

# GIZ GENDER COMPETITION 2023

## Strengthening Education and Health Services for Refugees and Host Communities in Pakistan (EHS)

### “Transforming Lives through Leadership of Afghan Women for Equitable Access to Health & Education”

#### Context:

In the bustling city of Peshawar, where the scent of spices and the sound of vibrant markets fill the air, there exists a silent struggle that often goes unnoticed—the plight of Afghan refugee women seeking solace and a chance at a better life in Pakistan. For more than four decades, Pakistan has been hosting one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Out of the 2.7 million registered Afghan refugees worldwide, approximately 1.3 million live in Pakistan. Most refugees reside in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (52%), with 68% now living in urban and semi-urban areas alongside their host communities. Among them are many women whose eyes hold stories of both pain and resilience. While a number of women who fled the war-torn streets of Kabul after the Taliban takeover still struggle to seek a safe life in Pakistan, those who were born in Pakistan also kept facing myriad unique obstacles that stem from their dual identities. Growing up, they navigate a complex landscape, caught between two cultures while trying to preserve their Afghan heritage in a foreign land. These women encounter challenges in accessing education, employment, and basic rights due to their status as refugees, women or immigrants.

To support these women and anchor their determination, the Strengthening Education and Health Services for Refugees and Host Communities (EHS) project designed an exemplary model which carefully addressed the cultural barriers testing the resolve of Afghan women and the stigma attached to being a refugee which often cast shadows on their aspirations. The project weaved meaningful inclusion of women and girls in every module indicator, capacitating government stakeholders on progressive discourse on gender, creating space for women to lead and also benefit from the health and education policies in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The most impactful initiative was to support local voices by empowering Parent Teachers Councils (PTCs), Primary Healthcare Management Committees (PCMCs), elected Women Councilors, Lady Health Workers and Community Midwives in the target districts. To better understand how EHS has brought Gender Transformative thinking into practice by strengthening the community leadership skills of Afghan women, details of four major initiatives are given below.

#### 1. Inclusion of Afghan Women in Parent Teacher Councils

Targeting three districts namely Peshawar, Nowshera and Haripur, the project identified catchment areas with significant Afghan population and selected 60 schools and 60 primary healthcare facilities. Out of 60 schools, 36 girls schools were included and while selecting primary healthcare facilities, consideration was given to those facilities which were frequently visited by Afghan women.

Out of a total of 600 PTC members, **360** women PTC members & Afghan mothers were trained by EHS to develop school improvement plans and be more vocal about the needs of their children in decision-making processes. As a result, 60 school improvement plans were developed and executed, improving Afghan girls' access to education. Due to the constant involvement of women members of PTCs, they managed to increase the number of teachers and enrollment of girls in their respective schools, built separate washrooms for girls and boys, lobbied for water supply schemes, provision of electricity, construction of boundary walls and accessible toilets for students with disabilities, ultimately contributing to increased enrolment, safety and protection, particularly for girls who would stop going to schools after reaching puberty due to lack of these basic yet important facilities.

The impact rippled through the community in unexpected ways. Initially met with scepticism, the women of the PTCs persevered, proving that their insights were not only valuable but essential. As they became more involved, a transformation occurred not only in the perception of women's capabilities but also in how the community viewed education as a whole. So far 21,129 students benefited from project interventions including the new enrolment of 7,880 children, including **746** Afghan refugees and **638** children with disabilities.

The inclusion of Afghan women in PTCs acted as a catalyst for change. Mothers, who were once confined to the private sphere, were now actively engaged in shaping the educational experiences of their children, especially their daughters. This newfound involvement had a profound impact on the children as well, as they witnessed their mothers assuming leadership roles and actively contributing to the community. Over time, the ripple effect extended beyond the school gates. The women of the PTCs became advocates for broader issues affecting the community, from healthcare to infrastructure, engaging with locally elected representatives.





## 2. Striving for an Equitable Distribution of Power in Digital Realm

For years, access to technology, particularly for young Afghan girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, remained a distant dream. They watched as their male counterparts gained digital literacy and seized opportunities that seemed unattainable to them.

To address the digital gender divide, EHS established 6 solarized Information Technology Labs out of which 4 were established in girls' schools. The IT labs were more than just rooms filled with computers; they were portals to a world of knowledge and opportunities. Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, these labs provided a safe and inclusive environment for a total **1114** students out of which **791** were girls. Currently, the project is aiming to engage **300** girls and their fathers, under its flagship **#eSkills4Girls** initiative in which each household will be given access to digital tablets.

By intentionally establishing these labs in girls' schools, EHS reshaped perceptions of gendered roles in technology. It empowered girls, giving them the confidence to navigate digital spaces, thus contributing to a more equitable distribution of power within the digital realm.



## 3. Championing Girls Right to Education:



21129 students have access to learning opportunities in 60 schools



6038 students enrolled (3195 girls & 2843 boys) as a result of enrollment campaigns



4341 students Transitioned (Graduated) including 2250 girls



Transition rate 94.82 % (95.98 % Year 1 & 93.66% Year 2)



99.17% Schools with functional basic facilities

To bridge the gap between Afghan refugees and the host community, fostering understanding, empathy, and collaboration, 120 youth activists, a diverse cohort of 60 men and 60 women which includes Afghan women, organized 1399 mobilization & awareness-raising activities. The awareness sessions focused on the importance of girls' education and social cohesion.

As a result, Afghan women along with women from the host community and their male allies, played an active role in reaching the minds of **5,356** Afghan refugees and 14,493 members of the host community regarding the importance and need to educate a girl child. What set this initiative apart was the intentional focus on inclusivity—65 per cent of those reached were women and 50 per cent of those who delivered the message of gender equality were men. The narrative of change was shaped not just by the numbers but by the faces of the resilient women and gender-champion men who became torchbearers of transformation.



## 3. Engaging Men in discussion on Sexual & Reproductive Health of Women:

The biggest challenge women from Afghan and host communities face is the agency to make decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health. Given sensitivities around reproductive health in Pakistan, the project engaged local activists to disseminate information to debunk the misconceptions concerning the reproductive health of women and made men part of the discussion. In this regard, 240 trained health activists hailing from both host and Afghan communities, orchestrated a monumental initiative of organizing **14,400** awareness sessions on maternal & child healthcare, immunization, nutrition needs of women and hygiene practices.

The statistics tell a story of their own—**200,000** people reached, each number representing a life touched by the transformative power of knowledge. What made this initiative even more commendable was the inclusion of Afghan refugees (18 per cent) and persons with disabilities (3 per cent).

By involving local activists, knowledge systems and cultural nuances to discuss women's access to reproductive services and agency over their bodies, EHS also challenged colonial legacies and power dynamics and focused on empowering rather than imposing external ideologies. The impact also extended beyond the immediate beneficiaries. Families began to adopt healthier practices, women were empowered to prioritize their well-being, and men became active participants in the holistic health of their households. The ripples of change also touched the lives of persons with disabilities, breaking down barriers that had long hindered access to essential healthcare information.



## Gender Equality as a Quality Feature of EHS

EHS is a GG1 project that adopted a comprehensive and intersectional approach to prioritize gender inclusion at every stage, aiming to dismantle entrenched patriarchal structures and uplift the lives of both Afghan and Pakistani women. Beginning with the planning phase, it conducted thorough gender analyses to identify existing inequalities and understand the diverse needs and perspectives of women from various backgrounds. In the financing stage, the project ensured equitable allocation of resources, dedicating funds specifically to initiatives that directly benefit women, such as digital literacy programs, training of both education and health staff of government on gender inclusion, and healthcare services tailored to the needs of Afghan women. During implementation, the project incorporated gender transformative policies and practices, actively involving women in decision-making processes and leadership roles.

### IMPLEMENTING FEMINIST PRINCIPLES

- 1. Intersectionality:** The project recognized and addressed the multifaceted identities and experiences of Afghan refugee women within the context of their dual identities as refugees and women. It acknowledged the intersecting factors of gender, ethnicity, nationality, and refugee status, ensuring interventions were sensitive to these intersections.
- 2. Inclusivity and Diversity:** EHS prioritized inclusivity, engaging diverse voices from both Afghan refugees and host communities. It intentionally involved women and men from various backgrounds, advocating for educational and healthcare initiatives that catered to the needs of these diverse groups.
- 3. Agency and Empowerment:** The project empowered Afghan women by providing them with platforms to actively participate in decision-making processes. Through inclusion in Parent Teacher Councils, healthcare committees, and advocacy campaigns, women gained agency over educational, health, and community-related matters.
- 4. Transformative Change:** EHS focused on long-term structural change rather than merely addressing surface-level issues. By challenging traditional gender norms, advocating for policy changes, and engaging men and communities in discussions around gender equality, the project aimed for transformative shifts in societal perceptions and behaviours.
- 5. Partnership and Solidarity:** The project fostered partnerships and alliances, recognizing the importance of collective action in advancing feminist principles. It engaged various stakeholders, including government bodies, implementing partners, community leaders, and activists, promoting solidarity to address gender inequalities.
- 6. Learning and Adaptation:** EHS embraced a continuous learning approach, recognizing the evolving nature of feminist discourse. It engaged in capacity-building initiatives, knowledge-sharing platforms, and ongoing training to ensure a nuanced understanding of gender issues and feminist principles.
- 7. Accountability and Transparency:** The project held itself accountable by incorporating gender-sensitive monitoring frameworks and evaluation mechanisms. It tracked the qualitative and quantitative impact of its activities on gender minorities and continually sought ways to improve its gender-inclusive strategies.

I was not sure that a session on Positive Masculinity would make me question everything I believed till today. I just realized why we men need more self-reflection and to adopt tools to unlearn traditional masculinity for a healthy life and relationships around us!

-Ahmed Amin, Project Manager SRSP (EHS Implementing Partner)



### Fostering Meaningful Cooperation with Partners

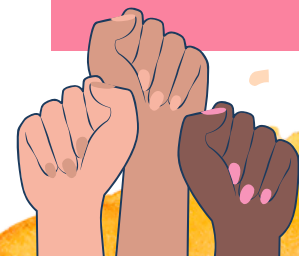
The project demonstrated robust collaboration and partnerships with various stakeholders, amplifying its impact and fostering a holistic approach towards its goals:

**Government Partners:** EHS collaborated closely with government stakeholders, particularly in the health and education sectors. It engaged with the Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women. Through capacity-building initiatives, the project enhanced the knowledge of government staff on gender concepts, promoting gender equality within policy frameworks and implementation strategies.

**Multilateral Agencies:** The project engaged with multilateral agencies, leveraging their expertise and resources to strengthen its initiatives. This collaboration involved aligning strategies with the priorities and frameworks of agencies like the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), especially concerning refugee welfare, education, and healthcare.

**Implementing Partners:** Collaborating with local implementing partners was integral to the project's success. EHS worked alongside NGOs, community-based organizations, and educational institutions to ensure the effective implementation of its gender-transformative initiatives on the ground. This partnership involved sharing resources, knowledge, and expertise to reach a wider audience and communities.

**GIZ Projects:** Collaboration with other GIZ projects showcased a synergistic approach. EHS have engaged in knowledge-sharing platforms such as SNGA, Gender Network Meeting 2023, & bilateral learning exchanges with Afghanistan & and Jordan, and joint initiatives to leverage best practices and lessons learned across projects. This collaboration aimed to amplify the impact of gender-transformative approaches beyond the scope of EHS. The three key success measures were aligning the work with localized feminist discourse, emphasizing on the constitutional rights of citizens & relying on international human rights.



## Contributions to Internal Measures towards Gender Transformation

### Corporate Culture:

One of the standout best practices EHS project in fostering gender equality within its corporate culture lies in its comprehensive approach to creating an inclusive and equitable work environment. EHS prioritizes gender equality not just in rhetoric but in action, evident through its commitment to maintaining a balanced representation of men and women within the team structures and leadership positions, promoting a male/female ratio of approximately 55/45 overall and 40/60 in technical roles. The project embraces gender-inclusive workplace policies, offering continuous training on anti-sexual harassment policies, promoting work-life balance through flexible working arrangements, and advocating for equal pay and benefits for all staff members. By implementing gender-neutral language in job descriptions and fostering diverse recruitment practices, EHS showcases its dedication to cultivating a diverse and inclusive workforce. Moreover, the project encourages a culture of continuous learning by organizing workshops on gender-related topics, fostering awareness and understanding of gender-related issues. Through these concerted efforts, EHS sets an exemplary standard for gender equality within its corporate culture, creating an environment where diversity is celebrated, inclusivity is embraced, and gender biases are actively challenged and addressed.

### Gender Competence:

The project stands out for its exemplary practices in embedding gender competencies as a fundamental component of its initiatives. Through comprehensive capacity-building initiatives, EHS invested in enhancing the knowledge of 256 implementing partners and government stakeholders on gender concepts, transcending binary and reductionist approaches to expand understanding beyond biological confines. Moreover, the project took a bold step by hiring transgender activists as trainers, aiming to bridge gaps in understanding and sensitize government partners to challenge heteronormative discourses on gender. EHS further demonstrated its commitment by incorporating Gender Monitoring Frameworks within implementing partner structures, enabling qualitative and quantitative assessment of the project's impact on gender minorities, including women, girls, transgender individuals, and persons with disabilities. Additionally, the project organized orientation sessions on the BMZ Feminist Development Policy, empowering implementing partners to translate this vision into practical action, thereby reinforcing their pivotal role in advancing gender equality and inclusion within the project's scope. These best practices showcase EHS's dedication to fostering a nuanced understanding of gender and actively working towards inclusive and equitable outcomes within its interventions.

### Cooperation:

The Strengthening Education and Health Services for Refugees and Host Communities (EHS) project has emerged as a role model within GIZ, offering valuable insights and guiding principles for creating more effective GG1 projects. Its success lies in several key areas: first, the project's comprehensive approach in embedding gender equality at every stage of planning, financing, and implementation sets a high standard. EHS demonstrates the transformative power of gender-inclusive policies, community engagement, and capacity-building initiatives, inspiring other projects within GIZ to adopt similar strategies. Moreover, EHS's success stories in challenging societal norms, empowering marginalized communities, and fostering inclusive environments offer valuable lessons and practical frameworks for other projects to follow suit. By emphasizing community-led approaches, inclusive representation, and continuous learning, EHS provides a roadmap for creating better GG1 projects within GIZ, encouraging a shift toward more impactful and sustainable interventions that prioritize gender equality and inclusivity at their core. Through its demonstrable successes and commitment to inclusive practices, EHS can advise other GIZ units, offering invaluable insights to elevate future projects and drive meaningful change within communities.



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