

## GIZ Gender Competition 2022 Entry

### The Gender Focal Team and the Seyhan Municipality Women's Solidarity Centre of the Promotion of Economic Prospects Program in Turkey

#### Background:

The program "PEP - Promotion of Economic Prospects for Refugees and the Host Community in Turkey" is financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. The PEP Program aims to enhance the economic prospects and strengthen the resilience of vulnerable Turkish citizens and Syrians under Temporary Protection through its three components: "Employment Promotion"; "Entrepreneurship Development"; and "Strengthening the Business Environment". Within this framework, measures taken by the program include the provision of vocational training and skills development, supporting decent employment measures in private and municipal sectors, assisting entrepreneurs and start-ups, formalizing unregistered businesses, developing capacities of key business development service providers and facilitating synergies between public and private sector stakeholders. PEP is implemented by its partners, which include, chambers of industry and commerce, municipalities, national and international non-governmental organizations.

Each of the above listed areas of influence of the PEP Program are ones in which gender gaps are prominent and in which development interventions favor men over women both globally and in Turkey. The global gender disparity in employment, participation in TVET and entrepreneurship is clearly evident in Turkey. While the ratio of Turkish women participating in the labour market, referring to those working or looking for work, is estimated at 37.3 percent, according to some estimates an even lower percentage of Syrian women (15 percent) are currently working or looking for work (10 percent).<sup>1</sup> According to the research 36% of the Syrian enterprises in Turkey have female employees and their overall female employment rate is 11%.<sup>2</sup>

The number of young women not in employment, education or training (NEET) from both the host and refugee communities, is also cause for concern. A recent study explains the high rates of NEET in Turkey particularly through the high female NEET rates, explained to be a result of lows levels of female labour force participation and curtailed access to education and training.<sup>3</sup> The study shows that 34% of women in the 15-24 age bracket in Turkey can be counted in the NEET category. This figure rises to 53.7% for the age group 25-29, and 55.6% for women between the ages of 30-34. The study, conducted by ILO, states that "there are no other countries in the European Union (EU) with a larger gender gap at any age bracket, suggesting that policies that primarily target women would bring benefits in Turkey". Young refugee women are even worse off. In 2019, the NEET rate among Syrian refugee women was identified as 70.9%, while the same rate for men stood at 26%.

---

<sup>1</sup> Atlantic Council in Turkey and UNDP (2020), *Turkey's Refugee Resilience; Expanding and improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey*. Available from: [Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey \(undp.org\)](https://www.undp.org/publications/turkeys-refugee-resilience-expanding-and-improving-solutions-for-the-economic-inclusion-of-syrians-in-turkey)

<sup>2</sup> INGEV- Potential Enhancement Areas For Companies Established by Syrians  
[http://ingev.org/reports/Potential\\_Enhancement\\_Areas\\_For\\_Companies\\_Established\\_By\\_Syrians.pdf](http://ingev.org/reports/Potential_Enhancement_Areas_For_Companies_Established_By_Syrians.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> ILO, Youth and Covid-19: Access to Decent Jobs Amid the Pandemic, 2021, available from: [wcms\\_771428.pdf \(ilo.org\)](https://www.wcms.771428.pdf)

In terms of entrepreneurship, one study of Syrian businesses in Turkey has shown only ten women out of three hundred Syrian entrepreneurs.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, women constitute only 5.4% of senior executives in companies and hold only 0.3% of majority shares.<sup>5</sup> All of the above figures may be expected to worsen as a result of deteriorating economic conditions in the country, especially as a result of ever-increasing inflation.

### The PEP Gender Focal Team and Gender Mainstreaming

The gender analysis conducted for **PEP proposes the GG-1 marker** for the program notes that the program has potential for making a positive contribution to gender equality if it decides to adopt a gender-transformative approach. This is said to entail, specifically, “enhancing the agency of refugee and host community women to become more self-reliant, addressing discriminatory legislation and policies, establishing a conducive environment to decent female employment, and encouraging working women to build supportive relationships that can provide practical assistance and encouragement.”<sup>6</sup> The PEP Programme took on these tasks through two interconnected and significant initiatives which in our opinion deserve the consideration for the GIZ Gender Competition 2022, namely **the creation of a Gender Focal Team (GFT)** and the **Women’s Solidarity Program for Young Refugee Women**.

The GFT includes representatives from each component of the Programme, as well as the Social Cohesion Unit, and aims to ensure that gender is mainstreamed into projects implemented by grant agreements with approximately 15 different partners. The challenge lays in the fact that the GG1 status was accorded to the PEP Programme as a whole. Within the PEP Programme, however, around 15 partners (NGOs, municipalities, chambers of industry and commerce) are provided with sub-grants to work on objectives set out in grant agreements in line with the overall PEP Programme objectives. This ultimately means forming partnerships with 15 different actors with different levels of awareness and knowledge regarding gender equality. The necessity to ensure an equal degree of conformity in the various projects to international standards (especially those reiterated in BMZ and GIZ gender strategy documents) becomes apparent. This requires a two-pronged approach, in that both PEP Programme staff (internal) and project partners (external) need to be assessed as regards gender sensitivity and responsiveness, and capacity building need to be initiated based on this assessment. Therefore, the main objectives of the GFT states as follows:

- **At the project level** (I.e. projects implemented under the PEP program):
  - Analysing and mainstreaming projects under the PEP program in line with the requirements of the GG1 marker;
  - **Supporting partners** in the design, implementation, monitoring and reporting stages of projects to ensure conformity to principles of gender responsive project management;
  - Supporting partners in finding resources and creating networks to increase their capacities in developing gender responsive activities, outputs and outcomes.
- **At the program level:**
  - To increase the capacity of **PEP staff** in terms of gender responsive project management;

<sup>4</sup> Atlantic Council, 2020: 11

<sup>5</sup> OECD (2018). Working together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees, available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264085350-en>

<sup>6</sup> PEP gender analysis: 28

- Utilizing the gains made as regards gender responsive project management in PEP 1 to inform the design of future programs

In fulfilment of these objectives, the GFT has set out to achieve the following milestones: 1) develop a checklist for gender responsiveness; 2) undertake an assessment of all projects based on the checklist; 3) collect perceptions, good practices and lessons learned, and map the gender related risks and unintended effects of the projects. As a final result, a Guidance Document for PEP staff and partner organization will be developed including concrete recommendations on gender sensitive project management, from designing, implementing, monitoring to evaluating projects, how to avoid unintended consequences, ensuring do-no-harm, and factoring in intersectionality at every turn. Furthermore, PEP's M&E unit has agreed to help the GFT on improving the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data while the Communication Unit has agreed to work with the GFT to assess current key messages and their gender implications, and to ensure that all communication content reflects gender perspectives and avoids gender stereotypes.

The final objective of the GFT is the creation of a pool of resources to use from various actors working on the gender dimension of the refugee response in Turkey and networking. Networking refers to connecting project partners with expert organizations with experience and knowledge in working with women in general and refugee women in particular, as the experiences of refugee women, the trauma they experience and the difficulties they face require a specialized type of knowledge and approach capable of addressing multiple discriminations.

### **The Women's Solidarity Program for Young Refugee Women**

The GFT, in line with its objective of seeking out good practices, then introducing and adapting them to the livelihoods sector, started its cooperation with the Human Resources Development Foundation (HRDF), a rooted NGO in Turkey that has worked with refugees from the beginning of 2000s. The HRDF has, since 2014, implemented a Women's Solidarity Program at the Support Center located in Esenler District in Istanbul, with the aim of supporting Syrian Women to develop solidarity networks, through which they gain the social capital to navigate the difficulties of integrating into Turkish society together. Throughout a period of 7 years the HRDF implemented this program for women who have encountered countless traumas in the process of forced displacement, and has shared its experiences and lessons-learned in a detailed step-by-step manual.

The Women's Solidarity Program evolved into a series of half day sessions conducted once a week with a maximum number of 16 refugee women and 2 facilitators. These became safe environments where women were not patronized through didactic trainings (i.e. told what to do), and could speak without being judged thanks to group rules created, recited and owned by every women participating. These were not aid programs for women, and the savior/saved hierarchy was avoided at all costs. Any information gained was a result of plays and games that helped express their feelings to each other and themselves. Religion and politics were not discussed, as the emphasis would not be on what divided these women, but what brought them together as women. They learned, together, about communication, shared experiences as regards discrimination, and internalized the meaning and uses of solidarity. The main question guiding the discussions was the following: "Can we find solutions to some of our problems together?". After each and every program, women continued their solidarity and friendship, entrusting their children to each other during work, renting houses together, calling each other in times of grief and anxiety, cooperating to find jobs, and navigating the Turkish bureaucracy together.

PEP's GFT saw an excellent opportunity to reproduce this incredible program with young refugee women who were beneficiaries of the project implemented within the framework of the program by the Women's Solidarity Center (WSC) of the Seyhan Municipality, a district of the province of Adana, where a large population of refugees live. Having worked with GIZ Syrian Refugees and Host Community Cluster programs including PEP in the past, the WSC operated a women only safe space funded by the municipality where women could receive and be referred to protection services, receive Turkish language and vocational training, and engage in income generating activities such as art and ceramics under the supervision of experts. Under the PEP Program, the WSC has initiated the "Innovative Women Endeavor", which aims to improve the resilience and employment opportunities of women by facilitating their economic empowerment through self-employment or work from home models, while at the same time providing counseling and support for refugee women who would like to pursue further/higher education and/or entrepreneurship. The women only staff of the WSC are made up of psychologists and social workers, along with experienced NGO workers, who are well versed in gender issues and the specific vulnerabilities of Syrian women.

The first step taken by the GFT of PEP was to connect the WSC to the HRDF. The architect of the Women's Solidarity Program of the HRDF introduced the program and at a later session trained the first facilitators. The facilitator training is a critical part of the process, as they are required, through adherence to minute details to prepare and facilitate the sessions, provide an objective account of themselves by adopting an equidistant attitude to every participant, and acting with the knowledge that the solidarity program is neither an aid program nor a training program.

The target group was then selected as 60 young women (four groups of 15) taking B1 level Turkish courses to prepare for a university education or to try their hands at entrepreneurship. Having women of a similar age, namely between 18-25, is a stated advantage due to an increasing likelihood of there being common experiences among the group, of being able to tailor sessions to the specific needs of the group, and to encourage solidarity for common goals. PEP, the WSC and the HRDF then proceeded with coming up with ideas for the sessions. The first session, for instance, would be one where the group members are introduced to each other, the group rules are set out, the needs and requests of the young women are recorded, and the session plan itself is put up for discussion. This is usually followed by a communication session, an experience sharing session, a session on discrimination in general and gender discrimination in particular, all designed through theater and art. Legal rights, reproductive rights, MHPSS are all among the possible topics for the next sessions, with experts from local NGOs having pledged their support for delivering innovative sessions. An exciting session the team is looking forward to is that of entrepreneurship, where successful businesswomen from Adana will come to mentor the young women to create projects and business plans for review and possibly enter them into competitions at the end of the project. The young refugee women will also have a chance to meet Syrian and Turkish students from Adana's Cukurova University, and will be guided on how to apply and what to look forward to during and after the university education.

The PEP Program is confident that this partnership with the WSC and HRDF will lead to the creation of an innovative and strong support network for 60 young refugee women in Turkey, who will hopefully continue standing shoulder to shoulder in creating productive lives for themselves in the near future. Interconnected with the creation and work of the GTF such transformative approaches can easily be analyzed and shared across the whole GIZ Turkey Portfolio as well as reach out to the entire partner network.

