



التقرير
السنوي
20
23

ANNUAL REPORT



E&E
Equity and
Empowerment



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Key Achievements of the Year	6
Letter from the Executive Director	10
About Equity and Empowerment	13
Why Equity?	14
Mission and Vision Statements	16
History and Background	17
Core Values and Guiding Principles	18
Programs and Initiatives	21
Earthquake Response for Women	22
Every Day Cyber Security	26
Peace Building and Social Cohesion: Fostering Unity through Dialogue	29
Bayte (My House)	33
Advocacy and Partnerships	37
Policy Briefs	38
The "Personal Is Political" Advocacy Campaign	40
International Advocacy	41
Challenges and Opportunities for Equity and Empowerment	45
Defamation Campaign Against Equity and Empowerment Initiatives	46
Backlash from Religious Figures	47
Strategies for Overcoming Obstacles	48
Partnerships	49



2023's Proverb



Doing More *With Less*

In a world facing numerous crises and humanitarian challenges, the demand for aid often surpasses the available funding. This shortage of resources necessitates a strategic and efficient approach to maximize impact. At our organization, we firmly believe in the power of community mobilization. By leveraging local resources, fostering collaboration, and engaging community members, we are able to amplify our efforts and achieve significant outcomes despite limited financial support. This belief and approach have led us to adopt the proverb, "Doing more with less," as it perfectly encapsulates our commitment to making a meaningful difference even in the face of financial constraints.

EXECUTIVE

Summary



In 2023, Equity and Empowerment (EE) made significant strides in advancing gender equality and empowering marginalized communities, particularly women, in Northwest Syria. Despite facing numerous challenges, including political instability and limited funding, our dedicated team worked tirelessly to deliver impactful programs and services. Our efforts have not only addressed immediate needs but have also contributed to long-term community resilience and empowerment.

This year, EE achieved a gender-sensitive response during the earthquake, ensuring that the needs of women and vulnerable groups were prioritized in emergency relief efforts. Additionally, we successfully implemented gender-transformative programs throughout the year, focusing on enhancing women's roles in leadership, decision-making, and economic empowerment. We have also made significant feminist achievements by promoting gender equality through all our programs and initiatives.

Working from a feminist perspective, we adopted an intersectional approach in our advocacy and outreach. Notably, we released policy briefs highlighting the gender-blind response to the earthquake and prepared a radio program titled "The Personal is Political" to shed light on the violations against girls, women, and marginalized groups during the earthquake. Furthermore, we published research on the alternative roles of women in the political arena at the local

level, from a feminist perspective, and issued a policy brief titled "Dignity Kits for All."

In line with our commitment to localization, we formed nine partnerships with local initiatives, reinforcing our belief in the power of community-led development and the importance of local ownership in achieving sustainable change.



■

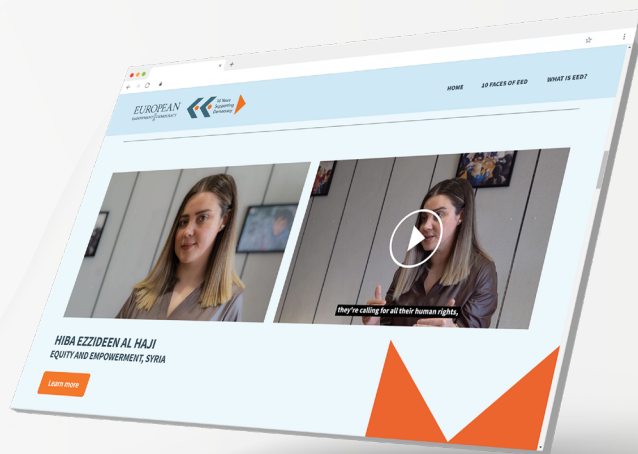
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

■

Of The Year



One of EED's ten faces of Democracy around the world: To mark its 10th anniversary, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) honors ten remarkable partners who exemplify the organization's impact and commitment to fostering democracy worldwide. Hiba Ezzideen Alhaji, the executive director of EE was honored as one of those ten faces for her efforts to empowering Syrian women to engage in public life.





Menstruation Policy

Officially adopted a one-day menstruation period off policy in our offices and centers, ensuring the availability of period materials to support the well-being and dignity of our staff and community members.



Peace Building and Social Cohesion

Conducted 80 dialogue sessions among people from different geographical areas.



Protection Programs

Reached over 5,000 direct individuals, providing critical support and services to survivors of violence and those at risk.



Cybersecurity Program

Trained over 20,000 students across six universities, 153 NGO staff members, 500 mothers, and 1,100 children, promoting digital safety and security awareness.



Early Recovery Initiatives

Facilitated the economic empowerment of 1,200 women through vocational training and small business grants.



GBV Support

Offered counseling and support services to 3,500 women and girls, helping them to rebuild their lives and regain their independence.



SRH Services

Delivered reproductive health education and services to 4,800 women, improving health outcomes and awareness.



Training and Capacity Building

Conducted 20 leadership and advocacy training sessions, benefiting 400 women and enhancing their roles in community leadership.





Letter From The Executive Director

Hiba Ezzideen

Equity and Empowerment **EE**

Dear Friends,

As I reflect on the past year, my heart swells with pride and gratitude for the incredible journey we have undertaken together at Equity and Empowerment (EE). 2023 has been a year filled with triumphs and challenges, but through it all, our unwavering commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of marginalized communities, especially women in Northwest Syria, has been our guiding light. This year, we faced unprecedented challenges, including political instability and financial constraints. Yet, we rose to the occasion with resilience and determination. In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake, our team responded with a gender-sensitive approach, ensuring that the needs of women and vulnerable groups were at the forefront of our emergency relief efforts. Witnessing the strength and courage of the women we serve has been profoundly inspiring. Our gender-transformative programs have

blossomed, fostering leadership, decision-making, and economic empowerment for women. We have embraced feminist principles and adopted an intersectional approach in our advocacy. The release of policy briefs on the gender-blind response to crises and the launch of our radio program, "The Personal is Political," have shed light on the violations against women and marginalized groups during the earthquake. These efforts are a testament to our belief that every voice matters. I am particularly proud of our commitment to the well-being of our staff and community members. This year, we officially adopted a one-day menstruation period off policy and ensured the availability of period materials in all our offices and centers. This policy underscores our respect for the dignity and health of our team.

Amidst our achievements, we also faced a severe defamation campaign aimed at undermining our credibility and work. Through unwavering perseverance, transparent communication, and the collective support of our partners and beneficiaries, we managed to overcome this challenge, emerging stronger and more united than ever. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering support during the recent defamation campaign against Equity and Empowerment (EE). Your steadfast commitment and generosity have been instrumental in helping us counter misinformation, restore public trust, and continue our vital work in promoting gender equality and empowering marginalized communities. Your belief in our mission has not only bolstered our resilience but also reaffirmed the importance of our cause. Thank you for standing with us during this challenging time and for your invaluable

partnership in our journey towards a more equitable and just society. As we look to the future, we remain steadfast in our mission to create a world where gender equality is a reality, and every woman has the opportunity to thrive. Our journey is far from over, and with your continued support, we will keep pushing boundaries, breaking barriers, and making a lasting impact. Thank you for standing with us, for believing in our mission, and for being a part of this transformative journey. Together, we are stronger, and together, we will continue to achieve great things.

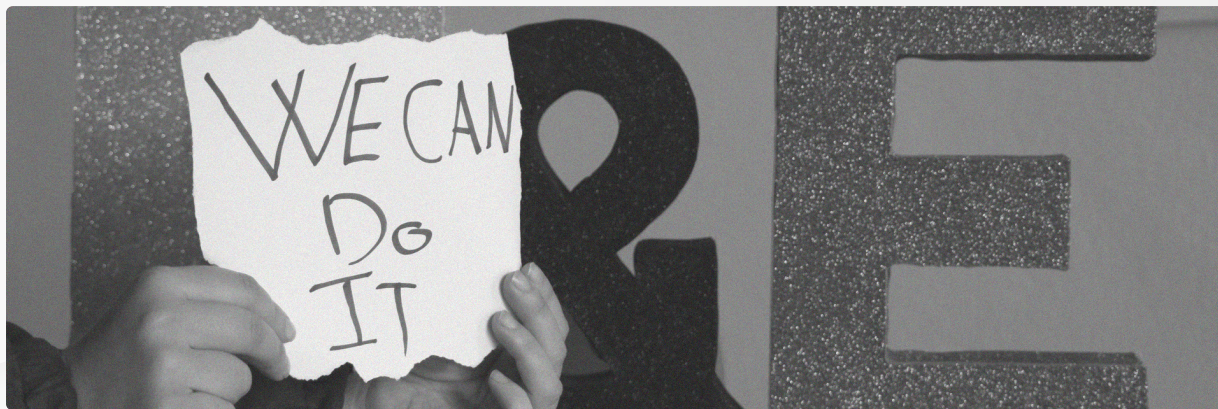
With heartfelt gratitude,





ABOUT EQUITY & EMPOWERMENT

Equity and Empowerment is a non-governmental, non-profit civil society organization operating primarily in Syria and in neighboring countries. We are a group of women and men who believe in gender equity in the social, economic and political arenas. Thus, we work to achieve the gender equality and equal participation of women in all life sides and stand against any form of discrimination.





WHY EQUITY



In Syria, women and men don't have the same chances because of the legal and cultural discrimination against women, so Equity is a step back, by promoting the fairness and giving women what they need to have the same starting points. Thus, the second phase is Equality and promoting the sameness. Worldwide, Women are still suffering because of the in-equality in the economic, civil, cultural and political domains. Syria was reported at 49.81 % of women in 2018, according to the World Bank collection of development indicators, compiled from officially recognized sources, but still, the dropout rate for women is much higher than for men and the rate of females over 25 with secondary education is only 29.0 percent.

In Law, in regard to gender discrimination, Syrian personal status laws have entrenched and reinforced the stereotypical traditional role of Syrian women, limiting them to the home. These laws further give male guardians the right to forcibly marry them off as well as allowing husbands to «discipline» their wives. Syrian personal status laws are based on the principle that the man is the head of the family, which undermines women's rights as human beings. This principal strips women of their dignity as adults, as it considers them incompetent and incapable of making their own

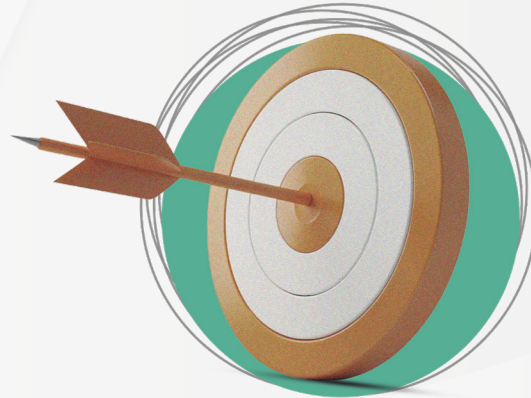
decisions. By attributing sacred religious and social value to these laws, they take on the values of the patriarchal system and thus exercise increased control over the lives and rights of Syrian women. Many Crimes against women such as detention over the last nine years, at least 10,026 females are still detained or forcibly disappeared. Honor killings take place in Syria in situations where women are deemed to have brought shame to the family, affecting the family's 'reputation' in the community. Some estimates suggest that more than 200 honor killings occur every year in Syria. In addition, the harsh living conditions, the insecurity, and the fear of rape, have led families to force their daughters into early marriages. Physical abuse (battering at least 3 times in the last year) was found in 23% of the investigated women in 2003, 26% amongst married women. Regular abuse (battering at least once weekly) was found in 3.3% of married women, with no regular abused reported by non-married women. The prevalence of physical abuse amongst country residents was 44.3% compared to 18.8% amongst country residents. In most cases (87.4%) the abuse was inflicted by the husband, and in 9.5% of cases, the abuse was inflicted by more than one person. Correlates of physical abuse was women's education, religion, age, marital status, economic status, mental distress, smoking and residence.



MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

Mission: Equity and Empowerment (EE) is committed to women's rights in order to ensure the social, economic, and political justice; as well as sustainable development through supporting women to improve their status quo and abilities to influence decisions in their communities. We also work on women's independence by utilizing skills, knowledge, and resources

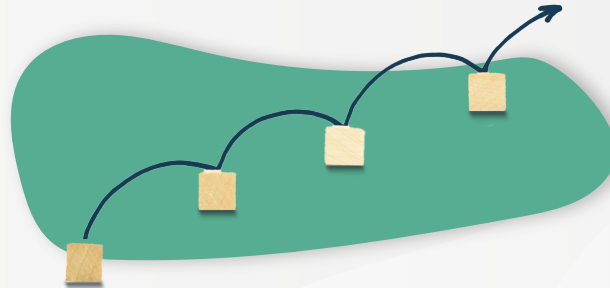
Vision: A society that adopts human rights, justice and gender equality.



HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Equity and Empowerment (EE) was founded in 2020 with the belief that gender equality is fundamental to achieving social justice and sustainable development. Since our inception, we have been committed to addressing the unique challenges faced by women and marginalized communities in conflict-affected regions, particularly in Northwest Syria. Over the years, we have expanded our programs and initiatives to respond to the evolving needs of the communities we serve.

Our journey began with a small team of dedicated individuals who were passionate about creating positive change. Through perseverance and a deep commitment to our mission, EE has grown into a respected organization known for its impactful programs and advocacy efforts. We have forged strong partnerships with local initiatives and international organizations, which have been instrumental in amplifying our reach and effectiveness.



-
- **CORE VALUES**

- **And Guiding Principles**







Community-Led Development

We prioritize the involvement and leadership of local communities in all our efforts, recognizing their invaluable knowledge and capacities.

Human Rights

Our approach is based on a human rights framework, advocating for the rights and dignity of all individuals.

Innovation

We embrace innovative solutions and approaches to address complex challenges and drive positive change.



Gender Equality

Our work is grounded in the principle that gender equality is essential for social justice and sustainable development.

Inclusivity

We strive to ensure that our programs and initiatives are inclusive and accessible to all, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Sustainability

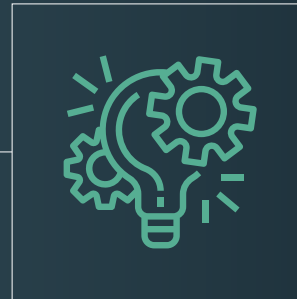
We are committed to implementing sustainable practices that ensure the long-term impact and viability of our programs.

■

PROGRAMS

■

And Initiatives



EARTHQUAKE *Response*



The Earthquake Response for Women, Elderly Men, and Persons with Disabilities project in Gaziantep, Kafr Yahmoul, Northwest Syria Camps, Azaz, and Afrin is dedicated to providing immediate and essential support to those affected by the recent earthquake. This initiative aims to address their critical needs through comprehensive services, ensuring their dignity and well-being are upheld in these challenging times.



OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

To meet the basic needs of 5,000 people in need affected by the earthquake.

- Provision of Dignity Kits: Distributing kits containing essential hygiene and personal care items to maintain dignity and health.
- Health Services: Equipping women with necessary reproductive health supplies and information.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES



- **Filling the Gap in Dignity Kit Provision:** Successfully addressed the immediate need for dignity kits among women affected by the earthquake, ensuring that essential hygiene and personal care items are accessible.
- **Gender-Sensitive Earthquake Response:** Implemented a gender-sensitive approach to the earthquake response, specifically catering to the needs of women, elderly men, and persons with disabilities.
- **Inclusive Support:** Extended support to elderly men and individuals with disabilities, ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are not overlooked.

IMPACT STORIES AND TESTIMONIALS



Hana, a head of household who lost her home in the earthquake, received a dignity kit that included sanitary pads, underwear, and personal hygiene products. "Receiving the dignity kit has been a blessing. It has provided me with the necessities I struggled to afford after the earthquake. I feel respected and supported," she says.

Hana's Story

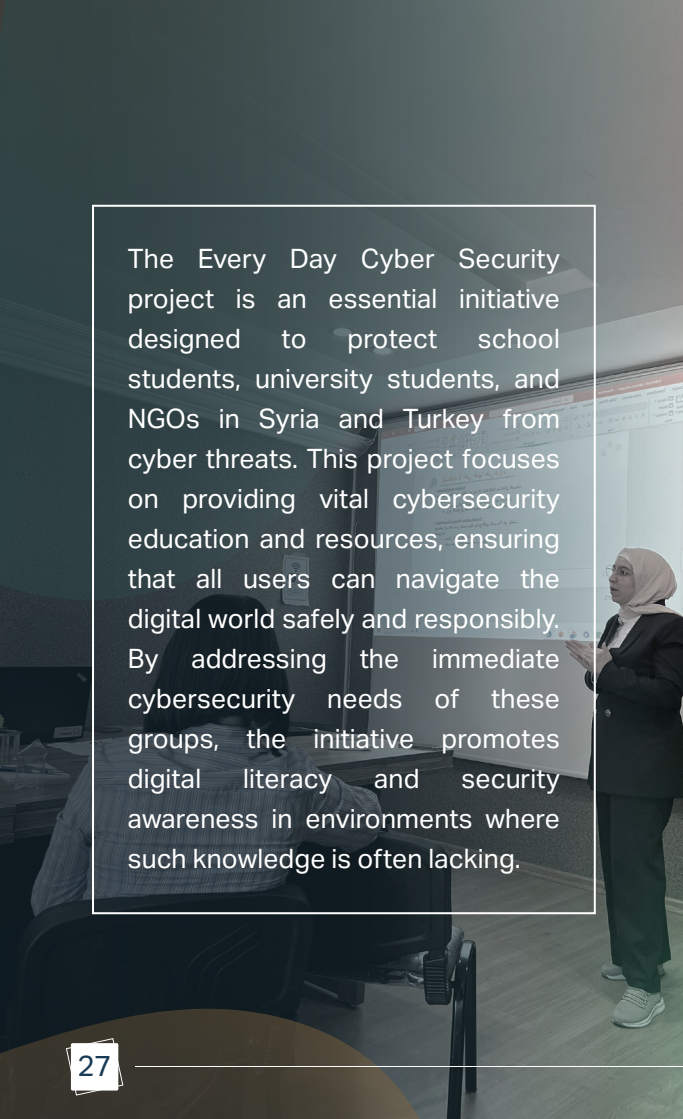
Amira, living in a temporary shelter, shares, "The support from this project has been incredible. The dignity kit has all the essentials I need daily, and it has made a significant difference in my life during this difficult period."

Amira's Testimonial

EVERY DAY

Cyber Security



A woman wearing a black hijab and a dark blazer is standing in a classroom, presenting to a group of students. She is gesturing with her hands towards a whiteboard. The students are seated at desks, and the room has a typical classroom layout with a whiteboard and a projector screen.

The Every Day Cyber Security project is an essential initiative designed to protect school students, university students, and NGOs in Syria and Turkey from cyber threats. This project focuses on providing vital cybersecurity education and resources, ensuring that all users can navigate the digital world safely and responsibly. By addressing the immediate cybersecurity needs of these groups, the initiative promotes digital literacy and security awareness in environments where such knowledge is often lacking.

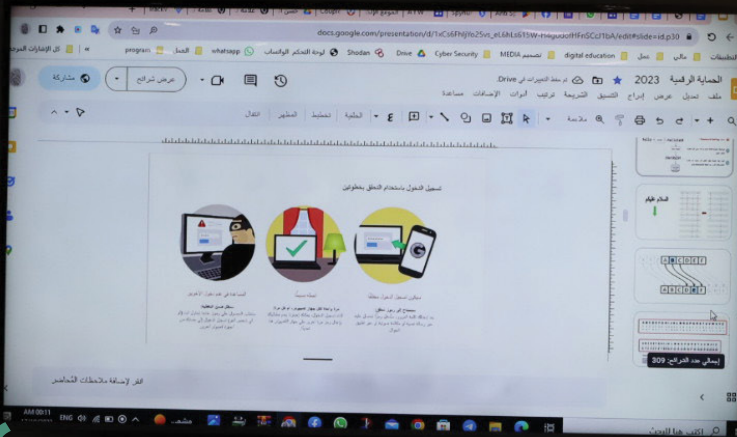
Objectives And Goals

- To integrate digitalization into case management processes, enhancing the efficiency and security of handling sensitive information.
- To create a culture of cybersecurity awareness through regular training sessions and resources, ensuring all participants can effectively protect themselves against cyber threats.

Major Achievements And Milestones

- Implementation of comprehensive cybersecurity training programs for school and university students.
- Distribution of educational materials and resources that simplify complex cybersecurity concepts.
- Successful integration of two-factor authentication and data encryption practices within NGOs.
- Establishment of a robust support system for ongoing cybersecurity education and threat response.

IMPACT STORIES AND TESTIMONIALS



Amal, a high school student, learned to recognize phishing emails through the project's training sessions. "Before this training, I didn't realize how easy it was to fall for phishing scams. Now, I feel much more confident online," she shares.

Amal's Story

Mohammed, a university student, benefited greatly from the project's focus on safe Wi-Fi practices. "Using a VPN has made my online activities much safer, especially when I'm using public networks," he says.

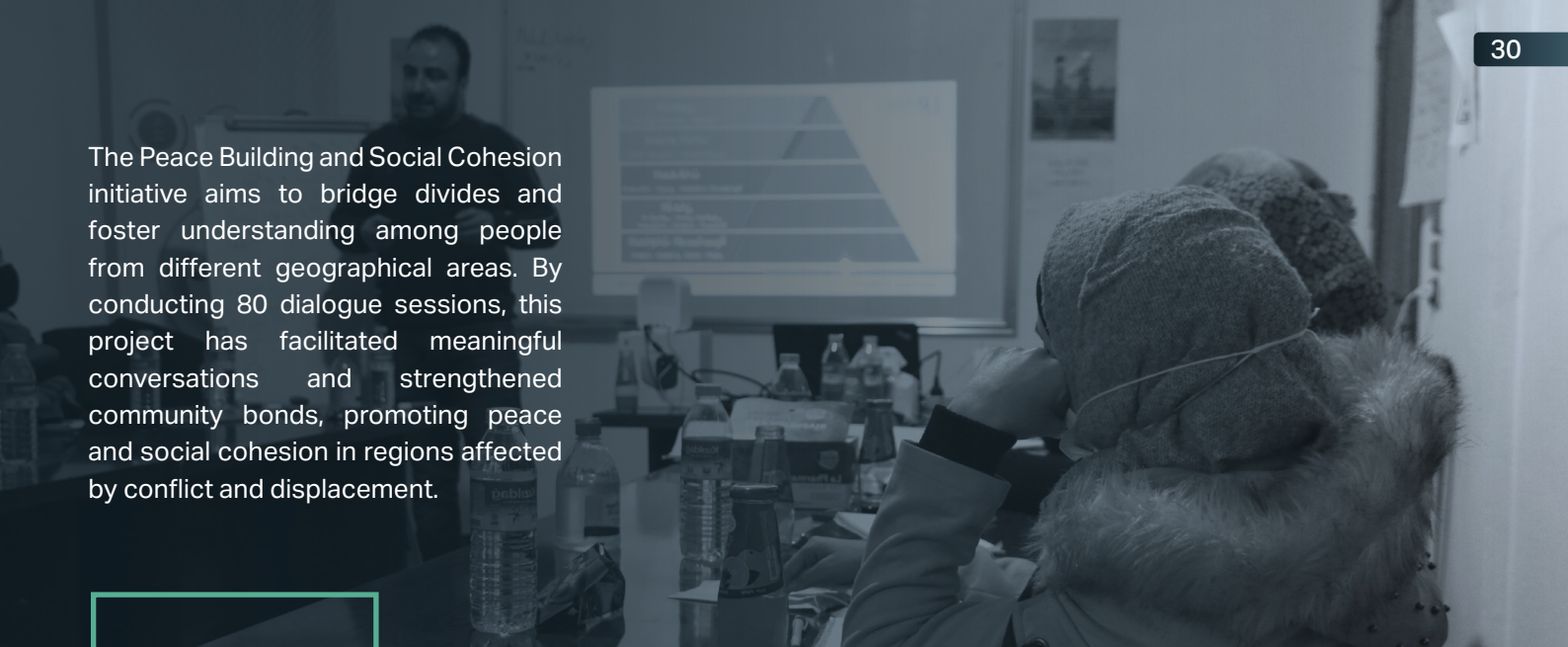
Mohammed's Testimonial

The case management managers expressed their gratitude for the training on data encryption and two-factor authentication. "The cybersecurity measures we've learned have not only become a crucial part of our daily operations, protecting our sensitive information, but have also helped us better understand the nature of cyber violence against the people we assist," one manager explains.

Case Management Managers' Feedback

PEACE BUILDING *And Social Cohesion*





The Peace Building and Social Cohesion initiative aims to bridge divides and foster understanding among people from different geographical areas. By conducting 80 dialogue sessions, this project has facilitated meaningful conversations and strengthened community bonds, promoting peace and social cohesion in regions affected by conflict and displacement.

OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

- To foster understanding and cooperation among diverse communities: Facilitate dialogue sessions that encourage open communication and mutual respect.
- To promote social cohesion: Build strong community ties by addressing common issues and finding collaborative solutions.
- To support conflict-affected regions: Provide a platform for individuals from different backgrounds to share experiences and work towards collective healing and peace.



MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES

- **Successful Facilitation of 80 Dialogue Sessions:** Conducted sessions that brought together individuals from various geographical areas, fostering a sense of unity and understanding.
- **Strengthened Community Bonds:** Enhanced relationships within and between communities, promoting a more cohesive social fabric.
- **Conflict Resolution and Peace Promotion:** Addressed underlying tensions and conflicts through structured dialogue, contributing to long-term peacebuilding efforts.
- **Inclusive Participation:** Ensured diverse representation in the dialogue sessions, including women, elderly individuals, and persons with disabilities.

IMPACT STORIES AND TESTIMONIALS



Layla, a young woman from a conflict-affected area, found the dialogue sessions transformative. "These sessions have allowed me to see beyond our differences and understand the shared challenges we face. It has been a healing experience," she shares.

Layla's Story



BAYTE

My House



The Earthquake Response for Women, Elderly Men, and Persons with Disabilities project in Gaziantep, Kafr Yahmoul, Northwest Syria Camps, Azaz, and Afrin is dedicated to providing immediate and essential support to those affected by the recent earthquake. This initiative aims to address their critical needs through comprehensive services, ensuring their dignity and well-being are upheld in these challenging times.

OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

- To provide comprehensive gynecological services by a qualified female doctor.
- To offer psychological first aid services by a trained specialist.
- To create a safe space where women can sit, eat, and socialize over provided meals.
- To supply essential items such as feminine period pads, analgesic pills, underwear, scented tissues without alcohol, sterilizers, lotion, soap, shampoo, and combs.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES

- Establishment of Bayte as a welcoming and accessible space for all women.
- Successful delivery of gynecological and SRH services to hundreds of women.
- Provision of psychological first aid to numerous women, offering critical emotional support.
- Distribution of essential hygiene and personal care items significantly improving the well-being of the beneficiaries.
- Creation of a supportive community environment where women can find respite and solidarity.

IMPACT STORIES AND TESTIMONIALS



Fatima, a mother of three, found solace in Bayte during a particularly challenging time. "Bayte has been a sanctuary for me," she shares. "The medical care and emotional support I've received here have been life changing. It's a place where I feel seen and valued."

Fatima's Story

Aisha, a young woman who faced immense hardship, expresses her gratitude: "The services at Bayte have helped me regain my strength and dignity. The psychological first aid sessions were a turning point for me. I'm incredibly thankful for this safe space."

Aisha's Testimonial

■

ADVOCACY

■

And Partnerships



Policy Briefs

| The Effects Of the Earthquake On Syrian Women Throughout Syria From a Feminist Perspective

The earthquake that struck southern Turkey and northern Syria on February 6, 2023, caused severe devastation, impacting approximately 8.8 million people across Syria. The Equity and Empowerment Organization conducted this policy brief with input from Syrian women both within and outside the country. This brief aims to highlight the social and psychological impacts of the earthquake on Syrian women and evaluate the gender sensitivity of the humanitarian response.



| Dignity Kits For All

Dignity kits are essential in humanitarian crises, providing hygiene and sanitary products to maintain dignity, particularly for women and girls. These kits include items such as soap, toothbrushes, and culturally appropriate clothing, which support self-esteem and confidence during stressful situations. However, there's a critical need to extend similar support to men, especially those with disabilities and the elderly. The response to the February 2023 earthquake in Syria and Turkey highlighted a gap in the provision of dignity kits for men. Many men and boys, especially those with disabilities and the elderly, lacked access to essential hygiene products, exacerbating their vulnerability. Issues such as involuntary urination among boys and men and the absence of adult diapers underscored the need for tailored dignity kits.



The "Personal Is Political" Advocacy Campaign

In collaboration with Rozana Radio, EE analyzed gender inequality in the response to the earthquake. This program aimed to highlight how disaster response efforts often overlook the unique challenges faced by women and marginalized genders, emphasizing that personal experiences of inequality are deeply connected to broader political and social structures. Through interviews, expert analysis, and firsthand accounts, the program shed light on the specific ways in which gender disparities manifested in the aftermath of the earthquake, advocating for more equitable and inclusive disaster response policies.



International Advocacy

Engagement With The Office Of The Special Envoy To Syria And The Civil Society Support Room

Equity and Empowerment participated in the discussions of the thematic working group on 'Protection Priorities for Syrians'. Participants engaged with the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria (OSE-Syria) leadership and team, provided updates on their work, discussed relevant policy recommendations, and presented a summary of their discussions and key recommendations to the OSE-Syria team, members of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and CSSR donors.



In their conclusion, the group emphasized that a political solution based on United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2254 (2015) remains fundamental, and that there is no way out of the political deadlock without ensuring a safe environment for all Syrians and addressing several fundamental issues, which include:

- Addressing the issue of the unlawful deprivation of liberty by all sides in the conflict.
- Ensuring a safe, calm, and neutral environment as a necessary pathway to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons; and
- Civil and identity documentation (including travel documents, civil status documents or property documents).

Participation In The World Forum For Democracy

Equity and Empowerment participated in the World Forum for Democracy, in the lab titled “Women building peace: are peace negotiations open to all the stakeholders? EE presented its work on the inter-religious nexus for women as peace builders and politicians project in northwest Syria, where it worked with forty women by integrating and empowering them through dialogues about democracy, political transition, civil laws, gender-based violence and peacebuilding, and by connecting them to political decision makers. The forty women initiated the “Shan feminist network for peace building”, which is considered the only network in northwest Syria that works on peace building.



Participation In The EED 10th anniversary

EE joined EED and celebrated its 10th anniversary in the event that gathered EED friends, partners, staff and supporters who helped us defend democracy over the past 10 years.



■

CHALLENGES

■

And Opportunities



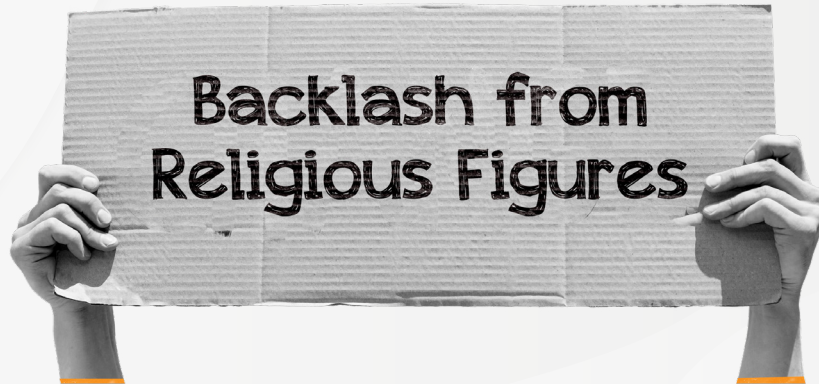
Defamation Campaign Against Equity And Empowerment Initiatives

In 2023, one of the most significant challenges has been a defamation campaign aimed at undermining the efforts of Equity and Empowerment (EE) initiatives. This campaign, orchestrated by various detractors, sought to discredit the goals and effectiveness of these initiatives through misinformation and negative propaganda, intending to erode public trust and hinder progress in promoting social justice and equal opportunities. False narratives and misleading statistics were circulated to question the legitimacy and necessity of EE programs. Social media platforms became battlegrounds where EE advocates faced personal attacks and baseless accusations. Additionally, there were attempts to lobby against key policies supporting EE, aiming to roll back advancements made in previous years.



Backlash from Religious Figures

Another major hurdle was the backlash from certain religious figures who perceived EE efforts as threats to traditional values and social norms. This opposition often manifested in public denunciations and organized efforts to mobilize communities against EE initiatives. Religious leaders used their platforms to criticize EE programs, framing them as contrary to moral or cultural values. Grassroots campaigns were launched to rally opposition, often leading to protests and public demonstrations against EE policies. Additionally, some religious groups exerted political pressure to influence policymakers, attempting to stall or reverse legislative support for EE initiatives.



Strategies for Overcoming Obstacles

Despite these challenges, several strategies were implemented to counteract the negative impacts and continue pushing forward with EE goals. Establishing dedicated teams to counter misinformation with factual, evidence-based responses helped to correct public perceptions and restore credibility. Launching educational programs informed the public about the importance and benefits of EE initiatives, emphasizing their role in fostering a more inclusive society. Facilitating open dialogues with religious leaders and other detractors aimed to find common ground and dispel misunderstandings, while encouraging community leaders and members to participate in EE initiatives demonstrated their tangible benefits and fostered grassroots support. Working with lawmakers to strengthen legal protections for EE initiatives ensured they were resilient against opposition, and enhancing monitoring mechanisms ensured compliance with EE policies and addressed any breaches promptly and effectively.



PARTNERSHIPS



You & Me
Together, We Could
If we would

منظمة عدل وتمكين
Equity and Empowerment

