

# Towards Inclusive Digital Governance

## Better Quality of Life in Palestinian Municipalities through Citizen-Centred Digitalisation

### Background

The increasing availability of information and communications technologies (ICT) – as also witnessed in countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – opens up entirely new opportunities for governance. The potential of digital transformation in the public sector to bring about social change and improved quality of life can hardly be overstated. Especially in fragile contexts such as the Palestinian one, offering a wide range of digital public services and participation formats can strengthen social cohesion, inclusion, and trust in public administration, as well as reduce regional disparities.

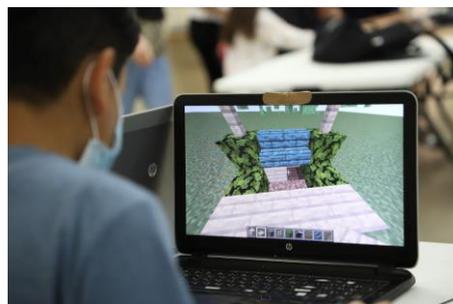
Under the umbrella of e-governance, digitalisation efforts in the MENA region have indeed gathered pace in recent years: some countries have managed to digitalise their public sector to a considerable extent. However, newly created digital service offerings remain grossly underused by citizens. This can be attributed both to a lack of trust in state institutions, as well as to the fact that in the public sector digital solutions are, as a rule, developed without active involvement of citizens. Therefore, the resulting services and participation formats do not sufficiently take the specific needs of their end users into consideration and are often neither user-friendly nor accessible.

### Our Approach

At INDIGO, we adopt an inclusive approach to fostering constructive state-society relations, especially at the communal level. We aim to improve public service provision as well as involve citizens in the shaping of their local environment.

To achieve this, capacities of relevant state and civil society stakeholders to develop citizen-centred digital services and innovative participation formats will be strengthened. So-called human-centred design approaches play a special role in this by putting the needs of citizens at centre stage when designing public services.

Project name	E-Governance in Palestine and the MENA region (INDIGO)
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Palestinian Territories and countries of the MENA region
Partners	Palestinian Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA), Municipal Development and Lending Fund (MDLF), selected municipalities and civil society organisations
Duration	January 2020 – April 2024



left:  
Participants of a training in human-centred design in Ramallah  
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right:  
Young people using videogame Minecraft for the design of a public square in Nablus  
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left:  
Human-centred design training session in Gaza  
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right:  
Final design of a section of Gaza City waterfront  
co-creatively developed with citizens  
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In order to ensure the user-friendliness as well accessibility of developed solutions, the project places a particular focus on the involvement of disadvantaged groups such as women, people with disabilities and young people.

At the regional level, INDIGO implements innovative formats — such as festivals and innovation labs — to improve knowledge exchange and co-creative collaboration on e-governance among diverse stakeholders from MENA countries.

## Achievements

Since the project began, some 270 citizens in 6 Palestinian municipalities have been actively involved in the design of digital services or have contributed to the design of public space by means of innovative formats such as hackathons and gamification. By the end of the project, around 30 municipal services as well as 60 proposals for the improvement of municipal quality of life will be developed and implemented together with citizens.

In the framework of a hands-on and inclusive certification programme, 60 professionals from civil society, the private sector and municipal government are currently being trained as human-centred design trainers. This will enable them to guide the design of efficient, user-centred and accessible (digital) services.

An online festival as well as several regional innovation labs offered 200 participants from 37 countries a platform to exchange

experiences and develop innovative e-governance solutions for the region together.

## Jamila's Story



Journalist Jamila Al-Habbash champions the cause of people with disability in Gaza.  
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“My disability should not keep me from having a full social life”, says Jamila Al-Habbash, who lost both legs in the 2008-09 Gaza war. The 27-year-old journalist is one of 25 citizens who were involved in the co-creative design of a section of Gaza City’s waterfront. The participants were introduced to principles and methods of urban design and citizen participation as well as guided in the use of landscaping software. “This was a unique experience for me: to see my ideas and concepts for an open, accessible and secure place for all become reality.”

This project is part of a special initiative designed to stabilise and promote development in North Africa and the Middle East run by Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Through the projects that make up this special initiative, BMZ is helping to open up economic and social prospects for people in the region.

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