

## Supporting Women on the Frontlines

Evidence shows that in times of crisis, levels of violence, especially Gender-Based Violence (GBV), heighten. The United Nations (U.N.) states that due to COVID-19, the number of women and children facing domestic violence and abuse has dramatically increased.

The pandemic has compounded existing vulnerabilities and jeopardizes the safety and wellbeing of girls and women. This is particularly true for refugee women and girls, living in and outside of camps. Further, the safety of women working on the frontlines of humanitarian crises is often overlooked and need to be addressed as well.

### ESD Global's Response:

We recognize these gaps and advocate to embed Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) – a unique, evidenced-based form of self-defense - into the global refugee response. In 2018 ESD Global Inc, and El HaLev, together with other partners, piloted ESD trainings in refugee hotspots on the Aegean islands. In 2019 we expanded the scope of this work to include an ESD Instructor training program, to give people the skills to teach others in their community. The trainings have been tailored to women on the frontlines (refugees and volunteers). A planned further expansion of ESD instructor training, which was planned for 2020, had to be put on hold due to restrictive policies and safety concerns related to COVID-19.

Nevertheless, we firmly believe that making ESD accessible to women on the frontlines is a priority - **now more than ever!** That is why we have created the ESD Global Refugee Fund.

We have raised **\$25,000 for our work with refugees** from the Global Whole Being Fund and have started virtually training dozens of women on the frontlines in refugee hotspots. Our waiting list is growing by the day.

A generous donor, Yudit Sidikman, has now offered to **match all donations to the ESD Global Refugee Fund made by July 1<sup>st</sup> up to another \$25,000 to grow the fund to \$75,000. This means that the impact of every dollar (or other currency) you give will be doubled**

**EVERY CONTRIBUTION, REGARDLESS OF SIZE, WILL HELP US PURSUE OUR GOAL!**

We are committed to supporting women on the frontlines during the pandemic because we know **NOW more than ever**, we need to equip women with critical skills and create a safe space for learning and exchange.

**Join us in solidarity with women on the frontlines and help us to achieve our goal.**

*For more information, see FAQ below.*

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**Frequently Asked Questions**

## **1. What is the impact of Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) training?**

ESD training is an effective intervention for the prevention of violence. It can increase feelings of self-efficacy and confidence and reduce levels of depression and anxiety. The evidence-based methodology can prevent and reduce traumatic stress symptoms, thereby lowering the harm of violence as well as its prevalence. Like other interventions developed from empowerment theory, ESD challenges the prevailing cultural narrative of weak, passive victims and strong, invulnerable perpetrators and instead helps students to discover and maximize their strengths.

The embodied empowerment it teaches can also be a powerful healing factor. ESD explicitly does not blame survivors for any violence they experience. Instead, it teaches individuals multiple options for confronting violence and affirms that defenders do the best they can with the tools they have at any given moment. Humanitarian workers and others exposed to severe levels of trauma are encouraged to explore ESD and consider adding it to their repertoire of interventions.

## **2. What is ESD Global:**

ESD Global Inc is a US NGO that is dedicated to making Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) training accessible around the world. ESDG does so by training ESD instructors to teach in their communities; supporting research and programs that increase public awareness of the profound benefits of ESD training; and engaging stakeholders to increase access to ESD training.

## **3. How is training conducted online?**

Virtual training consists of five consecutive weeks of a 90-minute interactive webinar. We engage participants using Zoom tools and to ensure that everyone's voice and experiences are heard. We move and sweat - yes, we do! ESD Global's play-based approach allows us to bring our whole selves and laugh our hearts out while learning together.

## **4. How much can one learn in five weeks?**

ESD Global applies a trauma-informed, holistic, and evidence-based approach to violence prevention education centered on physical activities, conversations, and pedagogical games. The games develop confidence, self-worth, assertive communication techniques, and trust in one's own instincts.

The methodology allows us to learn a lot in a short time. In five weeks, we teach how to set boundaries (yes, others find this challenging, too - you are not alone!). We dive into assertive communications, and playfully explore ways to de-escalate a tricky situation. And yes, we learn some fighting skills, too! Our focus is always to prevent violence, and, at the same time, to teach skills people can use to protect themselves. Students enjoy learning how they can strategically leverage their bodies and explore the wide range of skills they have while adding new ones to their repertoire.

## 5. Why not wait for in-person training post-COVID-19?

In times of crisis, we see an increase in stress, anxiety, frustration and emotional and physical violence. The need for confidence-building and self-advocacy becomes essential. Many women on the frontline are facing hard-pressed decisions about their safety and wellbeing. Based on the feedback we have received, women are further facing feelings of guilt, stress, anxiety, and depression about the heightened insecurity in the frontlines. This includes working in refugee camps, migrant settlements and on the borders, or performing online tasks.

Our online pilot has shown that the virtual webinar fosters a sense of group solidarity. It provides a safe space to share challenges, acquire a basic understanding of ESD pillars, and share practical knowledge and tools. The course further enables us to gather ideas on how to adjust ESD for refugees.

The short answer is: **We cannot afford to wait to make this accessible for women! ESD is an essential skill, especially during a crisis!**

## 6. How do you address the mental health challenges that come up during the course?

We are working closely with Humanity Crew, an international aid organization, specializing in the provision of first response mental health interventions to refugees and people in crises. Humanity Crew has assigned a principal psychologist with extensive experience working with displaced communities to work with participants who seek professional mental health support. They have also established a mental health hotline to address mental health needs during COVID-19.