with no learning centers, far from city center were mainly targeted because women there need more skills to be less dependent on husbands and families. Also women's right to work is a less common concept there.

The participants had 14 days of training, and on the 15th they would show their products in a small event celebrating the ending of the course. These 15 days were conducted over the course of one month.

In addition to building skills, these training courses were also a kind of window for women to show themselves, get in touch with each other, and form group therapy sessions.

The group therapy sessions were part of the awareness raising and women empowerment. Alongside the trainings, the teams gave eight sessions, each in different areas. These sessions centered around women rights, domestic abuse, education, arranged marriage, child labor, women health and FGM.

For the first six months of 2023, the surrounding villages of Garmyan received sewing training programs, while villages in Halabja received seminars. From July to December, Halabja was receiving sewing trainings, and Garmyan the awareness sessions. In total, **93** group sessions with **618** women and **72** men participants were held.



## Comments

- A male participant from Gwla Khan village, said, *“Women are weird, one day they’re fine and the other day they flip 180 degrees. Once I go home, children keep asking me for favors, that’s why men prefer to stay at work. Women and children are so demanding”*.

- One of the other men said, *“I completely disagree, the best time is the time I spend with my family. Women and children get upset and demand things from you because you’re rarely present, so once they see you, they tell you what they want. Same as for women, she’ll be dissatisfied if you’re constantly unavailable”*.

• Zhyan, Wadi's sewing trainer, said, *"Although it was quite challenging to finish this training because most of the women are illiterate, I'm happy they chose this village as they were very reactive and passionate for learning a new skill"*.

• *"I remember the midwife of our area, she would come with a sack of razors and ashes in one hand and an empty sack on the other hand. Back then people gave wheat and rice instead of money to the midwives, so she wouldn't leave until her razor sack is empty and her reward sack is full. After she's done for the day, she would invite herself to a house in the village for dinner, and call it a day"*.

• *"I have graduated five years ago, I couldn't find a proper job opportunity, I'm so grateful that after five years I'm learning a new skill that could potentially be a career,"* said Shahan tahir, 25 years old girl who was participating from a nearby village.

• *"I never thought I could make something like this, I feel like I found a natural talent in me. Although I have a six-month-old newborn, I still managed to participate. I was very excited about this,"* said a newly mother.

• Roshna Muhammad, 23, said, *"My brother forced me to drop out in fourth grade, he beat me and beat me until I couldn't resist. So, I gave up the dream of being a teacher. But now I have another chance of fulfilling my dream of having an independent income. My husband is very poor and he was so happy that I participated in this course he promised to look after the kids when I'm not home. He also promised to buy me a sewing machine when he saw me working very hard for it"*.

• *"I have lived in this village for very long, never have I seen as much violence and absurd behavior like now. The thing is, we are dealing with environmental and financial issues, which is creating unemployment. Therefore we cannot get married. Also we have easy access to social media. This makes young people leaning towards haram and internet relationships (sexting). And this leads to more violence from the parents and the young boys as well,"* said 46 years old Tuba Qadir.

• *"I really like sewing, I don't care that I'm the only male here, I want to be able to sew things for my mother. I'm a student in winter, but in summer we come back here, so I want to spend my time learning a hobby,"* said Ayat Faysal.

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

## Support for Yazidi ISIS Survivors

Almost 10 years after the Daesh genocidal attacks on the Yazidi people, the situation for the people remains dire. Most of them do not see any other option than to stay in the camps because their home places keep being dangerous. Jinda Center is supporting the survivors - women, girls and kids from different ages and areas - with various services and social and medical support.

**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, see also page 12 of this report. Plastic waste stays a major concern in the camps, and this project may provide

some relief.

### Recycling campaign in the camps

The pilot project began in August 2022 and ended in March 2023 as a response to the high level of waste especially in the camps and its effects on the people living in such environment where diseases can easily transfer and effects the health of the camp community. Many cleaning campaigns have been taken before but with only short period of a time the camp is again polluted with all kinds of waste.



In April 2023, Jinda officially started with implementing the project by opening a recycling center in Kabarto camp. 6 girls from the camp community of Kabarto 1 and 2 camps are now managing the center, along with one technician. The project generated employment opportunities for girls through involvement in awareness-raising campaigns and operational roles at the recycling center. The recycling center serves as a focal point for plastic waste management activities. It is equipped with compress, shredder and milling machines to process various types of plastic waste effectively. Trained staff, including local girls, are overseeing daily operations, ensuring efficient collection, segregation, and recycling of plastic materials. The team organizes regular awareness-raising seminars and educational sessions within the camp. These sessions are

covering topics such as the detrimental effects of plastic pollution on the environment and human health, the importance of recycling, and practical tips for waste reduction. The project team have been trained by Jinda Project management staff and Halabja Recycling Center staff.



Suaad, one of the camp residents, reported: *"I never realized the impact of our everyday actions until we started collecting plastic. Now, seeing the mountains of plastic waste shrink as we recycle gives me hope that we can make a difference in our environment."* The success of this initiative relies on collaboration with local authorities (Camp Managements of both Kabarto 1 and 2), NGOs, and media including Kanal 4, NRT, VOA, RUDAW, ALHURAA, ALSharqya, War TV, Duhok TV and Khane. This project is supported by BMZ.

### Increasing women's capacity to participate in decision-making and public roles

This project is funded by UN-WOMEN and WPHF, beneficiaries are IDPs from Shingal and Mosul and Host community of Dohuk. It takes place in the form of skills-building workshops designed to increase women's capacity, confidence and willingness to participate in decision-making and public roles. 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.

The project creates local women councils that 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. Two councils have been created, consisting of qualified women who have participated in the previous workshops, ensuring increased coordination and communication between women to support structural inclusion and create positive gender norms. The project aims to increase coordination and communication among women to discuss, support and learn from and with each other and to promote the role of women in public roles. Subsequently, these councils will provide women with a platform through which they can express their concerns and issues, which in turn the councils will communicate and coordinate to other relevant stakeholders such as local authorities and service providers. Moreover, the councils also set out to promote the role of women in decision making, increase visibility of women in public roles and provide access for women to essential services. In creating these councils, we formalize and institutionalize gender balanced representation structures that will continuously seek to promote the role and visibility of women in decision making. Besides providing women with the necessary skills, the project also provides them with a platform through which they can structurally and increasingly promote women's participation, rights and public roles. Their work and visibility will increase recognition and legitimacy among the different communities and local authorities. Through this increased recognition and formalized structure, women representatives have a higher chance of being involved in decision-making and coordination.

## Vocational trainings for survivors from Sharia and Khanki camps

Jinda trained 24 women and girls on mobile maintenance and programming. This new skill had been requested by the girls and women. They really like this idea and have been very creative and fast learners.

Mobile Maintenance shops have not been opened by women before because the community did not support such projects before. So Jinda wants to support such a project to break the routine and encourage ladies to own such shops. After that three ladies will be selected to own one shop near to their residence. Jinda organized the training and all its needs by coordinating with camp managements and government offices. It is in direct contact with the beneficiaries and organized the establishment of the shop and all its requirements from electricity, water, health etc. Jinda started with informing the camp community about its new training course after receiving the approval from the camp management and government offices to conduct the trainings. The idea of the project is new and many girls were interested in learning this new skill to practice at home and to have the ability to start their business. The project staff of Jinda organization organized three groups, each group consisting of eight women and girls from Sharya and Khanki camp focusing on survivors from ISIS.

The survivors are very sensitive after the traumatic experience they have faced. The Jinda social worker worked closely with each of the participants and also had a group session for encouraging them to do their best and leaving their circumstances and bad memories behind. The main goal of the project is to teach the women a new skill and to give them new hope in life, especially the survivors from Daesh captivity, and to strengthen their self-trust. The project will give them the opportunity to be financially independent and to merge with the community to be able to go out from the camp atmosphere and to work in the city. The specific goal of the project is to teach the women a new skill of mobile maintenance and programming by experts in these fields and to give the job opportunity of opening one shop for three qualified participants to work and to be financially independent so that they can support their families. The other participants received tool kits for practicing their skill at home. The project was funded by MC MC.

## Awareness on women's rights for IDPs and host communities

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) victims, implementing local authorities and religious and tribal leaders lack the sufficient knowledge regarding the rape and harassment laws. GBV victims struggle to reengage in the community activities which mean that many of them have the chance to be isolated and lack the access to the necessary mental tools. Jinda and Qobahan Organizations conducted 18 training sessions for women leaders to enhance their communication skills and GBV based-knowledge to better participate in decision making process on local and national level. This will lead to enhance the current legislations and provide better scope for victims of violence to participate in peace and decision making. They also conducted workshops and brought victims of violence, women leaders, religious and tribal leaders, and relevant authorities' representatives to review the current GBV legislations and amend them

accordingly to align with international human rights and women's rights. These workshops have been conducted in camps and host communities' areas.

Additionally, Jinda and Qobahan conducted digital security training for young men and women on how to better protect themselves online from being harassed from predators. Jinda and Qobahan also conducted security session on how to use two authentication layers to increase their social media account security. In addition to establishment of Dohuk Network for peace and women affairs that includes 16 members of the active NGOs in Dohuk area for the aim of better collaboration among NGOs working in Dohuk.



*On June 1st, World Children's Day, Jinda Organization held this event in Khanke Camp for Yazidi IDPs.*

### Support for women and girls from IDPs and host community

In 2023, Jinda was delighted to start the new collaboration with Caravan of Humanity NGO who had supported Jinda's mission previously in many activities including distribution of Humanitarian aid from clothes, toys, blankets, hygiene materials, stationary, handicraft materials, sewing machines, computer and shoes. With the financial support Jinda has been able to open sewing courses for women, organize upcycling of clothes and handicraft training courses for women and girls from IDPs and host community. Supported by Caravan, Jinda celebrated international children's day and opened an exhibition for women and girls in Dohuk for the occasion of "16 days of activism" against gender based violence.

*Jinda is also supported by Roselo Foundation.*

## Support for Refugees in Lesbos/Greece

Since 2019, Wadi has been supporting refugee self-organization in Lesbos, Greece. The refugee self-organized entity Moria White Helmets (MWH) is active across many areas of need, such as recycling, environmental protection, cleaning, electrical maintenance, education, barbershop services, tailoring, beauty salon offerings, and workshop assistance.

The Moria White Helmets refugee self-help organization continued activities throughout 2023 with 64 dedicated members from within the camp population. Here is an overview on their major initiatives in the past year:

### Waste Management



The Moria White Helmets (MWH) refugee volunteer group continued its critical waste management and recycling efforts in the Movrovouni Camp on Lesbos island in 2023. Out of 65 total members, 22 dedicated members worked on waste management activities across the camp and surrounding areas. Rubbish collection occurred 3 days per week, resulting in the collection of approximately 100-150 bags per month. The MWH team also conducted special rubbish collection drives focused on assisting the local community. These special collections included cleaning the streets inside and outside the camp, collecting empty plastic bottles and aluminum cans, and cleaning local beaches. Through their consistent community-focused waste



management efforts, the MWH team helped maintain a cleaner, more sustainable environment both in the camp and across Lesbos.

## Electric

The capable electrical team of the MWH operated on-call 24/7 throughout 2023, working diligently in collaboration with the camp's technical department upon request. The electricians also repaired various electrical outlets and maintained the electrical systems of individual housing units and tents for camp residents. Their critical repair efforts helped ensure continuous operation of vital electrical infrastructure across the camp.



## Education

Access to education remains a major challenge for asylum-seekers on Lesbos island. To help address this pressing issue, the dedicated MWH team provided both formal and informal educational support and capacity-building assistance to camp residents in 2023. They worked closely alongside existing formal education channels to minimize the number of children falling behind in schools due to lack of academic support. Approximately 50 students participated in supplementary English, Farsi, and Arabic children's classes offered by the MWH weekly. Additionally, some 20 adult residents attended informal classes focused on core subjects. The team also offered supplemental instruction in art, music, and mathematics led by 6 qualified teacher-volunteers from within the camp population. Through offering complementary educational opportunities, the MWH helped improve educational outcomes and skill-building for numerous students of all ages residing in the camp.

## Barbershop



The MWH barbershop continued operation in 2023 as a critical source of safe and dignified basic hygiene services for men and boys in the camp environment. Maintained by 8 capable resident barbers and assistants, the barbershop remained open 6 days per week from morning to early evening, providing essential haircuts and shaves to approximately 100 male camp residents per week. As inadequate sanitation infrastructure persists in refugee camps across Greece, the MWH barbershop has become a clean and consistent alternative for men to maintain proper hygiene and self-care.

## Beauty Salon

Responding to the needs of the community, the MWH team launched a dedicated women's beauty salon activity in 2023. Located in the camp and maintained by 6 trained female resident volunteers, the weekly beauty salon offers critical hair, nail, and makeup services to women and girls staying in the camp. As a safe and communal space run by women for women, the salon provides an empowering opportunity for female residents to focus on self-care despite the hardship of life in a refugee camp. Since opening, the service has received enthusiastic engagement from women and children looking for support with personal beauty needs.



## Workshop

The capable 8-person strong workshop team continued camp repair and construction assistance throughout 2023. Equipped with the necessary tools and skills, the hardworking handymen helped conduct approximately 100 bicycle repairs monthly in addition to performing urgent alterations on housing accommodations per camp resident requests. Through volunteering their broad maintenance capabilities, the workshop team delivered helpful hands-on support with infrastructure upkeep across the camp.



## Sewing and Tailor Shop

Operational throughout 2023, the MWH's on-site sewing and tailor shop assisted residents in adapting, fixing, and creating clothing items using 5 sewing machines manned by capable resident tailors and seamstresses. By providing customized mending services that extend the useful life of garments, the initiative helped reduce textile waste and unnecessary production of refuse in the camp. It additionally supported individuals in maintaining clothing that properly fits their needs. Through volunteering their handy skills, the sewing team delivered helpful hands-on support meeting localized community apparel needs.

## Administration and Logistics

The dedicated 4-person administration and logistics team of the MWH (2 logistic members and 2 translators) continued coordination support for the organization's activities in 2023. Key duties included maintaining positive working dynamics, providing task instructions, holding weekly progress meetings, addressing problems, exchanging best practices, registering members, producing reports, and ensuring cooperative teamwork across the initiative. The team provided the essential glue keeping the volunteer organization running cohesively to maximize positive community impact.

Through leveraging their diverse skills and collaborative spirits to uplift their community, the MWH team delivered aid and empowerment to those in need while setting an example of service and leadership under hardship. The initiative provides a powerful model of refugees helping refugees that kindles hope for the future.

*This initiative is supported by Solingen hilft e.V., ShowerPower and Wadi private donations.*

# 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.



## Daily Program

- Daily broadcasting for eight 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.
- Daily awareness and discussions about health, human rights, women's rights, FGM, children rights, refugees in Iraq and Syria, environment transformation, electricity and water
- Private announcements, "lost & found"

## 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.
- Sport Nwe: This program focuses on the national and international sport news, 44 programs were presented.
- Zhingakaman: A weekly live program which is hosting various experts to discuss environmental topics and provide awareness. 23 programs were presented.
- Simay parezga: is a live program. 13 programs were presented. The program is centered around issues of Halabja Governorate.



- 16 programs about 16 days of activism against women on November 25.
- Rahezan is a weekly program for students, which is prepared and published by teachers and students of Shahid Azad Hawrami School, for talking about improving students and study.
- In the framework of Masaruna Project a series of programs on family planning implemented by Nwe Organization in Halabja province. 6 programs were presented.
- By Hawrami is a program dedicated to talking about the history and culture of Hawraman village. By Hawrami is a special program in Hawrami language monthly twice prepared in Radio Dangi Nwe. 24 programs were presented.
- Short topics: environment information, science, economy and health

## Other Activities

On January 19, 2023, Radio Dangi Nwe warmly welcomed Mr. Irvin Hicks, Consul General US in Erbil to Halabja and interviewed him. Mr. Hicks highlighted U.S. support for human rights, women's empowerment and media freedom.

On the occasion of International Women's Day on the 8th of March, Radio Dangi Nwe presented three programs about women's issues in Halabja.

A member of Radio Denge Nwe received the Giving Joy award for her radio program: "Rangeen Salam Mahmood uses radio programs and spots to reach a broad audience to raise awareness of women's issues in Iraq. Rangeen plans to use the Giving Joy grant to produce four radio programs that delve into the challenges women face in Iraq. The radio programs started airing on Radio Dange NWE, a community-based radio station that reaches 80,000 listeners. In addition to the radio programs, Rangeen will produce ten radio spots to raise awareness of women's rights protection policies"<sup>1</sup>.

A member of Radio Denge Nwe participated in a meeting with US Consul General Mark Stroh in Erbil to discuss press freedom and freedom of expression.

A member of Nwe met with US Consulate General staff while she participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program, International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). (#IVLP) #USCGERBIL

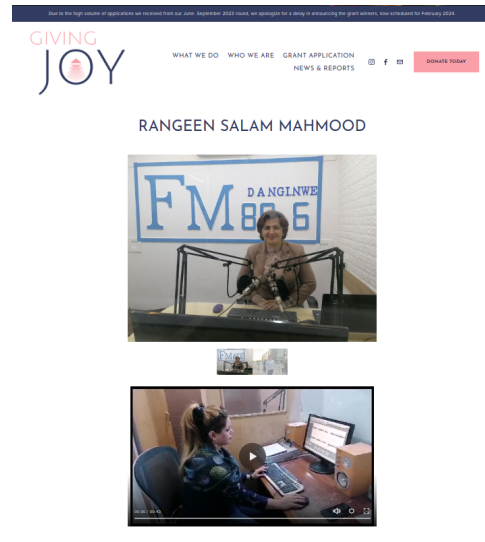
On 5th October 2023, a member of Radio Denge Nwe participated in an event to celebrate the Day of German Unity. Thanks to the Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany for the invitation.

On November 8, 2023, part of Nwe Organization staff had a meeting in Erbil with the Consulate General of the Netherlands about the situation of Halabja Governorate in general and women in particular, as well as the work and activities that the Nwe organization has done in Halabja.

They were very pleased to hear about the activities carried out by Nwe organization and reaffirmed that they always support civil activities, especially those benefiting women and children.

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.*



<sup>1</sup> [https://givingjoygrants.org/grantees/rangeensalammahmood?fbclid=IwAR34ANAXrGAAx0C2wHX08E0F9fM-Pt1QJBpOtxveS7\\_kvKFlcLQjDtC0C5A](https://givingjoygrants.org/grantees/rangeensalammahmood?fbclid=IwAR34ANAXrGAAx0C2wHX08E0F9fM-Pt1QJBpOtxveS7_kvKFlcLQjDtC0C5A)

## 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 2023

The main focus of the team during 2023 was to achieve the goals of KirkukNow’s new strategy for 2023-2026. KirkukNow’s team spent three months of discussions, surveys, workshops, and consultations with KirkukNow staff, stakeholders, partners, local and foreign media, and organizational experts to revise its strategy. On Nov 14, 2022, the strategic workshop to revise the strategy was held, and on Jan 8, 2023, the strategy was approved.

The new strategy is the harvest of eleven years of journalistic work and intensive discussions by our staff, journalists and partners who have extensive experience with the “disputed territories” as defined in Iraq’s permanent constitution. This strategy emphasizes making the most of our journalist skills and resources, serving the population of these areas, and establishing a professional media landscape. According to the new strategy, KirkukNow’s production lines include content production, capacity building, consultancy, and content selling. The team has worked to reach the goals of the strategy.



There are several main goals that the team tried to reach in 2023, one of them is to improve the outreach of the outlet to the local communities in Iraq disputed territories including religious and ethnic minorities, women, and IDPs. For example, 40 days before the Iraq provincial council

elections started an advocacy to promote the female candidates of the provincial council elections to empower women and give them a voice during the election advocacy. The team produced more than 10 short videos explaining the electoral program of the female candidates. This is despite continuing to implement its gender policy while content production and covering women`s issues in relation to climate change and environmental-related issues. Another focus point is showing the success stories of women in society. KirkukNow gave great space to women during content production. IDPs and displaced people were another focus area of KirkukNow during content production. KirkukNow`s team covered IDPs in several angles including, their condition in the camps, their demands, how to return to their original places, and their position in the past provincial council election. For example, KirkukNow Feb 2, 2023, KirkukNow did a follow-up on the six months given to the IDPs in Kurdistan region camps to return home and the amount of the grant provided for them to return home as part of the awareness content the team produces of the DDPs. Another example is covering them during the provincial councils election in Iraq. On Nov 16, 2023, KirkukNow produced content on the demands of the Yazidi IDPs to participate in the election. The summary of the report is, that the IDPs of Shingal (Sinjar) district, home to the Ezidi (Yazidi) community are participating in the upcoming Nineveh provincial council elections to implement three demands, the main of which is to return to their homeland. Moreover, KirkukNow`s team showed the success stories of IDPs. Religious and ethnic minorities in the disputed territories are also areas of concern for KirkukNow team and part of the strategy to cover them. The team covered the problems of both, their role and position in the provincial election of Iraq, the threats to them, and their situation inside the IDP camps.

## Funding

Securing more sources of revenue is another line KirkukNow`s team worked to secure more grants and sources of income. According to KirkukNow`s strategy Content selling, capacity building, and consultancy are considered new sources of collecting income. The team has worked on all of them. For example, on Feb 5, 2023, KirkukNow`s Newsletter launched. Among the 275 people who received the Newsletter, 22 people subscribed. The Newsletter will be free for three months, then the subscribers are required to pay for it. In addition, KirkukNow started selling content to other media outlets and institutions. For example on Dec 28, KirkukNow sold one of its contents to Justice Network for Prisoners in Iraq (JNP). KirkukNow started accepting advertisements, on Oct 2023 KirkukNow started accepting advertisements from Kirkuk branch of Carrefour company, Hiwa foundation, and TipTop fast-food restaurant Another source of income KirkukNow secured is by consultancy. On Mar 1, 2024 KirkukNow will start a new project in partnership with Internews. The name of the project is Media Resilience. Team will do consultancy job with Internews during the project.



## Freedom of Speech

Monitoring freedom of speech is another focus point of KirkukNow`s team. Under the [Free Press] section the team monitored the cases related to press freedom and freedom of expression in North Iraq. For example, On October 25, Suleiman Ahmed, 35, a news editor in the Arabic section of the Rozhnews Agency, was arrested at the Fishkhabur (Semilka) Syria-Iraqi Kurdistan Region IKR border crossing, while returning from northeast Syria to the IKR. He disappeared for five days before the Dohuk Asayish (security) announced Ahmed was detained by them. KirkukNow did three follow-ups of the case. And, monitoring the case of Idris Masoud (Idris the baker) who has been arrested by Erbil security forces who participated in the protests of the bakery owners who gathered on Monday, January 8, in front of the Erbil Governorate building to protest against the decision to reduce the price of bread so that 10 loaves of bread instead of eight to be sold for one thousand Iraqi dinars IQD (USD0.3). Moreover, the team continues monitoring Badidan detainee's case developments. In addition to the work the team does in the section, since Dec 2023 the team has been working on further expanding the section. The plan is to divide section no into two parts; monitoring and media development. In the first sub-section the team monitors freedom of expression and in the second subsection provides journalists with free resources for capacity building.

## Safety

The safety of the team both psychologically and digitally is another main concern of the team, which is why the team participated in two days of capacity-building training on safety for journalists, starting from Oct 16, 2023, to Oct 17, 2023. The training was part of the "Breaking The Silence" project by Free Press Unlimited and UNESCO Iraq. KirkukNow was one of the local partners of the project. The team also participated in a webinar on the same topic in the scope of the same project on Aug 14, 2023.

## Main lessons learned and opportunities

There have been several key lessons learned during 2023. KirkukNow has produced 11 in-depth reports on cases related to freedom of expression and press freedom because the team thinks that the situation is critical when it comes to freedom of expression in Iraq. Moreover, the team decided to expand the free press section and divide into two sections [Monitoring and Capacity building] to be able to cover the situation and provide journalists with free resources. Another lesson learned is related to the election. On Dec 18, 2023 provincial election in Iraq was held. The case for Kirkuk was different because it had been 18 years since the last election in the city. With the development of social media and fake news, a new generation that never participated in an election, division of the Kurdish pole in the city, minorities running for election, increase in the number of female candidates never been an easy election to cover. The team covered the election from different angles. For example, the team produced in-depth reports on the position

of minorities in the election, the importance of participation of the new generation in the election, and how to vote, empowering female candidates, and success stories of successful candidates from minority groups, the changes may the city witness in the future because of the election,...etc. As for the post-election now the team is covering the formation of the provincial council and electing a new governor including the governor of Kirkuk. The team learned that (1) the political equation changed, the needs of the new generation changed, and with the development of social media and fake news we need to be more accurate. Moreover, (2) we need to do fact-checking for the information we gather and publish. (3) We need more teams to cover an election in the disputed territories.

Another lesson the team learned during the first reporting period is about the environmental changes that happened as a result of climate change in Iraq. After Ahang Hussein Habib (journalist and head of business development of KirkukNow) participated in COP28 (1) we learned how to find a local angle for an international problem since climate change is a global issue. (2) We need more capacity-building training for the team on the coverage of climate change in the country. (3) we learned how to cover the position of women in climate change issues, and how important it is to cover gender-related issues concerning climate change in the country. In addition, we learned we need more resources on climate change issues, which is why the team continues to reach out to academicians and institutions with connections to climate change nationally and internationally.

On the issue of fake news misinformation and disinformation on media, the team learned that we need more tools to do fact-checking which is why Ahang Hussein Habib on Jan 20 - 25, 2023 participated in a training by Internews, samal part of the training was about the tools a journalist can use while fact-checking, she shared the tools with the team. The team learned that we need more tools to do fact-checking and we need to do fact checking's because with the development of AI, fake news, misinformation and disinformation it is necessary to have more resources for fact-checking.

## Challenges

There have been some challenges the team faced in 2023. The biggest challenge the team faced was hacking the formal emails of the team by an anonymous hacker. On Oct 1, 2023, the formal emails of four members of the team were hacked. It team of KirkukNow worked on the issue to get the emails back.

Another challenge the team faced was related to the development of partisan media in northern Iraq. With the development, of the political situation in north Iraq witnessed the last year political parties are establishing more media outlets to promote their political agenda. This challenged independent media



Garmian Now

1.6K likes • 1.6K followers

*Screenshot of KirkukNow logo used by a fake page on social media*

because they pay the journalist more than the amount an independent media affords. For example, six freelancers working with KirkukNow joined partisan media, despite all the time and efforts KirkukNow provided to help them in terms of capacity building to be professional journalists.

Another challenge the team faced was using KirkukNow`s articles logo on fake pages on Facebook. For example, on Oct 2 a fake page on Facebook used KirkukNow`s logo. We reached out to them and told them about it but unfortunately did not work. After a long time trying to convince them they changed the logo.

Moreover, many media outlets and social media pages used articles produced by KirkukNow without mentioning KirkukNow. We reported the issues, but the problem is not solved 100%, unfortunately.

### Gender and cross-cutting issues

Considering gender perspective remains one of our main tasks during 2023. On Dec 18, 2023, the provincial council election was held in Iraq. During the election campaign, KirkukNow focused on empowering women candidates to implement this agenda the team produced videos for female candidates and published them through platforms of KirkukNow in social media. Meanwhile, the team worked on the affect of climate change on women, minorities, and children in Iraq. The team worked on promoting the role of women in combating the effects of climate change and women have been part of the decisions made to decrease the footprint of climate change on Iraq`s environment. For example, on Jan 9, 2023, KirkukNow published the story of Shikofa a female environmental activist who started a campaign to expand green spaces in Kirkuk, and succeeded in convincing others to join her campaign. Moreover, the team continued implementing KirkukNow`s gender policy while producing articles and working on different projects. In addition, KirkukNow`s editor-in-chief on Feb 15 participated in a workshop organized of editor in editor-in-chiefs of media outlets of North Iraq in Sulaimanyah by the High Council for Women and Development of Kurdistan regional government. The main topics of the workshop were the media coverage of women`s issues in north Iraq and how media outlets can choose the best way to cover issues of women.

To give more space to women in the team now three female journalists working on reactivating the podcast section of the outlet. Ahang Hussein Habib, Bwar Qadir, and Enas Hassan now working on a series of podcasts and publishing them on KirkukNow`s podcast section. They all



*Example for KirkukNow content used by others without mentioning KirkukNow*

three participated in one-year training arranged by Aide Humanitaire et Journalisme organization in Iraq to work as podcast producers.

Meanwhile, the team decided to develop its gender policy and review it. On Feb 8, 2024 the team had its first meeting on the topic and decided to start the process by a server, then step by step developing it. The team also set a deadline for it which is Apr 30, 2024. The idea of the development of the policy came from the experience the team had in the past year. They concluded that they needed to further expand the policy to give the best to the audience.

In terms of capacity building, the team participated in several trainings on human rights and environmental-related issues in relation to gender. For example, Ahang Habib had a chance to meet Hillary Clinton in COP28. They exchanged ideas of climate change in relation to gender. She also participated in different discussions on human rights, gender issues, and climate change while participating in Cop28.

As for minorities, religious and ethnic groups the team covered different angles of them. For example, during the election campaign, the team produced several articles on the minority candidates to promote their role. After the election, the team covered success stories of minorities. Meanwhile KirkukNow covered their issues in daily life. For example, on Jan 2, 2024, the team produced an in-depth on the issue of deportation of Yazidi refugees in Germany.

*Supported also by Roselo Foundation, Aide Humanitaire & Journalisme (AHJ) and Free Press Unlimited.*



## Development of Charsteen Cave Site

In partnership with UNESCO, ILO and in cooperation with the Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage in Duhok, with funding from the EU, Wadi has launched the project entitled *“Creating Decent Job Opportunities through Development and Upgrading the Site of Charsteen Cave in Dohuk”* under the framework of the project *“Support to Livelihoods through Cultural Heritage Development”*. The project started on 15th of April 2023 and is ongoing.



This project aims to generate 11,000 working days by creating decent job opportunities for Iraqis and Syrian refugees to work in cultural heritage activities at the Charsteen cave site in Dohuk

governorate. In addition to development and upgrading the Charsteen cave site. Where the targeted groups are host community, Syrian refugees, and IDPs, in addition to focusing on the participation of female and people with disabilities. During the past period of the project, the engineers' team in coordination with UNESCO project team, has redesigned the masterplan, and started the implementation of the project. The project team was able to pave a new path in the site, which have been divided into two sides, consisting of stones path and iron stairway due to the difficult terrain of the site. In addition, a new path for the waterfall has been identified for recycling the water of the waterfall, and all the required digging, and pipes and tanks linking and installation has been done. Thus, the electric path has been identified, and cables installation for lighting the site in general has been done. Furthermore, the demolition of the reception office, building a new room for the electricity transformer has been done.

In general, more than 85% of the masterplan has been implemented. With more than 12,000 working days that has been provided for the three targeted groups. More than 22% of Syrian refugees has been integrated to the work so far. Where the female participation reached to 25%, and about 3% of people with disabilities has been participated in this project.

## Workshop

### **Recycling a building: Workshop on methods of documentation and sustainable restoration of endangered built heritage in Erbil**

The Citadel of Erbil has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2014, but there are also numerous historic buildings in the lower city that are threatened by decay.

The traditional residential buildings are particularly at risk, as their gradual decay not only threatens to destroy the building fabric, but is also causing large parts of the cityscape to disappear. As a result, knowledge about historical building elements and craftsmanship is also disappearing due to a lack of adequate documentation.



In autumn 2023, a four-week workshop took place with students from Erbil, Koya, Rania, Halabja and Mosul, which focused on the documentation of two particularly endangered residential buildings in the former Jewish quarter in the lower city of Erbil. In addition to documentation methods, practical exercises on analyzing building materials (mud bricks), restoration (masonry techniques and plastering) and concept development for restoration projects were also carried out.

The project took place in cooperation with the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage (Dr Abdallah Khorsheed) and the TU Berlin (Prof. Dr Thekla Schulz-Brize and Mada Saleh M.Sc.).

*The project was funded by the Gerda-Henkel-Foundation.*

# Articles and Media Coverage

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## Stop FGM

VOA (Voice of America) Kurdistan TV reported about one of Wadi's FGM-free villages and the positive impact of the campaign, 15-01-2023

Aryan TV, Wirşe program, interviewed Wadi Ranya team on International Day of Combating FGM, 06-02-2023

Aryen TV, Dede zhn program, interviewed Wadi Garmyan team on International Day of Combating FGM, 06-02-2023

Rojnews report on FGM, interviewing Garmyan team member, 08-02-2023

Nawzhin TV about a partner village that declared itself FGM and violence free, 30-03-2023

KirkukNow "Wadi explores FGM in middle and south of Iraq", 15-05-2023

Weser-Kurier newspaper, "Kampf gegen Beschneidung", 29-08-2023

Rheinische Post, "Ein Kampf gegen lebenslange Qual", 12-09-2023

Aryen TV, interviewing Wadi Erbil team member on Wadi's FGM work, 04-12-2023

Kurdistan 24 mentions Wadi's Stop FGM Kurdistan Campaign, 23-12-2023

## Environment

KirkukNow reporting on the recycling center in Kifri, 10-02-2023

La Stampa reports about the activities of our partners from NWE Halabja, 05-03-2023

Basnews reporting on Kifri soccer championship which cooperated with Kifri recycling center under the title 'environment is life', 09-03-2023

KirkukNow article about the recycling center in Halabja (Kurdish), 06-04-2023

KirkukNow article about the recycling center in Halabja (English), 10-04-2023

KirkukNow published a video about the recycling center in Halabja, 09-04-2023



Basnews, reporting on the environment exhibition done by NWE, 16-04-2023

KirkukNow, "Garbage Threatens Garmian's Environment", written by Wadi team member Layla Ahmed, 07-06-2023

Aryan TV, report on Halabja recycling center, 29-06-2023

Aryan TV, report on Halabja recycling center, 30-06-2023

taz, "Müllentsorgung im Irak: Verbrennen oder auf den Staat warten?" by Wadi team member Layla Ahmed, 02-07-2023

Tawar, media network for Kurdistan women union, wrote about the manager of the recycling center in Halabja, 12-10-2023

KirkukNow reporting on the opening of the Kabartoo camp recycling center, 18-10-2023

KirkukNow, "Displaced people turn plastic waste into new products", 19-10-2023

Halabja Environment Department, feature about the recycling center, 29-11-2023

Alhurra Iraq TV, reporting on the recycling center in Kabartoo camp, 11-12-2023

KirkukNow reports on award for the director of our Halabja partner NWE, 15-12-2023

VOA TV reports on award for the director of our Halabja partner NWE, 15-12-2023

Rudaw TV, report on how plastic is recycled in the Halabja recycling center, 21-12-2023

NRT TV reportage about the recycling center in Kabartoo camp, 22-12-2023

Rudaw TV aired a reportage about Halabja recycling center, 22-12-2023

NRT TV, reporting on the recycling center in Kabartoo camp, 23-12-2023

## Refugees' self organization

Borgen Magazine interview with Stowarzyszenie Mudita, our partners in Poland to help refugees with disabilities, 21-03-2023

The Italian publication Meltingpot reported about our partners in Greece, the Moria White Helmets, 25-04-2023

Video presentation of our partner organization Jinda, 02-05-2023

Deutschlandfunk mentioned our partners in Greece, the Moria White Helmets, 05-10-2022

### Cultural heritage / historical memory preservation

Kirkuk TV made a reportage about the Anfal memory project we support, 14-08-2023

VOA Kurdistan TV reports about upgrading and development of the historical Charsteen site in partnership with UNESCO, 25-10-2023

### Free Media

Rangeen Salam Mahmood, Manager of Radio Dange NWE, received the Giving Joy grant

# Acknowledgements

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We are immensely grateful to our donors and partners who have made all these achievements possible:



Kingdom of the Netherlands



Deutsche Vertretungen  
Irak

Roselo  
Foundation



Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation  
and Development



and our many committed private donors.

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*or refer to our contact details on page 2.*