

**GIZ Gender Competition 2022**

<b>Category</b>	GG1 Projects
<b>Submitted by</b>	Unterstützung des Stabilisierungs- und Transitionsprozesses in Syrien (USTS) – Phase II:
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Safe Access to Digitalization for Women in Syria</b>

**Context Analysis**

**Syrian Women, the Conflict, and Digital Literacy**

Even before the crisis in 2011, gender discrimination and violence against women were a continuous challenge for Syrian women. The start of the war has exacerbated the situation, and people suffer from widespread violence, economic hardship, lack of basic services and destruction of infrastructure. The spread of extremist actors controlling some areas in Syria with an ideology that encourages oppression of women has made it even worse for women in particular. The Islamic State (ISIS) and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), which was linked to Taliban and Al-Qaeda, are just examples. Women are banned from leaving their homes with strong restrictions on travel or mobility. The ongoing armed conflict with shelling and bombardment on civil areas increases the threat on women to be able to move or relocate.

Internet access, on the other hand, improved over time and has a lot of potential for empowerment and liberation. Internet was only introduced to Syria in the late 1990s, and access to it was initially restricted to government agencies. Until 1999, Syrian citizens were not allowed to subscribe to the Internet, a fact that Human Rights Watch noted in a [report](#) published in the same year. After the crisis since 2011, affordable access to the Internet has increased, turning into an opportunity for many Syrian women as a space for communication and freedom of expression. In many cases, it enabled the building of feminist ideas based on dialogue, expression, and debate, which was not possible on the ground physically.

During the past years, usage of portable devices and social media platforms by Syrian women has drastically increased; nevertheless, the lack of experience in safe access to the digital world or privacy terms has led to a lot of dangerous and misleading information and practices. For example, there were pictures published of Syrian women active in public affairs to keep them away from the public sphere and silence them. Social media and email accounts of some of them were hacked and their private conversations and pictures were distributed. Such actions have dramatic consequences for those affected, as in the case of [Rasha Bassis](#), who was brutally murdered by her own brother in a so-called “honour killing” after a photo was circulated of her without a head scarf.

**Cooperation between Donors, Partners, Colleagues**

The uniqueness of GIZ’s Syria Portfolio lies in the remote cross-border operations from offices in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Germany, where it has built up a large partner network of local NGOs that can access target areas in Syria. Our role as a project team is to act as a connecting hinge and translate donor strategies into concrete action on the ground through our established partner networks. The Syria portfolio is dedicated to supporting feminist Syrian organizations, many of whom face threats by radical groups.

The **key success factors** for designing impactful interventions collaboratively are: firstly, the participatory nature of our approach through our **continuous communication with donors**. Secondly, understanding of local dynamics by having **diversity in the team** itself (in terms of age, gender, nationality, colleagues with donor background, colleagues with local activist background) accompanied with close exchange with colleagues from the in-house analysis and research unit as well as the portfolio’s gender working group. Thirdly, during the past 10 years of cross-border implementation, the **trusted relationship with partners** allowed us to be deeply engaged in the work and therefore make a participatory impact on the ground.

Consequently, in designing an intervention tackling the issue of Gender discrimination in the digital sphere, the project team initiated an exchange with its co-funding commissioning party, the European Union, with whom a deeply shared common vision regarding the empowerment of women and inclusion of vulnerable groups exists. Building on our partner network the most suitable partner for such an intervention was identified, who is a local feminist partner called **“Equity and Empowerment (EE)”**.

**The Intervention**

**Objectives**

The project’s target group as well as partner staff consist exclusively of women. The main goal of the project was to promote digital rights of women in Kafer Yahmoul (a small town in the northwestern Syria) and providing women with tools to write about these rights and to constitute a framework for income generating activities. Main objectives were thus:

1. Raising awareness about digital rights
2. Increasing knowledge of human rights based academic/journalistic writing (as a tool for advocacy and creating job opportunities)
3. Building knowledge of hardware/device maintenance (in order to increase independence of women)

**Activities:**

**Phase one**

**1) Digital rights and security raising awareness sessions:**

This activity mainly focuses on educating the women about their digital rights including the freedom of expression online, safe access to internet modules, digital privacy & data protection, and specific types of speech-related offences online such as harassment, reputation, and cybercrimes.

**2) Computer maintenance and smartphones repair training:**

As the women were subjected to exploitation from men to repair their devices. The training aimed to

**Phase two**

**4) Visual materials training**

After receiving the academic writing training, the women were trained to transfer their opinion and investigative articles into visual materials. This is mainly to reach to more people through promoting it in the social media platforms.

**5) Advocacy and campaign design and implementation training**

After the women were trained on the digital rights and protection, the women also received

build the women capacity and increases their self-reliability in such a male dominated profession. Consequently, **25** women received intensive technical training from IT and software experts in computer maintenance and smartphones repair. At the end of this training, the women were able to repair their electrical devices on their own. Some participants subsequently started their own businesses, serving their communities and generating income for themselves.

### 3) Academic writing training

This activity was building on the digital rights and security training. Participants were trained to write about their digital rights and document their issues and experiences in order to prepare them for the next activities.

a media campaign training. In this way, the trainees were enabled to multiply their knowledge and reach to more women in the local community.

### 6) Advanced academic writing and investigative journalism writing training

GIZ USTS project and also EE organization believe in the gradual and long-term capacity development of women both on the hard and soft skills level. The training included topics such as writing and editing opinion materials, editorial article, investigative editing, and journalism ruled. Etc. As a result, the women were able to address gender-related issues and raise their voices in a professional manner.

## Results/outputs

This project has resulted in several tangible outputs that had an effective added value on the women and local community in the NW of Syria which are:

Collected, documented, and shared experiences can multiply the project results. The participants wrote blogs and collected them into **two booklets named "Zero-One"**. The booklets are meant to serve as awareness-raising content for women in the field of digital rights and protection to achieve safe use of social media and to manage private accounts. It is also worth mentioning that this is the first unique experience for women to write in this field in NW-Syria. In addition, **six videos** documenting women experiences and shedding the light on women digital issues and experiences in the NW has been produced and published on social media.

Encouraging the networking and collective efforts during the project increases the momentum of the participants efforts and encourages more women to join. One media campaign under the title of **(#Not\_Your\_Right)** about women experiences regarding cyber exploitation was implemented. The campaign was held both online and in EE center. Therefore, it has reached to big number of local people, national and international NGOs and development agencies.

Improving women's role in existing fields is good, exploring additional fields is even better. The IT sector is male dominated in most of the world. Despite the additional challenge of unwelcoming culture, women were able to access the field and two trainees started their own portable devices maintenance business.

Even though much more is yet to be done, the project did contribute to the empowerment of women and increasing their safe access to the digital sphere by directly reaching **345 women**.

## Networking & Synergies

On the local level, EE staff together with GIZ USTS project officers made strong efforts to create synergies with the other GIZ partners working in the same component and other local NGOs working in the same location. Stems from our mutual goal in promoting gender equality and mobilizing energies to reach to more people.

On the international level, EE conducted a meeting between the beneficiaries and The United Nations special envoy to Syria, Mr. Geir Pederson, in order to convey the women voices, needs and demands to the upper level.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

Due to the remote implementation environment, M&E is a particularly challenging in the Syria context. Equity and Empowerment’s M&E department provided monthly inputs regarding the indicators and means of verification measurement and progress beside the monthly narrative reports. Through EE’s strong compliance system and complaint tracking mechanism, it was possible to ensure the efficiency and safety & security of female participants and project staff despite difficult circumstances. As an additional layer of transparency and accountability, GIZ USTS project has a commissioned Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) providing independent assessments on the performance of the project including, Gender inclusivity. According to the latest TPM report, EE have shown great achievements in empowering women in the NW and played big role in building their capacity. For example, according to the pre- and post-test results, the women’s knowledge has increase by an average of 50% after they received the trainings.

**Success Stories**

- 1) Two women from the participants in the project were able to open their own mobile and computer service shops. These are the first of their type in the region and a huge step forward for the local women. These shops will not only provide income source for the women who started them, they will also provide a safe space for other women to service their equipment without the fear of being blackmailed or harassed. It can also encourage more women to start their own businesses in different fields when they see the barriers are broken.
- 2) One of the female field staff house was far away from the training center so she bought a **motorcycle**, becoming the first woman in the village and Northern Syria to do so, breaking the stereotypes that prevent women from riding bikes.

**Sustainability**

Despite being restricted within a physical confined space, the internet with enough digital literacy can open a whole new world to the women. They will be able to build online networks with activists around the world. They will be able to learn and cooperate with other women to push the boundaries and improve their situation within their environment.

It is a form of self-defense and protection with the huge threats arising from lack of digital literacy in the digital world.

The digital economy can provide the women with employment opportunities within their living regions and to connect to the global market.

