



**TOWARDS ACTIONABLE
KNOWLEDGE FOR
CHANGE: DIALOGUE
WITH NORTH AND EAST
SYRIA**

PROJECT REPORT 2025

Emmaus Jokioinen



FOREWORD

This project report was written in December 2025. In early January 2026, the Islamist government of Syria launched an attack on the territories of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. At the time of writing this foreword, the attack is still ongoing.

Instead of teaching and conducting research, the region's universities are forced to defend themselves against armed attacks. Al-Sharq University in Raqqa, mentioned in this report, has already been forced to cease operations, as the Raqqa region is now under Islamist control.

However, the struggle for democracy, equality, and the environment continues. Educational cooperation and mutual solidarity between European, Rojavan, and Iraqi Kurdish scientists will be increasingly important in the future.

January 26, 2026

Emmaus Jokioinen project group

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PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

Towards actionable knowledge for change: dialogue with North and East Syria is an educational cooperation project led by Finnish NGO Emmaus Jokioinen, in partnership with the University of Rojava's Institute of Science and Modern Technology and Tigris Polytechnic Academy. In 2025, the project received funding from **Maj and Tor Nessling Foundation**.

Emmaus Jokioinen is an independent non-governmental organization that has been for decades promoting equality and diversity around the world with the help of its flea market. In recent years, the NGO has focused its attention on the revolution in North and East Syria, known as Rojava, and its efforts towards participatory democracy, gender equality, and harmony between the environment and society. This long-term project, which has gained momentum over the past year, is now at the heart of Emmaus Jokioinen's activities.

University of Rojava is one of three universities affiliated with the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES). Its purpose is to share and create scientific knowledge as a source of vitality for a free society. The university's Institute of Science and Modern Technology is one of the main actors in this project, which focuses on teaching natural sciences and technology. Over the course of the year, the institute has found academic peer support from Finnish natural scientists and engineers.

Tigris Polytechnic Academy is a new educational institution. It is part of the DAANES education system. Its activities are planned in close cooperation with the Finnish contributors and supporters of the project. The polytechnic academy focuses not only on high-quality teaching in the technical fields and inspiring digital learning environments, but also on university democracy, critical thinking, and the social agency and ecological responsibility of engineers.



KNOWLEDGE FOR CHANGE



→ Purpose

Towards actionable knowledge for change: dialogue with North and East Syria is based on the desire to combine scientific knowledge, engineering skills, and revolutionary environmental thinking to accelerate sustainability transitions.

The aim is to open up new channels of dialogue between Finland and Rojava – North and East Syria – which is known for its unique social and environmental ideology. By the dialogue the people of Rojava can receive the support they need for science and technology education, while Finns, in turn, gain assistance in their sustainability thinking.

→ Goals for 2025

- Organizing a safe passage route: Opening a branch of Emmaus Jokioinen in Rojava's neighbor, Iraqi Kurdistan, and hiring a local employee.
- Meeting with science and environmental actors and government representatives in Rojava to agree on ways of cooperation.
- Spreading the word about the project, finding new volunteers, organizing meetings between Finnish and Rojava scientists and activists.
- Planning and starting continuous cooperation between partners.

DIALOGUE

In February 2025, an Emmaus Jokioinen branch was opened in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, managed by skilled local employee. Planning for a meeting with the Rojava partners could begin. In April, Emmaus representatives spent a total of 20 days as guests of the University of Rojava and Tigris Polytechnic Academy in Qamishlo and Heseke. The representatives also visited universities in Raqqa and Kobane, the Committee of Economy and Agriculture, and the Green Tress environmental organization.

The meetings clarified that the main partners for the project in Rojava would be the Institute of Science and Modern Technology at the University of Rojava and Tigris Polytechnic Academy. During the visit, direct video discussions were initiated between these educational institutions and the Finnish academic supporters of the project. The Emmaus Jokioinen project group in Finland was organized to search for the experts needed by the partners and to inform activists about the opportunities for mutual help and learning offered by the project. As it proved difficult to organize the participation of interested natural scientists and engineers at the beginning, Emmaus volunteers made two more trips to Rojava at the end of the year, and the building of cooperation channels began in earnest.



EXPERTISE THROUGH COOPERATION



Seeking peer review, peer support, and thesis supervision

Master's and doctoral graduates from the Institute of Science and Modern Technology at Rojava University play an important role in building democracy and combating environmental disasters in the region, both as researchers and teachers. The institute needs international input to complement its academic expertise in its new, vital educational programs, such as master's programs in artificial intelligence, geoinformatics, and pharmacology, as well as in agricultural technology research. The institute invites natural scientists to participate in the project as remote or contact teachers, peer reviewers of research articles, or co-supervisors of theses. Advice on the design of degree programs is also welcomed. The aim is to strengthen the knowledge and expertise of the University of Rojava and the local population so that sustainability transitions can be pursued through means that draw on libertarian ideology. The institute's professors are also keen to engage in political debate and exchange ideas with Europeans on topics such as the environment, democracy, and revolution.

Rojava University already has many partnerships with European social scientists and humanists, but establishing connections in the fields of natural sciences and technology has been more difficult. For this reason, Emmaus Jokioinen focuses specifically on reaching out to experts in these fields, but we invite everyone to join the discussion.

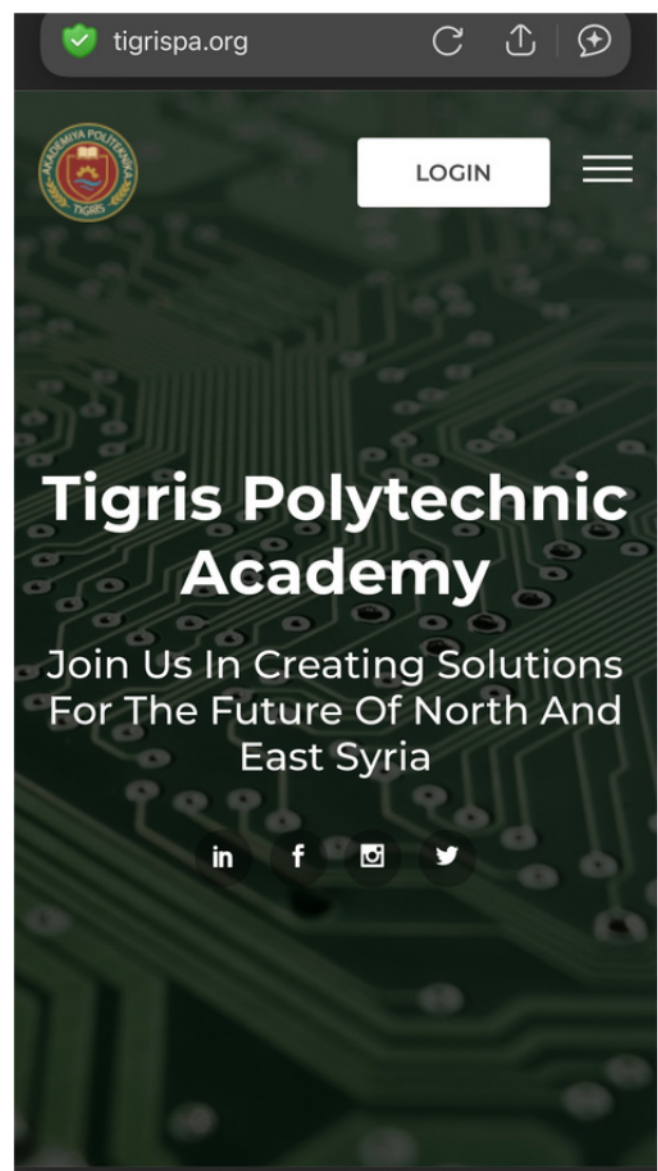
RESILIENCE WITH APPLIED SCIENCES

Collective planning

Tigris Polytechnic Academy will be opened in Rojava in August 2026. Its management team and future teachers want to plan and implement the launch of the institution and its first years together with Emmaus Jokioinen and experts involved in the project. In 2025, Tigris's curriculum and digital teaching methods have been designed collaboratively. The first academic year will be taught in Kurdish and will focus on the basics of engineering, study skills, and English. As there is a shortage of advanced engineering expertise in Rojava, distance teachers from abroad will be sought for the next three academic years and specialization areas. The Moodle environment will be used for teaching.

Cooperation begins

The academy's degree programs include electrical engineering and electronics, telecommunications, mechanical engineering, and information and communication technology. For the coming years, we are looking for remote teachers for specialization courses in all of these fields. To meet current needs – digital pedagogy consulting, curriculum design – we have already contacted a few experts and are now continuing to search for volunteers and coordinate cooperation. The Tigris team also invites interested parties to discuss educational democracy and the societal role and environmental responsibility of engineers.



OTHER CONTACTS



Al-Sharq University

Raqqa

Emmaus Jokioinen representatives had the opportunity to visit Raqqa and its Al-Sharq University. The city, which was liberated from ISIS in 2017, and especially its university, founded in 2021, exuded enthusiasm for building a free society and science-based action. The university is currently in need of international support, for example, to establish, maintain, and expand an e-library.

Economy and Agriculture Committee

Emmaus Jokioinen representatives visited the co-presidents of DAANES's Economy and Agriculture Committee to discuss their views on the region's environmental problems, possible solutions, and the need for international research cooperation. According to the agency, the key is to build sustainable energy production. Foreign expertise is very welcome in this work.



Kobane University

Kobane

Kobane became a world-famous symbol of Rojava's freedom and resistance when Kurdish forces defeated ISIS there in 2015. The city got its own university in 2017. Representatives from Emmaus Jokioinen visited one of the campuses.

Discussions highlighted the need for international cooperation, particularly in the field of education. Contacts with language technology and translation expertise are also desired.

Environmental organization Green Tress

For years, Green Tress has been involved in environmental education and awareness-raising in Rojava, organizing tree planting and striving to bring scientific knowledge to practical environmental protection. Emmaus staff visited the organization's office in Qamishlo. Green Tress seeks to establish links with major European and international environmental NGOs in order to gain peer support and visibility.

LEARNING FROM PARTICIPATION



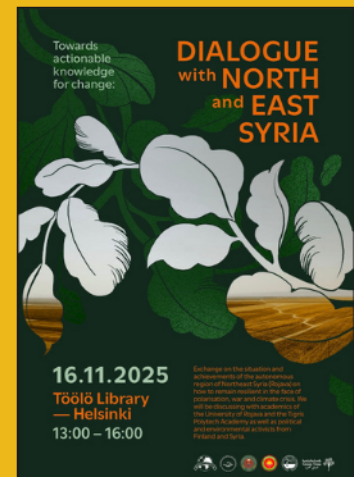
Participatory democracy is a guiding principle in education, including the fields of natural sciences and technology

Higher education institutions in North and East Syria strive to support the goals of the Rojava revolution. Therefore, their teaching, operating culture, and atmosphere emphasize the political agency of each individual and, on the other hand, collective social and environmental responsibility. Educational institutions are moving away from the authoritarian teaching and learning styles of the old regime, as the participatory democracy of Rojava society emphasizes the importance of individual growth in freedom and community. All DAANES universities, colleges, vocational schools, and high schools include women's studies, or jineology, developed by the Kurdish movement, as well as political analysis based on the philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan, as part of every degree program. In addition to democracy and gender equality, the key objectives of Rojava's autonomous administration, supported by higher education institutions, include a balanced relationship with the environment. All students, researchers, and experts are expected to participate in the pursuit of these goals. Finland could also learn from this participatory approach.

COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

Event on November 16, 2025

The project's first public information and discussion event was held at the Töölö Library, Helsinki. The event was aimed at a wide audience, especially environmental and social activists. In addition to representatives from the University of Rojava and the umbrella organization for polytechnic academies, the environmental NGO Green Tress from North and East Syria also had its speech. The auditorium was almost full. There was plenty of Kurdish snacks on offer. According to audience feedback, the speeches were interesting and the atmosphere was good.



Event on November 25, 2025

The second information event was held in Minerva building of the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki. The event was primarily aimed at pedagogues and natural scientists. Presentations by representatives of the University of Rojava Institute of Science and Modern Technology and Tigris Polytechnic Academy sparked lively and cheerful discussion. Many academics expressed their interest in hearing more about the project. New contacts were made and old ones strengthened.



Article in Ny tid magazine

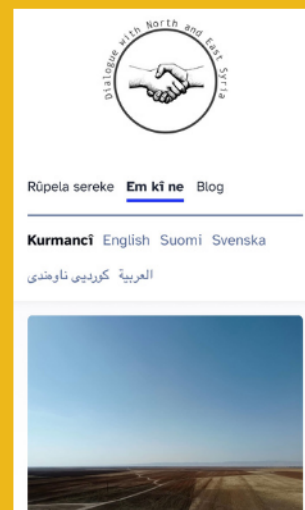
The Swedish-language magazine Ny tid published an article about University of Rojava in its 10/2025 issue. The article is based on interviews conducted and photos taken during the project trip to Rojava in April. The interviewees were teachers of natural sciences and technology at Rojava University. The article's closing notes mention both the Emmaus Jokioinen project and the funding received from the Maj and Tor Nessling Foundation. Ny tid magazine, especially its e-version, has a wide readership in Finland and Sweden.



COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

Website

The website for the *Towards actionable knowledge for change: dialogue with North and East Syria* project was launched in early 2025 in Finnish and English at dialogueforchange.fi. During the year, Swedish, Kurmanji, Arabic, and Sorani versions were also created. The website features an English-language blog with interviews from Rojava and event announcements related to the project. Blogging will continue in 2026.



Social media

The project's Instagram account was particularly active during the Emmaus Jokioinen representatives' trip to Rojava in April 2025, when short stories and photos from North and East Syria were posted on the account. Later in the year, the social media channel was used to advertise the project's information events and blog posts published on the website. More content will be added to the account as the project continues in 2026.



Brochure and business card

In connection with the arrangements for the project's information events, a graphic designer was hired to design the advertisements. The designer's handiwork can also be seen in the visual appearance of the project brochure. The texts describe the project and opportunities for participation in such a way that the information will remain accurate in the coming years. The brochure and project business cards have been distributed at our own events as well as at other events in Helsinki, Turku, and Tampere.



THE PROJECT CONTINUES

Towards actionable knowledge for change: dialogue with North and East Syria is a long-term project that aims to build ongoing interaction between Rojava's universities and experts working in Finland. Several university teachers met by Emmaus Jokioinen members in Iraqi Kurdistan also want to support their colleagues in Rojava. We are now working to create digital platforms that make it easy for anyone interested to find a way to participate in the work. We will continue to recruit experts requested by our project partners as distance and local teachers, co-supervisors, peer reviewers, and mentors. In order to promote systematic cooperation, Emmaus Jokioinen must also deepen its understanding of Rojava's society and working culture. Therefore, we will further intensify communication between project partners and continue our visits to the region.



→ Plan

The Emmaus Jokioinen project group will organize itself more clearly in order to communicate about the project and to involve new volunteers in tasks that suit them. In this, an important role will play also the Tigris Polytechnic Academy and the Institute of Science and Modern Technology, with which the project coordinator will be in regular contact. We aim to establish mutually beneficial cooperation with Finnish universities of applied sciences and technical universities. In 2026 information events will be held at least in Espoo and Turku.

→ Perspective

We examine educational cooperation, its objectives, and its impact primarily from the perspective of accelerating sustainability transformations. However, the discussions sparked by the project in Finland have also brought up another important perspective: how is participatory democracy implemented within Rojava's higher education institutions and in their relationship with the administration? What kind of help can we get from Rojava's higher education institutions in Finland, where academic freedom is shrinking? These issues we will be addressing in 2026.

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